

“What’s that tutti frutti [dance] stuff?”
Mine Mill Local 598’s Cold War Cultural Tool

by
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An essay submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA) in History

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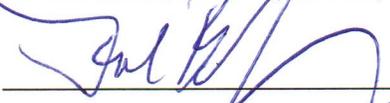
The undersigned hereby certify that they have read and recommend to the Department of History for acceptance an essay entitled "*What's that tutti frutti [dance] stuff?*" *Mine Mill Local 598's Cold War Cultural Tool* submitted by Rick Duthie as a partial requirement to the degree of Master of Arts (M.A.) in History.



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Introduction

In the 1940s and 1950s, a distinct working-class culture existed in Sudbury, Ontario. A large part of it was fostered through the activities of the city's largest union, Mine Mill Local 598. The leaders of the local union believed their organization had a role to play beyond the bargaining table and the worksite. In the 1950s, when communist purges, red baiting and raids by large American-affiliated industrial unions were common, Mine Mill local 598 persisted in trying to create a culture that emphasized community values, artistic production and social welfare.

This study focuses on Sudbury and the successful efforts by Mine Mill Local 598 to develop a community culture that valued inclusion, cultural education, and the political beliefs of its unionists. This paper specifically argues that Mine Mill's leaders chose to fund a dance school as a tool to enable their children to develop cultural fluency, deliver a political message and celebrate their multicultural membership. The school would not have been able to realize these ends without hiring the right teacher for the job, and Mine Mill found her in the person of Nancy Lima Dent. The dance program that she fostered during her short stay in Sudbury (1955-1957), including the class curricula and content of her students' recitals, attested to Mine Mill achieving its cultural objectives.

In terms of the general literature concerning labour movements in Canada, historians have written an extensive volume of material. The leading scholars in this field include Bryan Palmer, Desmond Morton and Craig Heron. In the main, they posit that

organized labour in Canada endured difficult times during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but that trade unions experienced unprecedented gains after the Second World War. In addition, they agree that social unionism transitioned to a more practical “business unionism” in the early 1960s.¹

Studies of the Cold War and its impact on Canadian trade unionism demonstrate Sudbury’s significance in this international conflict. Irving Abella, Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse address the purging of Communist union leaders during this period.² They argue that this process was well-advanced by the early 1950s. In this regard, Whitaker and Marcuse maintain that this development was in part due to the fact that the Canadian government’s Cold War policy was aligned with that of its southern neighbour. Abella in particular focuses on the “necessary” purging of Communists from the labour congresses in order to pave the way for social democracy, and he includes a chapter specifically devoted to this process as it affected the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW).

While Canadian scholars have generated very little literature about the cultural programs that organized labour created and delivered, American scholars have written a fair

¹Bryan D. Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1992), 268; Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Working Movement*, 5th ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 2007) and Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., Publishers, 1996).

²Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* (Toronto: U of T Press, 1996); Irving Martin Abella, *Nationalism, Communism, and Canadian Labour* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973).

deal about this topic. For example, Elizabeth Jameson's depiction of the Cripple Creek district in Colorado is a study of hard-rock mining culture at the turn of the twentieth century that touches on arts and culture. Similarly, Butte, Montana, is the subject of Mary Murphy's study of "mining culture" prior to the Second World War. Furthermore, Laurie Mercier examines the "community unionism" that existed in Anaconda, Montana, before and during the Cold War; her study also addresses the local union's cultural activities.³

In contrast, mainstream Canadian culture after the Second World War has been the subject of several significant works. For instance, Paul Litt's study of the Massey Commission provides a glimpse into the significance attached to the arts in Canada during this period. Litt's work illustrates the Commission's role in ushering in an era when the Canadian government legitimized its cultural community.⁴ Similarly, Max Wyman explores the nature of Canada's relationship to arts and culture. In doing so, he traces the deep roots of this connection to argue that the health of the nation's artistic and cultural vision is integral to its sense of identity and economic prosperity.⁵ Joy Parr's work, although not pertaining to the arts, provides further context by addressing the country's emerging

³ Laurie Mercier, *Anaconda: Labor, Community, and Culture in Montana's Smelter City* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2001); Mary Murphy, *Mining Cultures: Men, Women, and Leisure in Butte, 1914-41* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997) and Elizabeth Jameson, *All That Glitters: Class, Conflict, and Community in Cripple Creek* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

⁴ Paul Litt, *The Muses, the Masses, and the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

⁵ Max Wyman, *The Defiant Imagination: An Impassioned Plea to Keep Culture at the Heart of the Canadian Experiment* (Vancouver, Douglas and McIntyre, 2004).

consumer culture. Her *Domestic Goods* probes how Canadians weighed their moral, material and economic needs after the war by examining the goods they consumed.⁶

The history of dance in general is a new field of inquiry for academics, and as such there is relatively little literature about it. Two rudimentary historiographies on the subject are useful, however. The first, co-edited by Janet Adshead-Landsdale and June Layson, addresses the rationale, processes and methodologies specific to the study of dance history.⁷ The second, edited by Jane C. Desmond, provides a broad range of perspectives and pertains to the connections between dance and cultural studies.⁸

Much less has been written about the history of northern Ontario in general and Sudbury in particular during the period in question. The most important work in terms of the latter is the product of collaboration between C.M Wallace and Ashley Thomson. They explore Sudbury's transformation from a rail town to the significant mining community it is today.⁹ In addition, Cameron Smith and John Lang's studies pertaining to Mine Mill Local 598 provide a comprehensive account of the union's demise during the Cold War.¹⁰ Mercedes Steedman and Dieter Buse's work analyzes the local union's culture during this

⁶ Joy Parr, *Domestic Goods: The Material, the Moral, and the Economic in the Postwar Years* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999).

⁷ Janet Adshead-Landsdale and June Layson, eds. *Dance History: An Introduction*, 2nd edition (London: Routledge, 1995).

⁸ Jane C. Desmond, ed. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, 3rd ed. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁹ C.M. Wallace and Ashley Thomson, eds. *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1993).

¹⁰ John Lang, "A Lion in a Den of Daniels: A History of the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers, Sudbury, Ontario 1942-1962." (Unpublished Masters' Thesis, University of Guelph, 1970) and Cameron Smith, *Unfinished Journey: The Lewis Family* (Toronto: Summerhill Press, 1989).

period.¹¹ Union members such as Mike Solski, John Smaller's and Jim Tester also contributed to the regional scholarship in this realm.¹²

Moving closer to the subject of the present inquiry, the history of dance and its association with workers' movements has recently been the subject of academic exploration. Ellen Graph and Mark Franko chronicle this relationship during the 1930s, a period that saw the modern dance movement align itself with the interests of workers.¹³ Both authors posit that this collusion between modern dance and labour emerged as a powerful tool for political change. Michael Denning's seminal treatment of American labour's artistic leanings during this period further establishes a significant link between the two. It also situates dance among other art forms within the greater social movement that exploded during the Great Depression.¹⁴

Finally, the history of dance in Sudbury has been the subject of a recent master's thesis in "Dance History" by Julye Huggins. Her work set out to chronicle the history of a local dance company, with the end goal of exploring how dance has stimulated culture and

¹¹ Deter K. Buse "Weir Reid and Mine Mill: An Alternative Union's Cultural Endeavours'," In *Hard Lessons: The Mine Mill Union in the Canadian Labour Movement*, edited by Mercedes Steedman, Peter Suschnigg and Deter K. Buse, Toronto: Dundern Press, 1995, 269-287 and Mercedes Steedman, "The Red Petticoat Brigade: Mine Mill Women's Auxiliaries and the Threat from Within, 1940s-70s'," in *Whose National Security? Canadian State Surveillance and the creation of Enemies*, edited by Gary Kinsman, Dieter K. Buse, and Mercedes Steedman, Toronto: Between the Lines, 2000), 37-55.

