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***Capitalism Under Fire:
Voices of Baptist Social Protest in New
Brunswick and Nova Scotia
During the Great Depression***

Eric R. Crouse

In February 1931, the United Baptist minister, the Rev. Neil Herman of Moncton, New Brunswick wrote that the "whole heart-rending episode of modern industrialism is so glaring, so penetrating, that to claim our economic system as being Christian would be so preposterous as to make angels weep and heathens laugh."¹ In Baptist historiography there is the argument that the "communitarian side" of Baptist life, from the late 1700s to the early twentieth century, had been concerned with social problems and the transformation of society. Yet attention paid to Maritime Baptists confronting the economic conditions of the Great Depression has been lacking.² Did the social gospel impulse of the turn-

1 "Is Our Civilization Christian?" *The Maritime Baptist*, 25 February 1931

2 Certainly, more attention needs to be paid to how Maritime Baptists responded to the Great Depression years. Only one paragraph is devoted to this issue in George Rawlyk, "The Champions of the Oppressed? Canadian Baptists and Social, Political and Economic Realities" in Robert E. VanderVennen, ed. *Church and Canadian Culture* (Lanham 1991), 105-123. For an earlier period see Michael Boudreau, "'There is no pernicious dualism between sacred and secular' Nova Scotia Baptists and the Social Gospel, 1880-1914," *Nova Scotia*

of-the-century period persist beyond the 1920s? Were the critical words of Herman exceptional for the Maritimes which continues to be stereotyped by historians as a conservative and backwater region?³ An examination of Baptist commentary presented in the weekly paper the *Maritime Baptist*, the only major and widely-distributed Baptist publication of the Maritimes, indicates that social protest rhetoric during the Great Depression years was prominent among the various responses to economic conditions.⁴ As the 1930s unfolded a surprising number of Maritime Baptist leaders viewed the existing capitalist order as evil, clergy and lay preachers proclaimed a message of social Christianity in Baptist churches throughout New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

In the early decades of the twentieth century, the Maritime provinces lost political clout in Ottawa because of out migration, the region also suffered economically when its industrial base fell behind Central Canada. The economic prospects of the region were poor, since even its traditional economy of fishing, farming, and lumbering offered modest gains, at best. The Great Depression only heightened the despair that many Maritime people experienced.

The Depression in Canada was due to over extension of credit, overproduction of goods, and unstable international markets for exports, the economic crisis resulted in an unprecedented number of Canadians unemployed.⁵ Given their dependency upon primary production and

Historical Review, Vol 16 No 1 (1996), 109-131. On Baptists in the West see Walter E. Ellis, "Baptists and Radical Politics in Western Canada, 1920-1950" in Jarold K. Zeman, ed. *Baptists in Canada: Search for Identity Amidst Diversity* (Burlington 1980), 161-182.

3 On the backwater stereotype of the Maritimes see Ian McKay, "Of Karl Marx and the Bluenose: Colin Campbell McKay and the Legacy of Maritime Socialism," *Acadiensis*, XXVII, 2 (Spring 1998), 3-4. Also see E. R. Forbes, *Challenging the Regional Stereotype: Essays on the 20th Century Maritimes* (Fredericton 1989).

4 Other Baptist publications include those of a missionary nature and *The Gospel Light*, which was established in Nova Scotia by a small group of Fundamentalists in 1931. See George Rawlyk, *Champions of the Truth: Fundamentalism, Modernism and the Maritime Baptists* (Montreal & Kingston 1990), 54.

5 For some figures see Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking*

international trade, the Maritime provinces was "hit harder than that of any region east of the Prairies."⁶ As for relief aid, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett's offer for Canadians depended upon a municipality to come up with the initial funds for the relief program. Because many Maritime municipalities were too poor to match federal funds, the region was underfunded; Maritimers received as low as two percent of federal relief funds despite comprising approximately ten percent of Canada's population.⁷ Far too many Maritimers suffered poverty conditions due to decreased wages or little or no employment.