¹² Mike Solski and John Smaller. *Mine Mill: The History of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers in Canada Since 1895* (Ottawa: Steel Rail, 1984) and Jim Tester, *The Shaping of Sudbury: A Labour View* (Sudbury: Mine Mill, 1979).

¹³ Mark Franko, *The Work of Dance: Labor, Movement, and Identity in the 1930s* (Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press, 2002) and Ellen Graff, *Stepping Left: Dance and Politics in New York City, 1928-1942* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

¹⁴ Michael Denning, *Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Verso, 1997).

affected the lives of Sudburians. Her introductory section provides a historical framework for Sudbury's dance scene between 1930 and 1990.¹⁵

However, none of this literature fully engages the topic that lies at the heart of this essay, namely Mine Mill Local 598's connection to the arts in Sudbury. In exploring this subject, this paper will make a scholarly contribution to Northern Ontario labour and cultural history. It will be the first major paper that analyzes the relationship between dance and a local trade union in the Canadian post-war socio-political context and casts a spotlight on the unique union-sponsored dance school. While the early history of Sudbury's trade unionists reveals a tendency toward confrontation, post-war prosperity inspired both a shift in tactics and a brief renewal of social unionism. This essay will show how the transition from militancy to non-violent political activism was reflected in Local 598's arts initiatives.

¹⁵ Julye Huggins, "Dance Community: Training, Education and Performance," excerpted from *Earthdancers: Dance, Community and Environment* (MA Thesis, York University, April 2005), <http://issuu.com/julye/docs>. (accessed February 19, 2014).

Chapter One

Sudbury and its Union Roots

Sudbury started out as a Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) construction camp in 1883 as a way station for trains traveling east or west. Soon it included a courthouse, a jail and a hospital, which became its founding features as a “civilized” town. Sudbury’s rough and unruly beginnings resembled that of other frontier outposts. As the town gradually set down roots, it became renowned for its abundance of unlicensed watering holes; the transient people who arrived during its early years were considered as “uncouth as their surroundings.”¹⁶ Throughout the town’s evolution from a rail town into a blue-collar mining town this reputation persisted. Even today, Sudbury’s roughness is an integral part of its character.

Copper was discovered in the mid-1880s as the CPR blasted its way through the Canadian Shield. The pursuit of this mineral created opportunities. Murray Mine near Sudbury became the first open pit mine in the area, and in 1885 Samuel J. Ritchie formed the Canadian Copper Company. Smelting operations began in 1888.¹⁷ Around this time, nickel became increasingly valuable for its use in armour. A new process for nickel extraction made it a profitable industry and a merger in 1902 between two large companies created the world’s leading nickel producer, the International Nickel Company of Canada (Inco), in Sudbury.

¹⁶ Wallace and Thomson, *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital*, 17.

¹⁷ Wallace Clement, *Hardrock Mining: Industrial Relations and Technological Changes at Inco* (Toronto: McClelland and Steward Limited, 1981), 43.

A Sudbury region gradually emerged from its early mining settlements. Different mining companies centralized their smelting operations and created the company towns of Copper Cliff, Creighton, Coniston, and Levack. By 1920, Sudbury proper became a home for nickel miners. By 1931 they comprised 25% of its labour force, and by 1941, they comprised 50%.¹⁸ Mining was the city's dominant industry.

American financial interests dominated the Sudbury region from its outset. In 1902, financier J. P. Morgan (who also controlled the United States Steel Corporation) took over Inco, thus ensuring he enjoyed a monopoly on both steel and nickel that were integral to the armour-plate industry. This control over nickel, and thus Sudbury's mining operations, by powerful American financial interests continued until the early 1970s. As a result, Sudbury's mines and issues related to them were never strictly local affairs. This, of course, is not unique to Sudbury: foreign capital controlled 38% of Canadian mining and smelting in 1946 and increased to 70% by 1957.¹⁹

The demographics in the Sudbury region experienced a large-scale transition from its origins in the late nineteenth century to the 1950s. People of British descent comprised 56% of the population in 1901, followed by French Canadians (at one third), while the remaining 10% or so consisted of other ethnic groups.²⁰ They included Italian, Finnish, Scandinavian, Ukrainian, German and Poles. The Anglo majority did not last, however. Gradually, the region became one of the most evenly balanced in the country in terms of

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 71.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

ethnic composition.²¹ Don Delaplante, in his 1951 *Maclean's* article about Sudbury's character, explains that while "[i]n its furnaces every day a mountain of ore becomes a river of vital metals; on its streets a colorful mixture of races and religions surges and blends into a unique Canadian scene. Sudbury's got a right to thump its hairy chest."²² His assessment of Sudbury's ethnic diversity was certainly accurate. When Delaplante wrote his article, the French Canadian population of Sudbury exceeded the British. Also, Finns, Germans, Poles, Ukrainians and Italians had experienced unprecedented population growth. In 1951, these ethnic groups' and others comprised approximately 22% of Sudbury's population.²³ Over the next ten years Sudbury saw a population increase of more than 58% and was the fourth fastest growing city in the country due to immigration.²⁴

In the 1940s and 1950s Sudbury's population was disproportionately young and male.²⁵ There is some truth to Stompin' Tom Connor's description of the "Sudbury Saturday Night" on which "The girls are out to Bingo and the boys are gettin' stinko, [a]nd we think no more of Inco ..."²⁶ Close to half the population in these two decades was composed of young men, and they outnumbered females by a wide margin.²⁷

²¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

²² Don Delaplante, "Sudbury: Melting Pot for Men and Ore," *Maclean's Magazine*, April 15, 1951.

²³ For a more complete demographic breakdown of Sudbury and Area in the 1950s see Table 8.2 "Sudbury Census Metropolitan Area Population Growth, 1951-1961" and Table 8.3 "Population by Ethnic Origin in the Sudbury Area" in Wallace and Thomson, *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital*, 196-197.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 196.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 173.

²⁶ Stompin Tom Connors, "Sudbury Saturday Night," *The Northlands' Own Tom Connors* (Audiorecording, 1967).

²⁷ Wallace and Thomson, *Sudbury: Rail Town to Regional Capital*, 173.

The hyper-masculinity implied by Delaplante's "hairy chest" metaphor is definitely a characteristic of Sudbury's working-class culture, but his and Connor's descriptions only depict one version of Sudbury's masculinity. In the mid-1950s these same miners puffed out their hairy chests, and openly debated in their union hall whether or not ballet teachers would be brought into the community to train the children. An open discussion ensued about the relevance of culture and ballet to the community. According to onetime Local 598 executive Ray Stevenson, Mine Mill's members fought it out over this issue on the floor and the membership finally agreed to bring in the "tutti frutti [dance] stuff."²⁸ These men demonstrated an alternative and contradictory form of masculinity by embracing what could be considered as traditionally non-masculine artistic values.

Canada's trade union history, according to Desmond Morton, "is the story of countless little struggles, some of them successful, most of them frustrating failures."²⁹ Sudbury's miners are a part of this larger story. Local 598 of the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers [IUMMSW or Mine Mill] emerged within the context of a North American union movement that arose from the difficult years of the interwar period to achieve significant victories during and after the Second World War.

By the mid-thirties, Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation had already set a new standard for North American workers. His 1933 National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) stated that "employees shall have the right to organize and bargain collectively

²⁸ Ray Stevenson, interviewed in *The Un-Canadians*, dir. Len Scher (National Film Board of Canada and Smale Communications, 1996).

²⁹ Desmond Morton, *Working People: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Labour Movement*, 5th ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queens Press, 2007), 176.

through representatives of their own choosing and shall be free from interference, restraint and coercion.”³⁰ Two years later, the American Wagner Act (1935) provided a target at which workers in Canada could aim, as it gave workers in the US a legal guarantee to collective bargaining rights. Canadian labour history in the interwar years loosely paralleled that in the US, with a few notable differences. Most important was the comparative lack of government support for workers in Canada. They lacked a home grown version of the American NIRA and Wagner law.