Maritime Baptist responses to the Depression shed important light on Maritime society. In no other region of Canada did Baptists form such a large proportion of the population. The New Brunswick and Nova Scotia Baptists who wrote about economic difficulties, in the pages of the *Maritime Baptist*, belonged to the United Baptist Convention of the Maritimes, created in 1906 when the Regular Baptists (Calvinists) united with the Free Baptists (Arminians). They represented the largest Protestant denomination in New Brunswick and ranked only a few percentage points behind the United Church and the Church of England in Nova Scotia. Throughout the 1930s, the number of Baptist churches in the Maritimes ranged from 580 to 589.⁸

Baptists were slow to understand and respond to the severe and lasting economic troubles which were signalled by the Stock Market Crash in October 1929. Writing about the New Year of 1930, one Baptist clergyman challenged people to learn to sing at their work and embrace the drudgery of menial labor with heart.⁹ In his 1930 New Year's Message, the Rev. M.S. Richardson, Saint John clergyman and president of the United Baptist Convention, focused not on socio-

the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991 (Toronto 1992), 241.

6 E. R. Forbes, "The 1930s: Depression and Retrenchment" in E.R. Forbes and D. A. Muise, eds. *The Atlantic Provinces in Confederation* (Toronto 1993), 272.

7 *Ibid.*, 274-276.

8 Rawlyk, *Champions of the Truth*, 41. In the 1930s, according to Rawlyk, almost all Baptists in the Maritimes belonged to the United Baptist Convention. For statistics see. George Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit Religious Revivals, Baptists, and Henry Alline* (Montreal & Kingston 1984), 172.

9 "The Challenge of the New Year," *The Maritime Baptist* 1 January 1930.

economic difficulties but on the need for more spiritual power¹⁰ The Rev Gordon C Warren, editor of the *Maritime Baptist*, wrote in December 1930 of discontent in the previous months, without clear statements on the economy¹¹ While the Rev Arthur L Huddleston of Halifax stated that "bitter experiences" were teaching Maritimers that material goods had no value unless they served human want, his positive New Year's message underscored the rich opportunities and potential of 1931¹² One year after the Stock Market Crash, there were few indications that Maritime Baptist leaders had grasped the severity of worsening economic conditions

Baptist assessments that evaded the seriousness of economic problems became less frequent after 1930 Early in 1931, the Rev Alvin Robbins of Saint John West argued that during this "business depression" people with "no money to buy, and no employment by which to earn money" were going hungry and destitute¹³ Other Baptist clergymen increasingly used the word "depression" to describe economic conditions throughout the Maritimes¹⁴ By 1932, a Maritime Baptist annual report stated that unemployment had cast a shadow over Maritime industrial and social life "with its attendant evils of poverty, lessened physical well being and lessened morale"¹⁵ Not even rural districts were spared from the chaotic conditions of the depression One concern among Baptist leaders was that country church memberships were dwindling due to migration to the 75 towns in the Maritimes The Rev C E Rockingham, who pastored a church in Salisbury, New Brunswick, lamented that rural churches were handicapped by loss of leadership and a shrinkage of finances, which forced churches to appeal

10 "Our President's New Year's Message," *The Maritime Baptist* 1 January 1930

11 "The New Year," *The Maritime Baptist*, 24 December 1930

12 "A Happy New Year," *The Maritime Baptist*, 24 December 1930

13 "Hardtimes and Evangelism," *The Maritime Baptist*, 4 February 1931

14 "Thanksgiving," *The Maritime Baptist*, 5 October 1932 By 1932, according to a Baptist leader, the outlook was dark as "economic depression" had gripped the land

15 "Thanksgiving," *The Maritime Baptist*, 5 October 1932 "Social Service Report," *The Maritime Baptist*, 21 September 1932

to the Home Mission Board for assistance¹⁶ A rural problem discussed in an annual United Baptist Convention report was the slum condition of housing Regarding one Nova Scotian county examined, it was concluded that rural slums were as deplorable as those in urban centres¹⁷ Writing about the overall impact of the depression, the Rev W Gordon Ross, Yarmouth clergyman, declared "We are in the midst of changes so startling that we are still rubbing our eyes and wondering if we are seeing correctly"¹⁸ After 1931, whether it was the epidemic of industrial strikes occurring in the United States or the social unrest and unemployment in urban and rural Canada, the *Maritime Baptist* kept its readers informed about the "severe depression"¹⁹

Throughout the 1930s there was also the problem of a weakening religiosity Some churches had to reduce their expenditures as there were fewer worshippers For religious leaders, declining church attendance, secularism, and general religious indifference were distressing issues²⁰ In 1932, over 2100 were added to Baptist churches due to baptism, the largest number of additions by baptism in Maritime history²¹ There was steady church membership growth in the 1930s, but a 1937 report noted that of the 590 Baptist churches in the United Baptist Convention approximately 400 reported no additions by baptism in the five preceding years²² Reflecting upon the spiritual and economic components of the community, the Rev W Gordon Ross wrote that the social order, economic system, and religious ideas "may all need remoulding" That Ross voiced such a revolutionary-type

16 "Conserving Our Weaker Interests," *The Maritine Baptist*, 14 March 1934

17 "Social Service," *The Maritine Baptist*, 14 September 1938

18 "My Resurrection," *The Maritine Baptist*, 28 March 1934

19 "Strikes," *The Maritine Baptist*, 8 August 1934, "Presidential Address to Convention," *The Maritine Baptist*, 18 September 1935

20 "Is True Religion Declining in Our Midst, What of the Future?" *The Maritine Baptist*, 2 August 1932 For more on this issue in the wider context of Canadian Protestant history see *David Marshall, Secularizing the Faith Canadian Protestant Clergy and the Crisis of Belief 1850-1940* (Toronto 1992), chapter 8

20 "Evangelism," *The Maritine Baptist*, 15 February 1933

22 "Presidential Address," *The Maritine Baptist*, 8 September 1937 Rawlyk, *Ravished by the Spirit*, 171

notion from the small coastal town of Yarmouth reveals the critical position that Baptist clergymen were willing to advance²³

Maritime Baptists responded in various ways to the conditions of the 1930s. Viewing the depression strictly as a spiritual issue, fundamentalists disavowed prescriptions for economic reform²⁴. However, a fundamentalist position on the ills of the Depression was rarely expressed in the *Maritime Baptist*. One strident fundamentalist-type voice in the Maritime paper belonged to the Rev. W. Steadman Smith, who pastored New Brunswick churches in Hartland and Marysville. Smith spoke forcefully on the deadly compromise of the age. Demonstrating his annoyance with social religion, Smith believed that the first step toward spiritual awakening was the forsaking of "philosophic vagaries and socialistic vanities." "People could not prevent the ills of the world, so when did they "get wise enough to cure them?" he asked. Seeing revivalism and social reform as mutually exclusive, Smith argued that only "Divine outpouring can blast class feeling." The solution was the "Surgeon's knife," which humbled the sinner, rather than organizations and schemes²⁵. Even if Smith cannot in fairness be labelled a fundamentalist, his strong message against those who viewed Christianity as a social religion was conspicuous in contrast to the majority of other opinions in the *Maritime Baptist*. Of the Baptists who chose not to embrace a social gospel-type message, most were unwilling to openly attack its goals. Unlike the case for other Canadian regions, fundamentalism failed to gain much support in the Maritimes in the first

23 "My Resurrection," *The Maritime Baptist*, 28 March 1934

24 George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism 1870-1925* (New York 1980), Virginia Lieson Brereton, *Training God's Army: The American Bible School 1880-1940* (Indianapolis 1990). In defence of certain conservative biblical and theological emphasis, fundamentalists upheld the "fundamentals" of faith, which included the inerrancy of the Bible, the virgin birth of Christ, substitutionary atonement and bodily resurrection, and the premillennial second coming of Christ. But a militant and anti-intellectual reaction to modern ideas particularly set fundamentalists apart from other evangelicals.

25 "A Clarion Call to the Church," *The Maritime Baptist*, 22 July 1931. "A Spiritual Awakening," *The Maritime Baptist*, 9 February 1938

half of the twentieth century.²⁶

Yet there were a few, though lacking a militant manner, who expressed reactionary ideas on a number of issues. President R.B. Wallace of the United Baptist Convention in 1935, stated that the rich were getting richer and the poor were getting poorer, nonetheless his assessment of industrial strikes was that they were mainly initiated by "foreign agitators" who escaped the suffering that strikers experienced.²⁷ There was a lack of understanding that some workers were compelled to strike as a result of repressive working conditions. Some Baptists were also insensitive to the depressing living conditions of the working poor. Concerning slum housing, the Rev. Dr. Brice D. Knott of Central Baptist Church in Saint John implied that one with a "finer spirit" would never completely resign themselves to live in a shabby house or to accept relief assistance.²⁸ There were those who recognized the perilous condition of the economy, but suggested that hard times brought benefits. The Rev. Alvin Robbins recounted his conversation with a New Brunswick factory manager, who expressed the belief that the depression would educate people not to live so "extravagantly, and beyond their means."²⁹ The main theme of Robbins's article was that difficult times would encourage people to focus on God rather than money.