The inter-war years witnessed other significant events in the trade union movement. The formation of the US Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) in 1935 was a major step forward in the efforts by unionists to organize on an industrial rather than craft basis. The Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) was formed by the CIO’s affiliates and would prove quite influential for Canadian workers as had the CIO in the United States.³¹ The IUMMSW was one of the eight founding members of the CIO, an organization devoted to organizing workers in mass production industries.

Canadian workers had reason to be inspired. American unions were proving to be a formidable force, having extracted recognition from powerful corporations. Some of the organizers from the US shared their experiences and helped their affiliated Canadian members. Yet, as Craig Heron attests, the Canadian government tended to respond to organizing workers with an “iron heel.”³² Again, a fundamental difference between the

³⁰ Morton, *Working People*, 150.

³¹ Library of Parliament Research Branch, *Trade Unionism in Canada* (Ottawa, Economics Division, April 1989), 4.

³² Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 65.

respective labour movements in the US and Canada during the 1930s was the latter's lack of support to act on the workers' behalf.

The Canadian federal government had its own entrenched set of practices when it came to handling labour issues at this time.³³ When Canada entered the Second World War, Ottawa was still generally hostile to organized labour. For example, the enactment of the War Measures Act ensured that the Industrial Disputes Investigation Act (1907), which was considered unfavourable to workers, was extended to all essential war industries to discourage strikes.³⁴ However, the Second World War placed Canadian workers in a position of strength, as their productivity was essential to an Allied victory. Ultimately, workers would use this leverage to pressure the government to guarantee collective bargaining rights.

The year 1943 was both a crucial point in the war and an explosive one in Canadian labour relations. In that year union membership numbers soared.³⁵ Overall, the number of unionists doubled during the war, their ranks rising to 725,000 by 1945.³⁶ There was an accompanying wave of strikes; one in three union members was on strike at one point or another in 1943.³⁷ The resulting instability and potential disruption of the social order compelled the government to make concessions. These initiatives were, according to *Canadian Forum*, "the price Liberalism was willing to pay to prevent socialism."³⁸ The passage of Privy Council order 1003 in 1944 was by far the most significant piece of

³³ Morton, *Working People*, 89.

³⁴ Morton, *Working People*, 170.

³⁵ Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 70.

³⁶ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 279.

³⁷ Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 70.

³⁸ Morton, *Working People*, 182.

wartime legislation for proponents of Canadian labour organizations. The act legally both entrenched collective bargaining and provided the benefits accruing from an automatic check-off. The first meant that the unions representing a particular group of workers, upon proving to a labour relations board that they had the support of the majority of workers in a particular workplace, became legally certified and employers could not refuse to sit down with them to negotiate their contracts.³⁹ The latter, often called the Rand formula, is where the payment of trade union dues is mandatory regardless of the worker's union status.⁴⁰ Palmer describes this legislation as both a blessing and a curse.⁴¹ Workers had achieved their much-sought-after recognition, but at the same time they lost their most powerful weapon – the ability to strike spontaneously.

The history of Mine Mill Local 598 begins at the turn of the twentieth century when its parent organization, the American-based Western Federation of Miners (WFM), first appeared north of the border representing miners in Rossland, BC in 1895. A decade later, a local chapter of the WFM was formed in Cobalt in Northern Ontario.⁴²

The WFM had originally been established by miners in 1893 to protect themselves from hostile frontier mining conditions in the American West. In particular, the WFM fought to obtain better provisions for the health and safety of miners and their families.

³⁹ Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 72.

⁴⁰ This formula is designed to ensure that no employee will opt out of the union simply to avoid dues (or the scorn of the employer) yet reap the benefits of collective bargaining.

⁴¹ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 280.

⁴² Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 97.

From its outset, the WMF was associated with radicalism and pioneered unionism in the mines.⁴³

Throughout the early twentieth century, the WFM was affiliated with two radical international unions. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) and the One Big Union (OBU) each aimed to unite all industrial unionists.⁴⁴ This type of militant industrial unionism provoked alarm and repression from the Canadian state.⁴⁵ This was especially true in the wake of the first red scare. After suffering internal and external attacks, the WFM, which by 1916 had become the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers (IUMMSW), lay dormant for much of the interwar period.

In 1933, Roosevelt's National Recovery Act gave the IUMMSW purpose again. The re-emergent union did not recant its earlier links to militant union organizations; the radical legacy of IUMMSW is one that future generations would proudly embrace.⁴⁶ By the same token, the IUMMSW would devote itself, like its predecessors, to improving wages and deplorable working conditions, and address the long hours symptomatic of work in many mine and smelter towns in North America.

The IUMMSW earned its militant reputation by supporting political action by its members on an industrial basis and opposing conservative-oriented craft unionism. However, unlike the WFM, the IUMMSW was not exclusively devoted to revolutionary purposes. It was a "grass roots" organization devoted to bettering the immediate living and

⁴³ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 175.

⁴⁴ Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 36.

⁴⁵ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 204.

⁴⁶ Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 1.

working conditions of its members through united action. This was a North American struggle, whereby the Canadian story was but a chapter of a larger tale and the events that took place in Sudbury but a piece.

Mine Mill local 598's influence in Sudbury began when it achieved its certification at Inco on 4 February 1944. The miners from Falconbridge followed suit a month later. These local milestones were passed within the same month that the federal government enacted emergency order PC 1003. Thus, Sudbury's miners demonstrated some agency in achieving certification before the emergency order was activated, both because of their strength in numbers and because of the significance of nickel to the war industry.

Throughout Local 598's fight to gain certification, Inco did not remain idle. It employed common tactics of "corporate welfarism," including the re-establishment, in November 1942, of its own company union: the United Copper-Nickel Workers (UCNW). Miners termed this association the "Nickel Rash," and gave it little support.⁴⁷ The rank and file voted resoundingly for Mine Mill when they cast their certification ballots.

Subsequent contracts spanning the years between 1944 and 1951 brought unprecedented gains in rapid succession. These included the eight hour day "collar to collar." Prior to this time, explains Bob Miner, "[y]ou worked eight hours on the face. You went underground on your own time, ate lunch on your own time, and came up on your own time."⁴⁸ Mine Mill's workers also gained improved grievance procedures, a mandate to achieve better working conditions, seniority job postings, shift premiums for afternoon

⁴⁷ Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 105.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 109.

and graveyard shifts (for the first time in company history), two weeks of vacation after two years of service, War Labour Board approved classification increases, and the elimination of the third and fourth classes in the trades.⁴⁹ Also, in terms of contract gains, although wage increases were prohibited during the war, by 1951 wage increases had been won continually and they provided Sudbury's miners with the second highest wages in the country in this industry, as well as the forty-hour work week.⁵⁰

The outbreak of the Cold War changed the political landscape for IUMSWW in general and its locals in Sudbury in particular. The region's mines were responsible for 90% of the western world's nickel supply, a highly valued resource during the post-war period.⁵¹ The international trade union bargained with 583 companies – one of which was Inco. It bargained with the IUMMSW's Local 598 in Sudbury that represented approximately 18,000 workers in the region alone.⁵²

Potentially dissident miners in Sudbury thus represented a significant threat to governments and capital. They had the potential to wield tremendous power and fears of Communist "infiltration" of industrial unions served to encourage this perception.

The Cold War provided new weapons to IUMMSW's enemies. Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse point out that "Cold War anti-Communism combined readily with anti-

⁴⁹ Ibid., 109.

⁵⁰ Ibid., ix and 109. Second only to miners from Trail in the post-war-period, who were also represented by Mine Mill.

⁵¹ Mercedes Steedman, "The Red Petticoat Brigade," 58.

⁵² John B. Lang, "One Hundred Years of Mine Mill'," in *Hard Lessons: The Mine Mill Union in the Canadian Labour Movement*, ed. Mercedes Steedman, Peter Suschnigg, and Dieter K. Buse (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995), 14. Number includes Falconbridge workers who were also represented by Mine Mill Local 598.

unionism to produce a new threat to unions.”⁵³ The American Taft-Hartley Act (1947) essentially banned communists from holding union office and at the same time limited the right of unions to organize and strike.⁵⁴ This was a continuation of the post-war pattern that featured similar purges in the civil service and the arts.

In fact, many trade unions did not survive the Cold War purges. For example, the CCL (Canadian affiliate of the CIO) also expelled the United Electrical Workers (UEW), the International Leather and Fur Workers (ILFW) and the International Woodworkers of America (IWA) as well as Mine Mill (1950) for non-compliance with the Taft-Hartley Act. Only the UEW survived the Cold War with most of its membership intact.⁵⁵ In the 1950s the United Steelworkers of America (USWA), a conservative union concerned with “bread and butter issues,” gradually gained control over IUMMSW’s locals. In fact, according to Bryan Palmer “[o]nly in Sudbury did it [i.e., Mine Mill Local 598] remain a union of strength” during the 1950s.⁵⁶ This vitality provided local unionists with the incentive and the means to finance their own cultural programs to serve their fellow members in Sudbury.

⁵³ Reg Whitaker and Gary Marcuse, *Cold War Canada: The Making of a National Insecurity State, 1945-1957* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), 311.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁵⁵ Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement*, 81.

⁵⁶ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 293.

Chapter Two

The People and Cultural Programs of Mine Mill

The period covered by this paper is known as the “Golden Age” for trade unionism in Canada.⁵⁷ The IUMMSW was removed from the CIO in 1949-1950 and five years later the IUMMSW granted autonomy to its Canadian membership. Nonetheless, Local 598 independently sought to enrich the lives of its workers and their families, and during this time Nels Thibault and Mike Solski largely oversaw this process. As successive presidents of Mine Mill Local 598 between 1947 and 1959, they exercised significant influence over the local’s cultural initiatives. Their long tenure was termed the “Thibault - Solski Regime” by enemies and friends alike.

When local 598 began building its union halls, it was the beginning of what Thibault felt was an effort “to have a little bit of socialism of our own.”⁵⁸ This represented a novel initiative for a Canadian local to purchase property for a hall as opposed to renting one for its activities. Thibault spoke of “wiping the slate clean” by expanding into cultural activities, creating summer camps for youths and working towards a total erasure of any kind of racial discrimination.⁵⁹ The cultural programs developed by local 598 promoted the spirit of equality that was articulated in the language of the collective agreement: “There shall be no discrimination by the Company or the union or its members against any

⁵⁷ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 268.

⁵⁸ Nels Thibault interviewed by Mike Solski, 25 May 1981, P019 Mike Solski Fonds, Laurentian University Archives, F47, 3.2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

employee because of membership or non-membership in any lawful union, or because of the employee's sex, race, creed, colour, nationality, ancestry, place of origin or political opinions.”⁶⁰

Through these programs the union promoted its credo of unconditional acceptance regardless of background. Solski later spoke of how proud he was of the “grassroots thing,” and recalled that “[w]e always boasted that [we] were the only union in Canada that enabled that program and gave something more to the membership besides fighting grievances.”⁶¹ Part of this “more” had to do with providing access to cultural pursuits for the local's members. Solski later lamented that he was largely motivated in this regard because “we were shut out from all of the social benefits in the communities by the elites Where did working man's children have an opportunity?”⁶² Thibault did not dance around the issue either, and rather humorously attributed the need to provide the membership with cultural and social activities, such as theatre and ballet, to a remarkable source. He took exception to President Dwight D. Eisenhower's quip in the 1950s that “some people wanted champagne and caviar when they should have had beer and hot dogs.”⁶³ Mine Mill's members in Sudbury were going to be given the option of high culture, with hot dogs on the side.

A guaranteed supply of union dues through the mandatory check-off provided the funding for cultural programs. Local 598's members each contributed five dollars per

⁶⁰ Tester, *The Shaping of Sudbury*, 29.

⁶¹ Mike Solski interviewed by Mick Lowe (transcript), 30 October 1995, PO19, LU Archives, J,16.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Thibault with Solski, 25 May 1981.

month in mandatory union dues.⁶⁴ This amount covered national and international dues, local and national strike funds, supplementary welfare funds and money for local union administration. Also included in this amount was the 50-cent allotment to the building fund, which included recreation and entertainment. These monetary contributions came directly out of the workers' pockets. Expenditures were voted on by the membership as part of a democratic process. Unlike other unions, Local 598 distributed its own funds for local use and then paid its national and international contributions. This was a reversal of the standard system whereby a local would receive a disbursement channeled through an American office. Sudbury unionists thereby ensured they received enough funding through their system and Sudbury's miners at Inco and Falconbridge had direct control over how their money was spent.⁶⁵

Mine Mill's local leaders thus sought to exploit their control over these financial resources to provide cultural activities for their membership. According to 598's Executive Trustee Ray Stevenson, the local's leadership wanted to "raise the cultural and artistic views of the people living in Sudbury, a community which had been dominated for many years by Inco."⁶⁶ This impulse started with the construction of union halls and translated into the activities that were to take place within them. They were intended to provide the membership with sites for promoting educational, cultural and recreational opportunities. They ended up hosting a great many social and cultural activities in the halls, including

⁶⁴ Solski with Mick Lowe, 30 October 1995.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Unfinished Journey*, Appendix O, 515.

⁶⁶ Len Scher, *The Un-Canadians: True stories of the Blacklist Era* (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992), 94.

ballet, theatre, bands, orchestras and weekly dances for the membership. Not all of these endeavours cost the union money, however. The weekly dances, for example, were profitable and proceeds were re-invested in their cultural programs.⁶⁷

Each construction project was implemented through a democratic process. The membership and the executive had to vote on and approve all proposed expenditures. With the edifices in place, cultural activities and community events had a permanent home. Grassroots initiatives such as these were untenable before certification for workers, who, according to one trade unionist, previously had exclusively “worked, ate, and slept company.”⁶⁸

The most significant capital investment for Mine Mill’s members was a state of the art union building on Regent Street that was officially completed in September 1952. The new structure cost half a million dollars. Starting in 1946, members had been putting aside an additional fifty cents for a building fund as part of their dues.⁶⁹ Afterward, the Mine Mill members in Sudbury believed they had “erected a monument to labour.”⁷⁰ Emulating the political and cultural traditions associated with “Hall Socialism,” which had already been active in Finnish communities in Northern Ontario, Mine Mill created its own multi-ethnic cultural space.⁷¹ Some of the activities it hosted were dances, which increased in number due to their popularity, Christmas pageants and present exchanges for the children,

⁶⁷ This is another point made clear in the minutes and budget summaries, LU Archives, PO19.

⁶⁸ Palmer, *Working Class Experience*, 286.

⁶⁹ Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 112.

⁷⁰ Deter K. Buse, “Weir Reid and Mine Mill: An Alternative Union’s Cultural Endeavours’,” in *Hard Lessons: The Mine Mill Union in the Canadian Labour Movement*, ed. by Mercedes Steedman, Peter Suschnigg and Deter K. Buse (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1995), 274.