Most conservative responses to the depression, printed in the *Maritime Baptist*, originated from American rather than Maritime commentators. There was no mistaking the conservatism of these voices. Direct relief to the poor was discouraged, since this undermined the character of the recipient. Public works programs were also dangerous.³⁰ Workers were directed to deny the notion of capital in conflict with labor; such a structure was false. The virtues of individualism and industrial technology were exalted, for machines

26 Rawlyk, *Champions of the Truth*

27 "Presidential Address to Convention," *The Maritime Baptist*, 18 September 1935

28 "Shabby Lives," *The Maritime Baptist*, 28 July 1937

29 "Hardtimes and Evangelism," *The Maritime Baptist*, 4 February 1931

30 "Truly Helping the Poor," *The Maritime Baptist*, 22 February 1933

increased consumption and employment.³¹

Maritime readers were provided with conservative perspectives, but various forms of social Christianity were more numerous. A report by an American commentator warned clergy leaders about "always lining up with the ruling classes, from having too great regard for the supreme rights of property and the status quo." Such radical words are all the more noteworthy given they were voiced in February 1930, during the early stage of depression conditions.³² The themes presented in an article entitled "Bread" were not uncommon in the Baptist denominational paper: "I could not get out of my mind the man who manipulates the market, getting by cleverness — not work, not honest toil — more than a man can make by labor in a lifetime. Producing nothing, he has gotten more than his share of the loaf."³³ The "Social Service" page included critical commentary by Americans directed to business life, statements such as "the overshadowing evil in industry is the acquisitive spirit."³⁴ Maritime readers were exposed to numerous articles by The Church and Social Service of the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America that confronted shortcomings of capitalism and the resulting dismal economic conditions.³⁵ There were other American reports, such as "Where Does Jesus Stand in Industry?" a sermon that stressed that the appalling and unequal distribution of wealth was "unChristian."³⁶

The *Maritime Baptist* even printed articles depicting the harshness of American working-class experience as told by one correspondent: "The ground I work on does not belong to me. The tools I work with are the property of the boss. The fruits of my toil belong to

31 "Sidelight on Modern Labor," *The Maritime Baptist*, 25 November 1936

32 "Mr Filene Discusses Business and Religion," *The Maritime Baptist*, 12 February 1930

33 "Bread," *The Maritime Baptist*, 14 December 1932

34 "The Contribution of The Church to Industry," *The Maritime Baptist*, 23 April 1930 Also see "Frankenstein and Humanity," *Ibid*, 13 August 1930, and "Is the Preacher to Deal with Social Questions?" *Ibid*, 28 May 1930

35 "Labor Sunday Message, 1930," *The Maritime Baptist*, 27 August 1930 and "Labor Sunday Messages, 1935," *Ibid*, 28 August 1935 Also "Labor Day Message," *Ibid*, 24 August 1932, 5

36 "Where Does Jesus Stand in Industry?" *The Maritime Baptist*, 2 July 1930

others, I have nothing to sell but labor. The only thing that stands between me and poverty is my job. But even my job is not mine in the sense that it is my property to sell, barter, to use or dispose of at my will. And yet my job is all that separates me from the social outcast." The point was that "jobless men rot in body and soul."³⁷ These words published in mid-1931 were powerful; statements that were accepted by Baptist editors and read by ordinary Baptist church people throughout the Maritime provinces. Similar messages were also voiced by other non-Maritimers, such as United Church of Canada clergymen, British socialists, and other commentators.³⁸ Clearly, the editorial policy of the Baptist denominational period favoured a type of social gospel approach.

Maritime Baptists supported social gospel ideals, but they cannot be placed in the same category as Ramsay Cook's late Victorian regenerators who underwent a process of secularization as a result of adopting a social scientific approach to social reform.³⁹ The Maritime Baptists continued to uphold their evangelical roots and theology.

There were numerous *Maritime Baptist* editorials or articles relating to a desire for spiritual regeneration. For example, interest was expressed for the Oxford Group Movement, a movement that had its roots in the United States under the leadership of Frank Buchman, a Lutheran minister. Buckman's evangelical-type program began as a student movement when he held meetings at Oxford University in the 1920s. The Oxford Group had no official affiliation with Oxford University, nor was the movement a new sect, denomination, or organization. Cutting across denominational lines, the Oxford Group Movement held "house parties" in private homes, church parlours, and hotels where participants shared "their personal experiences of sin and

37 "The Worker in the Modern World," *The Maritime Baptist*, 15 July 1931.