⁷¹ Ian Radforth, “Finish Radicalism and Labour Activism in Northern Ontario Woods,” in Franca Iacovetta et al, *A Nation of Immigrants* (Toronto: UTPress, 1998), 298.

regularly scheduled banquets and social affairs for various union committees, annual stewards' banquets, and free Saturday morning movies for children. Another role for the new building was to accommodate diverse organizations in the Sudbury area. Catholic, Ukrainian and the Orange Lodge were some of the many groups who made use of the new facilities.⁷² This concept was extended to the whole Sudbury region as the building fund was used to construct libraries and Mine Mill halls in the surrounding centres of Garson (1953), Coniston (1956), Creighton (1957) and Chelmsford (1959).⁷³

Another one of Mine Mill's cultural initiatives was to provide various forms of the arts to the community. This included both acquiring art and supporting prominent artists for the benefit of the community, as well as providing opportunities for children to learn to create art for themselves. For example, the Mine Mill Ladies Auxiliary established and oversaw dance and theatre programs in the union halls. In addition, Weir Reid was hired in March 1952 as the local's recreational director. He was charged with assisting in "providing for the constructive use of leisure time for the members and their families and achieving conditions of life in the home and the community which make for health and happiness."⁷⁴ He would embark upon a "vigorous program of cultural and recreational activities."⁷⁵ Through his efforts, the union decided to host blacklisted radical or communist performers such as Pete Seeger and Paul Robeson. Robeson's performance in Sudbury in 1956 was his first outside the US since his travel ban had been lifted in 1952, and holds a special place in

⁷² Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 112.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁷⁴ *Mine Mill News*, IV, 3, 17 March, 1952. Found in John B. Lang, "A Lion in a Den of Daniels: A History of the International Union of Mine Mill and Smelter Workers, Sudbury, Ontario 1942-1962." (Unpublished Masters' Thesis, University of Guelph, 1970),170.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

the memories of Mine Mill alumni.⁷⁶ The singer later described how “[m]y art . . . is my weapon in the struggle for my people’s freedom and for the freedom of all people.”⁷⁷ On an unforgettable night in February he sang the famous worker ballad *Joe Hill* for those in attendance. The local invited many other acts such as Pete Seeger, *the travelers* and the Barnard and Barry circus to enrich the lives of workers and to provide entertainment.

In addition, Mine Mill wanted the Sudbury community to host elite dance culture in the mid-1950s. According to dance historian Julye Huggins, a “professional dance show [in Sudbury] was about as rare as a meteorite collision.”⁷⁸ Reid attempted to remedy the situation. In an attempt to wrest the monopoly of the arts from Sudbury’s ruling elites, he arranged to have the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (RWB) perform at the Sudbury union hall in 1954. According to the company’s chronicler Max Wyman: “Initially, the Sudbury appearances were to have been sponsored by the local chapter of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (I.O.D.E.), but the financial load had proved too great and the responsibility had been assumed by the Sudbury chapter of the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers.”⁷⁹ The leaders of local 598 wanted to bolster its prestige and to stamp Mine Mill and its members as “cultured” by hosting this event. Reid deliberately attempted to re-appropriate “the social event of the season” from the “petty bourgeoisie of Sudbury” by funding the Royal Winnipeg Ballet (RWB) performance.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 118 and Laurel Sefton MacDowell, “Paul Robeson in Canada: A Border Story,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 51 (Spring 2003): 185, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25149338>.

⁷⁷ Solski and Smaller, *Mine Mill*, 118.

⁷⁸ Huggins, “Dance Community: Training, Education and Performance,” *First Generation*, 2.

⁷⁹ Max Wyman, *The Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the First Forty Years* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1978), 87.

⁸⁰ Lang, “A Lion n a Den of Daniels,” 171.

Enemies of Mine Mill both within the community and outside, however, did not want the famed troupe to perform in the ‘socialist’ Sudbury hall. Without warning, on the same week of the scheduled shows in Sudbury, the union received a wire notifying it that the RWB had cancelled. The circumstances surrounding the cancellation were dubious. The RWB Sudbury performances were scheduled for 29 and 30 January 1954. Every one of the 1,200 tickets for the performances had been sold in advance, with enough demand to have scheduled another performance.⁸¹ The reason given for the cancellation was that the two female leads, Eva van Gencsy and Jean Stoneham, were unable to travel due to the twenty-four hour flu.⁸² Controversy erupted when Gencsy was reported to have said while dining out with friends on the Thursday prior to coming to Sudbury that “people told me I had the flu, so I had the flu. I never felt any better than I do right now, though.”⁸³ The next day she backtracked and blamed her poor proficiency in English when she explained that “it was all a terrible mistake . . . [i]f I say I feel good, it is only because I am so happy to be going on tour.”⁸⁴ A radio station quipped that their “twenty-four hour ‘flue’” had become a “48-hour flu.”⁸⁵

Now that the dust has settled, it can be asserted with reasonable certainty that these performances were cancelled due to political pressures.⁸⁶ Even though Mine Mill members

⁸¹ Ray Stevenson, “Ballet Ruse,” in *The Un-Canadians: True stories of the Blacklist Era*, ed. Len Scher (Toronto: Lester Publishing, 1992), 94.

⁸² Wyman, *The Royal Winnipeg Ballet*, 88.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 88.; Huggins; Bayfield, *Winnipeg Free Press*

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁸⁵ Ted Byfield, “‘I Never Felt Better’ ‘Sick’ Ballet Star Reported as Saying,” *Winnipeg Free Press* 29 January 1954: n. pg.

⁸⁶ Wyman, Lang and Stevenson all attest to the fact that the RWB had succumbed to American pressure. Stevenson takes it a step further linking the cancellation to the US State Department as members from Mine Mill had already been barred from the country. John Foster Dulles, the US

were skeptical, they made several counter proposals to try to have the shows go on, including using stand-ins, making program changes and having a smaller company perform. The dance company refused, however.⁸⁷ The problem was that Mine Mill's reputation, having been removed from the CCL for its communist leadership during the height of the Cold War, was deeply tainted. This caused concern for the RWB because it feared potential repercussions that would result from its association with this "Communist" union. Moreover, RWB faced the loss of \$30,000 in the event of having its US tour cancelled.⁸⁸ According to Local 598 executive board member and trustee Ray Stevenson, in conjunction with the immediate difficulty of refunding all the tickets and providing disappointed ticket-holders with explanations, the union "[a]lso raised a public fuss about the thing because we weren't going to roll over and play dead. To us in Sudbury, it was a direct onslaught on the rights of the community, as well as on the civil and personal rights, to deprive us of the opportunity of viewing Canadian artists, or any artists for that matter."⁸⁹

This attack on the union's attempt to host the RWB poignantly demonstrated how Mine Mill was seen at the time as a radical, left wing organization. Local 598 in Sudbury was vulnerable to the whims of powerful political, economic and industrial interests that emanated from the United States. The Sudbury local, with its sizable membership, attempted to function independently in spite of these hostile circumstances, and its cultural programs were meant to express this autonomous identity.

secretary of state was formerly a top-level Inco executive, hence the company was aligned with McCarthyites who were both enemies of Mine Mill. See Stevenson, "Ballet Ruse," 95; Lang, "A Lion n a Den of Daniels," 172; Wyman, *The Royal Winnipeg Ballet*, 88.

⁸⁷ Wyman, *Royal Winnipeg Ballet*, 88.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

⁸⁹ Stevenson, "Ballet Ruse," 95.

Chapter Three

Nancy Lima Dent, Instructor for Mine Mill's Dance Schools

Local 598 was committed to creating a rich and diverse cultural environment for its members, and one of the largest and most important initiatives undertaken during this time was the dance school. The union's members wanted their children to have the opportunity to train in dance, to be educated in culture and to perform for the community. In pursuance of this goal, local 598 opened two dance schools and commissioned an experienced, political, and well-known Canadian dancer and choreographer to lead its school. Nancy Dent was hired in 1955 as the first director and instructor at the Mine Mill dance school.⁹⁰

Nancy Lima Dent was born in 1919 to Italian immigrants and grew up in Toronto. As a first generation Canadian with Italian parentage, Dent's inferior social and economic position in society informed her perceptions from an early age. She developed a resilient attitude and a strong sense of the power of community. In particular, her upbringing was deeply affected by experiences during the interwar years and the Second World War.

In 1941, Dent's father was interned as an alleged Fascist, and this experience from her youth left a lasting impression. Her family was ostracized even within the Italian neighbourhood where they lived. Members of her church whom she had known her entire life crossed the street to avoid her family. People also stopped shopping at her parents' fruit market at Bloor and Bathurst. When shunned by members of the local Catholic Church, she

⁹⁰ Dent spoke about her life and artistic career in a sixteen-part interview conducted in Toronto. Nancy Lima Dent Interviews, 1983, DCD Archives.

never attended church again. Dent learned first-hand the value of a unified community through this alienating experience.⁹¹

Dent concluded in hindsight that her father's internment was both a blessing and a curse. Being alienated within the community due to her father's politics was definitely hurtful. This, combined with racial prejudice that she had already experienced because of her Italian heritage, became an incentive for her to pursue her life's work in dance. On the positive side, however, her father's traditional worldview did not include his oldest daughter leading what he viewed as the immoral life of a dancer; he had thus prohibited her from pursuing this type of training. Nevertheless, Dent was able to begin taking dance lessons – specifically ballet – during her father's internment even though she was already 22 years old. Her father's absence during this period removed the constraint that had prevented Dent from expressing herself artistically.

Dance was the key for Dent's independence and represented her opportunity to exercise her freedom of expression. Her challenging living conditions made it necessary for Dent to develop her expertise so that she could earn a living. Her natural drive and dedication to her values led her to develop a rigorous training regime, something she later passed on to her students.

Dent's resiliency was again put to the test when her father came home after being released in 1943, and his return prompted her to move out of what she feared would be a return of a restrictive, patriarchal and domineering household. She was driven to improve her skill-set and determined to work herself through as many styles of dance as possible.

⁹¹ Nancy Lima Dent Interviews, 1983, DCD.

Not knowing that she was on the path to becoming an elite artist in Toronto, Dent took any class she could fit into her schedule. During one stretch she recalled that each class cost one dollar and twenty-five cents. She participated in four classes that were offered in a week during which fifteen dollars was all she had coming in through her part-time work.⁹² She was thus forced to live on the remaining ten dollars a sum that was barely enough to cover her rent and other sundry living expenses.

Dent formally trained in the 1940s in Toronto, Buffalo and New York City, and studied multiple styles of dance such as ballet, folk and primitive dance. During this time she inundated herself with art, theatre, music and costume design and she learned to play the piano.

She taught dance from the mid-1940s until the early 1970s for several groups. These included the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and United Jewish People's Order (UJPO) in the 1940s and the New Dance Theatre (NDT) school in the early 1950s. From 1955 to 1957, the period that is the focus of this study, Sudbury's IUMMSW Local 598 hired her to establish its dance schools in Sudbury and Garson.

Dent was not a traditional woman for the time period, but she was the quintessential artist. Dent exhibited tenacity in the early stages of her career as she managed to teach in the midst of difficult circumstances. Dent was driven to pursue these activities by a zealous spirit; she described it as a "motor." As she put it "oh boy did it drive me this motor . . . I

⁹² Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

don't know but baby I can't stop, I wasn't in control of it, IT [her emphasis] controlled me!"⁹³

Dent's political views and her ability as an artist and teacher put her on Mine Mill's radar. Her experiences as an artist during and after the Second World War engendered within her a sense of political activism that she shared with unionists in Sudbury and would nurture in their children. According to Amy Bowring, curator of Dent's online exhibit, "Nancy had entered the arts simply to express herself through movement, but as the [Second World War] progressed she became more aware of the social implications of individual decisions."⁹⁴ Dent, who made a point of emphasizing that she was first and foremost an artist, could not detach herself from the social issues that plagued the world. For her, art had to "say something," and she retained this view her whole life.⁹⁵

In the Cold War climate, Dent was politically conscientious by necessity. Like many left-wing artists in the 1930s and 40s, she had gained a reputation for being a "radical" among members of society's Establishment. For her part, Dent openly acknowledged that she had strong left wing, socialist and communist affiliations and influences. In her youth, she befriended Eleanor Dixon and Millie Ryerson. The latter's husband was head of the Canadian Communist Party (CCP) at one time and the former's father participated in the

⁹³ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

⁹⁴ Amy Bowring. *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time* (A Dance Collection Danse: Web Exhibition), Beginnings, 6, "Nancy's Repertoire," <http://www.dcd.ca/exhibitions/limadent/index.html>.

⁹⁵ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

creation of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).⁹⁶ Through these early associations she later attested that “her world began to open up,” especially in collaboration with many like-minded artists.⁹⁷

She belonged to a group of post-war artists whose work produced political commentary. Her first choreographic work, *Set Your Clock at U235* (1946), named for a key material used to make the atomic bomb that was dropped on Hiroshima, was part of the Toronto Labour Arts Guild’s Summer Festival. Based on a poem, it was one of several of her works that included references to the devastating impact of war, such as the effects of the atomic bomb.⁹⁸ Dent also combined a variety of art forms, which allowed her to apply a personal approach to these issues. For example, the above-mentioned poem was read aloud, acted out to Dent’s choreography, and accompanied by the piano. After viewing the performance, a reviewer wrote that “[t]he mime sustained an undercurrent of feeling which is seldom accomplished by amateur effort.”⁹⁹ As a result of this performance she was invited to join a cultural group that held a similar outlook in terms of using art to express political views.

She joined the Neo Dance Theatre in Toronto, later named the New Dance Theatre (NDT), in the mid-1940s, and it was supported by the United Jewish People’s Order (UJPO).¹⁰⁰ The UJPO was the NDT’s patron and was a social organization that was set up

⁹⁶ Nancy Lima Dent Interview; Amy Bowring. *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time*, “Beginnings,” 6.

⁹⁷ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

⁹⁸ Bowring. “Nancy Lima Dent,” *Beginnings*, 6.

⁹⁹ Bowring. “*Nancy Lima Dent*,” *Beginnings*, 6.

¹⁰⁰ The United Jewish People’s Order (UJPO) is an independent, socialist-oriented, secular cultural and educational organization with branches in Toronto, Winnipeg and Vancouver, and members in

to help Russian and European Jews forge a new life in Canada. It was primarily an association for workers, who were also known to have Communist associations.¹⁰¹ UJPO conducted its social programs through a democratic structure in a manner very similar to Mine Mill. The NDT became Dent's vehicle as an artist that enabled her to pursue both her instructional and choreographic interests. It provided a rich cultural program with choirs, orchestras, dance and theatre groups, lectures, summer camps and other activities.¹⁰² A particular focus for this group was to protest against human misdeeds and atrocities, and promote peace and social justice. Dent and other dancers with NDT were given rehearsal space and performance opportunities, and were also able to forge significant artistic connections. She remained with NDT for nine years until she departed for Sudbury in 1955.

Dent's later teaching style while working through NDT in Toronto also demonstrated that she sought to empower students by allowing them to express their cultural diversity and individualism. An NDT children's dance recital program from 1955 would have demonstrated to unionists in Sudbury her values and instructional techniques.¹⁰³ According to the program, the NDT School offered dance classes in modern and classical ballet for adults and children. The recital's dance numbers reflected topical content with titles such as *Spring Dance*, *My Daddy is a Hero* and *Jewish Hora*. They were performed while being accompanied by various styles of music, including folk and classical.

Montreal and other Canadian centres. From its beginnings in 1926, the UJPO has always had a socially progressive outlook. We have consistently promoted the unionization of workers, peace, and social justice in Canada and the world. *United Jewish People's Order (UJPO)*: Website, *A Canadian Secular Humanist Organization* (Last Updated November 16, 2011), <http://www.ujpo.org/> (accessed July 29th 2014).

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Amy Bowring. *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time*, "Beginnings."

¹⁰³ "New Dance Theatre Children's Dance Recital," 29, May 1955. Dance Collection Danse (DCD), Nancy Lima Dent, *New Dance Theatre – 4, 1949-1955*, 208 2012 -1-6.