38. "Jesus and the Unemployed," *The Maritime Baptist*, 16 September 1931; "The Evangelization of Canadian Life," *The Maritime Baptist*, 10 May 1933, "Realism Is the Way of Jesus," *The Maritime Baptist*, 29 April 1936. Also see "Echoes from Oxford and Edinburg," *The Maritime Baptist*, 6 October 1937; "The Society Sought by Christ," *The Maritime Baptist*, 4 November 1931.

39 Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto 1985).

failure, of victory and happiness"⁴⁰ This revival-like movement arrived in the Maritimes in 1934, with meetings at Fredericton, Saint John, Kentville, Wolfville, and other centres *Maritime Baptist* reports on the meetings were positive, but after 1934 there were no editorials or other coverage on how the movement fared with Maritimers⁴¹ Buckman openly sought the support of the wealthy, meetings were often held in ostentatious sites, and the ethics of capitalism or the existence of poverty were neither pursued nor questioned⁴² Overall, the Oxford Group Movement and its association with a bourgeois way of life may have limited its impact in the Maritimes during the depression years

After the initial shock of depression-type conditions, there was a greater awareness among various Baptists that declining church attendance and general religious indifference could not be discussed apart from the shortcomings of capitalism As one commentator reported to the 1935 Maritime Baptist Convention meetings, "Religion has always had a social emphasis, but unless religion meets the needs of society, society will cast it aside" At the same convention meeting, Dr Henry T Dewolfe of Wolfville, Nova Scotia agreed that Baptists had to preach the gospel and confront social problems According to Dewolfe, the capitalist system was "the reason for the mess that we are in" and support had to be given to social legislation and political parties whose policy conformed closest to the principles of Jesus Christ⁴³ Whether Baptist readers interpreted this as an endorsement of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, the democratic socialist party formed in 1932, is difficult to say

A significant number of items in the *Maritime Baptist* relating to spiritual regeneration offered penetrating critiques of the social and economic order In February 1933, *Maritime Baptist* editor the Rev

40 "Oxford Group Movement," *The Maritime Baptist*, 22 June 1932

41 On the work of the Oxford Group Movement in the Maritimes see "The Oxford Group," *The Maritime Baptist*, 25 April 1934 and 2 May 1934 and "The Churches," 2 May 1934 and 8 August 1934

42 Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith*, 223 A similar argument is advanced by Robert A Wright, "The Canadian Protestant Tradition 1914-1945" in G A Rawlyk, ed *The Canadian Protestant Experience 1760 to 1990* (Burlington 1990), 176

43 *The Maritime Baptist*, 11 September 1935

Gordon C. Warren wrote that a genuine revival "will quicken and sensitize the social conscience of the church and make it intolerant of the evils of the modern social order." He spoke of people's rededication to Jesus Christ and the blind and cruel greed of the existing industrial, financial, and economic order. As for revival in the Maritimes, the time was ripe unto harvest, since the poor economy had checked the exodus of young people. It was hoped that the large number of young Maritime people would respond to a spiritual and social message. In another editorial on the issue of evangelization, Warren maintained that Christ's teaching had been denied in this social order that allowed the inequality of some living "sumptuously" while many others were "compelled to join the bread-line."⁴⁴

There were Baptists focusing on issues besides evangelism who also used strong language against the social and economic order. In early 1931, the Rev. Neil Herman of Moncton asked "Is our Civilization Christian?" In his paper delivered to The Baptist Ministers' Institute of Moncton, Herman was amazed with the capabilities of the modern industrial machine, while at the same time concerned about the spiritual basis of those who owned the machines. His assessment was bleak. "We are dumbfounded to discover that the modern mogul of wealth can without batting an eyelash," make millions of dollars and also throw many people out of work from the simple act of updating industrial machinery. Behind this business morality that allowed the control of wealth by a few individuals was "the mad rush for markets, regardless of flesh and blood, without respect to God."⁴⁵

Other Baptists clergymen shared similar sentiments. Class barriers and economic injustice were two of a number of evils that were damning the lives of people, according to the Rev. J. A. R. Tingley of Saint John East.⁴⁶ In a sermon at the 1935 Maritime Baptist Convention

44 "Evangelism," *The Maritime Baptist*, 15 February 1933. Warren quotes David Lloyd George in "The Evangelization of Canadian Life," *Ibid*, 10 May 1933. Warren's tone was moderate in an earlier editorial. See "Thanksgiving," *Ibid*, 5 October 1932.

45 "Is Our Civilization Christian?" *The Maritime Baptist*, 25 February 1931.

46 "What Can I Do To Improve My Community," *The Maritime Baptist*, 21 November 1934. Also see "Why Did Jesus Come?" *Ibid*, 12 December 1934.

in Moncton, the Rev. Dr. Brice D. Knott preached: "I indict all employers who steal the youth of their employees, those who work them in improper conditions and for starvation wages."⁴⁷ The exploitive nature of capitalism was deemed an important topic by Baptist clergymen. The Rev. M.M. Lappin of Sackville, New Brunswick presented his views on the relationship of church and the economy, in two issues of the *Maritime Baptist*. As he understood it, "in its most stark naked literalness [competition] just means the acceptance of the old adage, 'Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.'" On the church's relationship to the changing order, Lappin wrote: "Man is a child of God - not a mere cog in the industrial and economic wheel of the world; and certainly not a mere tool to be used by the select few for their own enrichment." And when people cried out for justice, they had good reason because capitalism had been guilty of perpetrating injustices.⁴⁸

The Rev. E.A. Kinley, a Sydney, Nova Scotia minister, called for a new status for humanity, arguing that the main goal of industry must be the welfare of people rather than profits: "We have not only trusted evil but we have loved it, because it made money for us and gratified our fleshly lusts."⁴⁹ In a similar vein, the Rev. L.E. Ackland of Bridgetown, Nova Scotia wrote: "Extreme poverty and excessive wealth have no rightful place in a Christian nation." He believed that there was a growing anger against the wealthy and the self-indulgent use of power and privilege. Likewise, the record of politicians was hardly respectable, since too many of them represented large financial interests rather than working people; governments shaped "their policies in the interests of the leachers and blood-suckers of society instead of in the interests of the needy and deserving."⁵⁰

47 "Christ's Promise of Life," *The Maritime Baptist*, 4 September 1935 Rev Knott's message about shabby lives, two years, upheld a more conservative tone

48 "The Economic Life of the World," *The Maritime Baptist*, 7 and 14 February 1934

49 "A New Year's Message," *The Maritime Baptist*, 30 December 1931

50 "How Can We Make Our Nation More Christian," *The Maritime Baptist*, 21 June 1933, "What Have We To Thank God For?" *Ibid*, 11 October 1933, "Causes And Cures Of Poverty," *Ibid*, 22 November 1933 Also see "What Has

Some Baptists wondered if the capitalist order of the early twentieth century was on the brink of collapse. The Rev. F.S. Crossman of the mining town of Springhill, Nova Scotia held that there were two possibilities for a "loveless capitalism": it would either "crush" its opposition or "be overwhelmed by its own pawns."⁵¹ The assessment of the Rev. Ross C. Eaton of Bridgetown, Nova Scotia was that an increasing number of people judged that "capitalism established in this land, by its very soul of ruthless and competitive individualism contains within itself the forces of disintegration." Could there be stability if thousands of thwarted, baffled, and frustrated men continued to tramp the streets of Annapolis Valley seeking a job?⁵² At Amherst, Nova Scotia, the Rev. T.B. MacDormand preached that the application of the Golden Rule in private life and the rule of gold in business has produced "an almost hopeless cleavage in human society, a divided house which cannot hope to stand for long."⁵³ Referring to the future of the Acadia University graduating class of 1934, a *Maritime Baptist* editorial proclaimed: "They behold the capitalistic system on trial throughout the world and believe its doom can be escaped only by its being divested of its abuses."⁵⁴ There were, of course, others in secular publications who made comparable arguments about the inequalities of the capitalist order, but the agitations of labor activists, socialists, and communists were expected. The widespread Baptist critique of capitalism was striking.

Few Maritime Baptist leaders advocated complete rejection of capitalism, but many protest voices demanded some type of change. As early as 1933, a Maritime Baptist resolution stated that the United Baptist Convention recognized the flawed nature of the economic system; Baptists sought changes that reflected Christian social ideals.⁵⁵

Jesus Done for Us?" *Ibid*, 7 March 1934.

51. "What Does Christianity Do for Life?" *The Maritime Baptist*, 5 January 1938.

52. "Wanted - Program of Social Action," *The Maritime Baptist*, 19 August 1936.

53. "The Consecration of Business, *The Maritime Baptist*, 26 January 1938.

54. "The Graduates," *The Maritime Baptist*, 23 May 1934.

55. "The Voice of the Church and the Present Economic Situation," *The Maritime Baptist*, 21 October 1936.