While teaching at NDT, Dent was also a strong supporter of students performing their own material. Select dancers in the seniors' category, which consisted of students aged seven to eleven, were credited with being both dancers and composers of the pieces they performed.¹⁰⁴ Dent believed that encouraging students to generate their own material was a means to empower them. This was also evident from the NDT children's dance recital in 1955 through the concluding act of the "Programme," which was titled *Improvisation on a Theme*. Its subtitles were *Early Morning*, *Terror from the Sky*, and *Finale*. Underneath the credits for this piece was an explanation of its concept and process; it explained that "[t]he movements of the children in this dance are purely spontaneous. Only the story line, entrances and exits have been planned." Furthermore, it specified that "[t]he children have been taught the basic elements of choreography such as: pattern, design, musical phrasing, rhythms, thematic motivation etc. Along with tecnic [sic]." It concluded by outlining its overriding philosophy, namely that "[a] dance of this nature is designed for the purpose of developing creative movement that arises not from movement itself but from the story." Through the NDT School, Dent encouraged her young students to engage in spontaneous and improvised movement, and enabled children to earn acclaim for their accomplishments through public performance.¹⁰⁵

The evolution of the modern dance movement had a significant impact on Dent. As a historic term "modern dance" refers to a particular group of choreographers and the tradition of dance values they established. Essentially, it describes a variety of styles that developed in the early twentieth century as a reaction to classical ballet. These practitioners

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

viewed ballet as decadent, rigid and academic. In the 1940s and 50s, the structure and uniformity required in ballet was akin to the oppressive traits experienced by many artists through the behest of autocratic governments. For them, threats against the freedoms of speech and expression were palpable. As a result they wanted to pursue a style more devoted to individual expression and humanistic values. Michael Crabb and Graham Jackson explain that “modern dance presented humanity in a more direct, visceral, ground-rooted manner.”¹⁰⁶ Modern dance represented people as individuals and their lives as a series of choices and outcomes, rather than as something that was restricted and predetermined.

Modern dance also fostered increased interest in non-Eurocentric styles of movement. As Crabb and Jackson put it, “what had once been ethnic became part of a multi-faceted-mainstream.”¹⁰⁷ Unlike traditional dance forms, modern dance tended to blur distinctions between various art forms and movements from various cultures and backgrounds. Dance practitioners began increasingly to blend them together and further promote the modern dance movement.

Dent had trained with influential figures from within this movement in the early 1940s prior to belonging to NDT. Her artistic career and teaching practices reflected her continued allegiance to their teachings. For example, this hybrid use of styles played a huge part later in her ability to create an inclusive community across the cultural groups that made up Mine Mill’s membership.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Crabb and Graham Jackson, “Modern Dance,” *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/modern-dance/> (accessed October 16, 2014).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

As a result, Dent's relationship to Mine Mill Local 598 in the 1950s reflects the underlying emotions that fueled both trade unionism and modern dance. Beginning in the 1930s, a rich connection between culture and trade unionism had become a predominant feature within immigrant communities. This link was especially prominent in the United States as various cultural groups formed in the 1930s. Trade union participation in dance was further encouraged through the federally sponsored arts programs that resulted from President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal legislation.¹⁰⁸ The connection was again promoted by travelers returning from the Soviet Union, such as Paul Robeson, who reported positively upon workers' dance and cultural groups there and subsequently attempted to import some of this culture to the US and Canada.¹⁰⁹ Essentially, socially conscious dancers found a home within cultural groups that were aligned with workers and committed to fighting for workers' rights. In Ellen Graff's view, the 1930s featured an "explosion of choreographic activity."¹¹⁰ According to her, "[t]he anti-academy and anti-elitist basis of modern dance fit nicely within the mission of proletarian culture, just as the proletarian worker proved an eager student and enthusiastic audience for an emergent art."¹¹¹

During the 1930s, modern dance was enthusiastically generated by artists in New York City who were supportive of workers' rights. This proletarian movement had a profound impact on Dent's training. The New Dance Group (NDG) was a prominent member of the Workers' Dance League, which was an umbrella organization that aimed to

¹⁰⁸ Graff, *Stepping Left*, 76.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

develop and organize various workers' dance groups. NDG valued and promoted many styles of dance and prioritized a hybrid use of them that included communal, folk, ballet and primitive. Members of this group were partly responsible for legitimizing the modern style as part of the mainstream or "bourgeois" dance scene.¹¹² Ballet was included in its arsenal but not as the group's exclusive focus. This ensured an egalitarian representation of dance styles and techniques. A one-time administrator for the group decreed that "we derive whatever is of value to us from [a] dance as it stands and reject the rest."¹¹³

NDG issued a provocative slogan for its first annual recital in 1933: "The Dance is a Weapon."¹¹⁴ It exerted a significant influence on Dent, who trained with the group in the 1940s. Members of this group included prolific dancers such as Pearl Primus, Katherine Dunham, Martha Graham, Jose Limon and Doris Humphrey.¹¹⁵ Dent attributed much of what she learned in New York to NDG and applied the lessons to her artistic practice north of the border.

Dent developed a preference for modern dance with the NDG, and she later incorporated it into her curriculum at Mine Mill's schools. She preferred the more fluid "modern" approach to movement, which was a departure from the structured and prescribed steps that were characteristic of classical ballet. This preference for the modern and onetime avant-garde dance method over ballet did not mean she was a less proficient instructor in

¹¹² Graff, *Stepping Left*, 57-58 and Franko, *The Work of Dance*, 15-17. A distinction between "radical" and "bourgeois" is blurred by the end of the 1930s. Dancers became more professionalized and distant from their worker or amateur roots.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹¹⁵ Amy Bowring, *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time*, "Chronology."

the latter. Her first extensive dance training was in Toronto with Boris Volkoff, who has been referred to as “the father of Canadian ballet.”¹¹⁶ For Dent, like her instructors from the NDG, ballet was one tool in her arsenal for artistic expression. She recognized the value of classical ballet as a sound training base. Dent, like other modern dance advocates of the time, believed in a proletarian approach to both dance and politics, and used dance as a means of political expression.

From her training with New Dance Group in New York City during the 1940s, Dent developed teaching philosophies that she continued to use throughout her career. Among these was the importance of the basic lesson structure, and her goal to empower each individual student. She would later implement these approaches in Sudbury.

Near its inception, NDG organized its classes in three sections: technique, improvisation and political discussion.¹¹⁷ This was modeled after the Wigman School, one of NDG’s foundational approaches in the early 1930s, and with which Dent identified strongly.¹¹⁸ Through discussion and improvisation, students and performers would explore a social theme or idea. They were encouraged to make it their inspiration to dance. Thus, the work was made to resonate with the individual while it also had to be accessible and comprehensible to an audience of workers. Finally, the quality of work was subjected to the highest artistic standards.

¹¹⁶ Amy Bowring, *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time*, “Beginnings,” Section 1, Boris Volkoff.

¹¹⁷ Graff, *Stepping Left*, 54-57.

¹¹⁸ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD. German dancer Mary Wigman is regarded as one of the founders of modern dance.

Dent's term as director of Toronto's New Dance Theatre (NDT) in the late 40s and early 50s, particularly throughout its involvement in the newly established Canadian Ballet Festival, exemplified the inextricable link between her artistic and political sensibilities. It also demonstrated the very real consequences and challenges that were attendant upon using dance as a form of political, cultural and social expression during the Cold War. The Canadian Ballet Festival (CBF) was an annual event from 1948 to 1954 that brought together various Canadian dance companies to generate public interest in classical dance.¹¹⁹ It featured professional companies that consisted of dancers who were paid for their work. The Royal Winnipeg Ballet Company was the most prominent of these professional companies, and Dent was a member of an amateur group that performed at the festival several times. The NDT was not professional; it consisted of working people. Dent was the only one who danced full-time and was not paid. Members of her troupe would often put in endless hours during their nightly rehearsals. Nevertheless, members of the NDT received positive reviews and enthusiastic applause at the festival, which also included "elite" companies and was attended by affluent audiences.¹²⁰

NDT's dance productions for the CBF promoted the company's social and political views. The company's first show for the festival, *That We May Live* (1950), was a good example. It dealt with the suffering and religious persecution of Jewish and Slavic people in Czarist Russia. One of the show's themes was the freedom attained by immigrating to Canada. It received positive reviews, including one in *The Globe and Mail* by Herbert Whitaker. He wrote that NDT was a "most impressive group," and "what distinguished [its

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

work] from the other items on the program was that it had something to express.”¹²¹ NDT’s focus on serious and relevant contemporary topics was habitually an integral component of its mandate.