While acknowledging that there were Christians who denied it is the business of the church to establish a Christian economic order on earth (one that repudiates exploitation), the Rev L E Ackland of St Stephen, New Brunswick argued that it was hard to believe that the Lord was not interested in how people get their daily bread or whether they received any at all⁵⁶ Maritime Baptist clergymen, the Rev H T Dewolfe asserted, must become "socially minded" and educated about the specific economic conditions of the Maritimes This position found expression in the annual United Baptist Convention "Report of Social Service Board"⁵⁷

In his address delivered at the Maritime Convention in 1936 entitled "The Voice of the Church and the Present Economic Situation," the Rev G E Levy of Canso, Nova Scotia highlighted four important teachings of Christ that demanded attention when social reform was discussed First, that Jesus warned that the love and worship of God could not be substituted by the love of money Second, the unique value of the spirit of humankind far exceeded the value of material things Third, Jesus' teachings about the kingship of service was opposite to the "old order that made profit and acquisitiveness the rule of the game" Finally, the principle of loving your neighbour was essential in building a truly Christian order⁵⁸

The Rev S D Trites, who pastored in New Harbor, Nova Scotia, favoured the ideas of the co-operation, such as those promoted by the Antigonish Movement centred at St Francis Xavier University This movement initiated by Catholic priests and professionals emerged out of the frustrating 1920s when the farmers' political challenge, Maritime Rights Movement, and coal union activity had collapsed⁵⁹ In addition to other co-operative schemes, Trites was encouraged by the efforts of the Antigonish Movement to provide vocational and economic

56 See "What is the Program of Our Church and Denomination?" *The Maritime Baptist*, 23 January 1935 Earlier in the 1930s, Ackland had ministered a church in Bridgetown

57 "Counting the Cost," *The Maritime Baptist*, 2 September 1936, "Presidential Address," *Ibid*, 8 September 1937

58 "The Voice of the Church and the Present Economic Situation," *The Maritime Baptist*, 28 October 1936

59 Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 226

guidance for small groups interested in the principles and methods of co-operative buying and marketing. When relations between Roman Catholics and Protestants were often cold, it is striking that the *Maritime Baptist* published Trites's assessment of the merits of a Catholic venture to remedy an unjust economic system.⁶⁰ Showing receptiveness to diverse solutions to economic woes, the publication even printed on page one an essay by the Rev. Dr. M.M. Coady, Director of Extension, St. Francis Xavier University and the major Roman Catholic figure behind the co-operative movement in Nova Scotia.⁶¹

There were Maritime Baptists who believed that the church should arouse public opinion against economic injustice and also compel the government to legislate a more just social order that followed Christ's teachings.⁶² In the 1934 Report of the Social Service Board, the United Baptist Convention showed its support for social legislation, even to the point of singling out provincial governments who were slow to implement social acts.⁶³ Earlier in the year, the Rev. C.A. Charter of Dawson, New Brunswick discussed making provision for the working poor and unemployed and the sweeping away of class distinctions. Men and women were to be treated "as far more precious than *things*"⁶⁴ One of the more forceful speakers for radical reform was the Rev. Ross C. Eaton of Bridgetown, Nova Scotia. For him, palliatory government relief measures were inadequate when what was needed was remedy. Believing that Baptists might learn from the Communist and the "clarity of his plan," Eaton even suggested that a form of "Socialism" might be the answer. Moreover, some Marxist indictments against religion had a ring of truth to them. Eaton wanted concrete social action; he had little patience for pious generalities and was

60 See "The Co-operative Movement," *The Maritime Baptist*, 4, 11, & 18 November 1936

61 "Revitalizing Nova Scotian Districts," *The Maritime Baptist*, 23 January 1935

62 "The Economic Life of the World," *The Maritime Baptist*, 14 February 1934

63 "Report of Social Service Board," *The Maritime Baptist*, 12 September 1934 This included the Mothers' Allowance Act and the Old Age Pensions Act

64 "The Importance of Public Worship," *The Maritime Baptist*, 13 June 1934

sceptical that "when individual men are saved then society will care for itself " Such statements were moral evasions, offering little to those who had pressing needs of wages and food on the table According to Eaton, the many who were baffled and embittered by the evils of capitalism best understood the language of "bread and butter, daily toil, struggle, hardship, and comradeship for justice "65

Other radical voices were heard in Baptist churches For example, New Brunswick socialist and lay preacher Henry Harvey Stuart delivered Christian socialist sermons in United Baptist churches in Jacksonville, Tracy, and Fredericton Junction 66 Stuart was not optimistic about capitalism, as was demonstrated in a sermon to Baptists at Fredericton Junction "Our economic system and the religious ideas we have founded upon it are largely wrong Only the spirit of brotherhood and co-operation dimly foreshadowed by the earlier prophets and fully taught by Jesus and His disciples can save the world " Stuart was convinced that "The individualist theory of everyone for himself has failed and can never succeed All for each and each for all is the better way Not until the spirit of Jesus dominates society will the objects of social and moral reform be achieved "67 At another Baptist church, Stuart argued that capitalism might be better in the hands of Christians who could administer it "so as to afford a large measure of justice and security to all " However, "it would be extremely difficult to ensure every person fair treatment by it "68 Having Christian capitalists at the helm, would not guarantee social justice Stuart's socialist sermons in Baptist churches in rural New Brunswick demonstrate that the social Christianity that was expressed in the *Maritime Baptist* was not the exclusive domain of a group of clergy elite in major urban centres such as Halifax, Saint John, Sydney, Moncton,

65 " 'Our Daily Bread' - A Meditation," *The Maritime Baptist*, 19 February 1936 "Wanted - Program of Social Action," *Ibid*, 19 August 1936 Also see "Report of Board of Social Service," *Ibid*, 8 September 1937

66 For biographical information on Stuart see James K Chapman, "Henry Harvey Stuart (1873-1952) New Brunswick Reformer, *Acadiensis*, Vol V, No 2 (Spring 1976), 79-104

67 H H Stuart Papers, University of New Brunswick Archives, Box 1, "Sermons "

68 *Ibid*

and Amherst Clergymen and lay preachers who integrated socialist ideas with their Christian faith appeared to have been welcomed in many Baptist churches

By the late 1930s, there was some indication in the *Maritime Baptist* that social reform ideals were being partly eclipsed with calls for revivalism. This was in part due to the Rev JH Macdonald who became editor in 1936. Macdonald was aware of the injustices and inequalities of the capitalist system, but his position was that people were to be "born again" before any social system could succeed.⁶⁹ Many of his editorials were requests for revival activity, a "revival not less spiritual but one conceived in a social atmosphere and with a Kingdom of God outlook."⁷⁰ Lacking a radical protest tone, Macdonald's voice nonetheless was proclaiming the need for transformation.

Macdonald and the radical Baptist commentators who criticized the economic and social order all appeared to maintain a loyalty to evangelical thought. For example, the Rev Gordon C Warren could write that capitalism "must clean house or go" and in the same paragraph state the importance of Jesus and the Cross.⁷¹ The Rev Neil Herman's protest against capitalism exploitation was seasoned with the words that "the religion of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ" promised a method of life that goes far beyond secular illusions. Those who expressed their views did not appear as troubled ministers adopting "the tenets of social Christianity 'as fragments to be shored against the ruins of traditional faith' "⁷² Although embracing humanitarian ideals, these clergymen promoted social evangelicalism rather than secular humanism. Their support for the "social implications of the gospel" did not exclude the importance of individual conversion. The point stressed was that following Jesus without reference to a Christian way of life fell short of Christ's example. Baptists ministers who spoke out against

69 "Babson and Church Decline," *The Maritime Baptist*, 25 August 1937. Macdonald as pastor of Brunswick St Baptist Church was a key figure in the successful Reuben Torrey Fredericton revival meetings in 1910.

70 "Attractive Power of Christ," *The Maritime Baptist*, 21 September 1938.

71 "Changing Sunset to Sunrise," *The Maritime Baptist*, 2 January 1935.

72 James Turner, *Without God Without Creed: The Origins of Unbelief in America* (Baltimore 1985), 246-247.

economic injustice realized that due to the complexity of society there was the need for social action in addition to spiritual piety.

The enduring stereotype of the Maritimes as a conservative and backwater region is at odds with the perspective of a surprising large number of early 20th century Baptists. Throughout the 1930s, the *Maritime Baptist* often kept its readers informed about the "severe depression." A significant number of Baptist ministers who responded to the religious and economic conditions of the era did so with a social protest voice. Their penetrating critique of capitalism is all the more notable in light of historian Mark Noll's indictment that twentieth-century evangelicalism had "failed notably in sustaining serious intellectual life" due to its neglect of offering a sobering analysis of society.⁷³ In New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, the 1930s represented a decade of Baptist condemnation of the capitalist social order.

73. Mark Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids 1994).