NDT’s presentation at the CBF in 1952 called *Heroes of Our Time* continued to provide social commentary and raised the group’s prestige even further. Dent, who was the main facilitator and director, recalled that the performance received enthusiastic applause.¹²² Its theme and story applied to the contemporary Canadian context, and addressed the increased fear of comic books as a dangerous influence on the period’s youth. According to Dent, interested NDT members set up “a think tank” devoted to devising a dance piece to tackle this issue.¹²³ They developed a collective creation and a “seldom-used choreographic tool [for] the time.”¹²⁴

Conversely, the CBF’s organizers prevented the NDT from entering a rendition of *Lysistrata* into the festival because it was deemed too left wing and subversive with its strong anti-war themes.¹²⁵ This decision reflected the discomfort many people felt about using culture for political purposes. Although after this incident the NDT was labeled in dance circles and elsewhere as “the Communist group,” Dent felt that it was “right on par” with the Royal Winnipeg Ballet Company in terms of the quality of its work. Dent believed its success threatened the established professional company and she felt that this instance of

¹²¹ Amy Bowring. *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time*, “New Dance Theatre,” Tour # 2: Canadian Ballet Festivals.

¹²² Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

¹²³ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

¹²⁴ Amy Bowring. *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time*, “New Dance Theatre,” Tour # 2: Canadian Ballet Festivals.

¹²⁵ Aristophanes’s *Lysistrata* is a classic Greek comedy set in Athens and is a comic account of a group of women banding together to put an end the Peloponnesian War.

public validation had an adverse effect on elites at the festival since it “shook them up” to have this group of working amateurs, “nobodies,” enthusiastically accepted by an audience.¹²⁶

Dent’s personal opinions of these events reflect the regularity with which artists were suppressed during the Cold War. It was common during this period for a group of socially minded and left-leaning artists to be excluded from a mainstream cultural event. According to Amy Bowring, one of the reasons for NDT’s exclusion was because this potential link “may have made the Canadian Ballet Festival Association nervous about associating with a pro-socialist group during the height of McCarthyism.”¹²⁷ The dance group was excluded from participating in the CBF based on its alleged unsavory political associations.

Regardless of the consequences, Dent believed that a dance group should be judged on the quality of its work and not its politics. For her, individual expression, ethics, values and choices took precedence. For Dent, art was not a cover for an illicit gathering for political purposes. While political expression was integral to her work, the work itself was more important than the politics.

Dent, like members of Mine Mill Local 598, was doomed to be caught up in quagmire that was the Cold War. While many unionists held socialist political views, and a few were card-carrying communists, the majority was concerned above all with issues that

¹²⁶ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

¹²⁷ Amy Bowring. *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time*, “New Dance Theatre,” Tour # 2: Canadian Ballet Festivals.

pertained to the union and the community. And yet artists and unionists alike were persecuted in the same ways.

The circumstances surrounding Dent's departure from NDT in 1955, which made her available to teach dance for Mine Mill in Sudbury, illustrates that politics and art were inseparable for her. The NDT had endured its last schism in that same year. Dent indicated that there were several reasons for her wanting to cut ties with this group. One was that she wanted to pursue and continue working in the genre of modern dance. Although some members of the NDT agreed with her, a larger segment wanted to work in the style used by the Bolshoi ballet from Soviet Russia. To her, their decision was about politics. A strict adherence to ballet in her eyes restricted individual expression. She was an artist and felt that others were more concerned with being Communists than artists.¹²⁸

Unbeknownst to Dent, her prior experiences as a professional dancer, teacher and political activist prepared her ideally for her upcoming role as director of Mine Mill's dance schools. Unionists hired Dent specifically because she had all the requisite qualifications for fulfilling their cultural aims through Mine Mill's dance program.

¹²⁸ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

Chapter Four

Dent's Vision For Mine Mill's Dance Schools

Mine Mill hoped to use the dance school as a tool to expose its members and their children to culture, enable these children to develop cultural fluency, deliver a political message and celebrate its multicultural diversity. To realize these ends, Mine Mill would have to retain the services of a qualified dance instructor who had a unique background and skill set. That person was Nancy Lima Dent. Because she was who she was, Dent was able to facilitate Local 598 achieving its cultural objectives. She did so through both the nature of the course material she delivered and how she delivered it.

The dance program gave Local 598's children the opportunity to train in dance, while not excluding those outside the union; the fee was nominal at "50 cents per each class for all students," as explained in an advertisement for the school.¹²⁹ Local children would have the opportunity to train in dance and be able to engage its different forms such as ballet, modern and folk.

In terms of delivering the dance program, the set up was relatively simple. The two schools operating out of union halls in Sudbury and nearby Garson started offering classes to Mine Mill's children in November 1955. They featured classes that were subdivided and grouped according to each student's age. Dent taught all the classes at both schools and was

¹²⁹ Advertisement for "Dance School Sudbury Mine Mill Hall," Nancy Lima Dent Collection, DCD Archives, Nancy Lima Dent 1955-1957, Sudbury + Garson, Ontario Recreation Dept. Mine Mill Union, 1-12. This is the equivalent of \$4.43 in 2014: <http://www.bankofcanada.ca/rates/related/inflation-calculator/>.

sometimes assisted by her advanced students. The women from both Sudbury and Garson were extremely supportive and helped by making costumes and organizing the recitals. The program accommodated more than one hundred students from 3½ years of age and up, including homemakers, and offered advanced and professional levels of instruction for those who qualified and were over fourteen.¹³⁰ There were some boys enrolled in the classes but girls filled the majority of the spaces.

But it was Dent's pedagogical approach and the content she delivered that made her such a perfect fit for achieving the goals Mine Mill wished to realize. For example, on one level Dent was able to use the dance schools to engage the entire community in Sudbury – and not strictly its blue collar elements – and generate significant acclaim for the union through her recitals. Moreover, Dent utilized these occasions – and most of her classes – as forums for expressing political ideas that resonated with Mine Mill's own worldview. However, the dance school's most significant impact occurred in the classroom. There, Dent attempted to empower Mine Mill's dance students by promoting personal development, expression and creativity. She employed other methods of instruction besides dance training to achieve these ends. One significant result of this approach was that some students developed as professional dancers and instructors. For example, Tini Pel and Ida Sauvé became prominent members of Sudbury's dance scene for decades to come. They

¹³⁰ Ibid, "Registration Form," DCD Archives, 1-12. For example, Gloria Barylski's Registration form for the 1956 session requires information regarding her age, address and contact information. It also asks about previous dance training. In this case she had acquired six years training somewhere else. She also indicated that she was in good health. Hence she was assigned to the Crow class. Another unique component of the registration form was that it requested: "[if] the parent was a member of the Union?" It also requested the parent's badge number and the plant where he worked. Gloria's father worked at the Falconbridge Smelter.

participated in two activities with Dent at the dance school that will be used as case studies and serve to highlight how Dent used the dance school to help Mine Mill 598 achieve its cultural objectives, which just happened to be goals that Dent shared. Her influence can be measured by examining Pel's political performance using poetry, and Sauvé's participation in an ensemble that developed *The Magic Cup*.

Dent arrived to teach dance in Sudbury in what she saw as a "cultural desert."¹³¹ Most children, particularly those of Mine Mill's members, had limited access and exposure to the arts, and Dent's goal was to expand their world-view through the arts. Dent was empathetic about her students relating personally to their backgrounds, and she believed that the students felt like they had a person working to give them something much "bigger than the narrow narrow [sic] vision that they had."¹³² She equated the ends of teaching and choreography as being the opposite of those processes necessary to run a dictatorship and always tried to encourage her students and their families to express their individual thoughts and beliefs.¹³³

In local 598's region, Dent arrived and found that, aside from ethnic folk dances by the region's various growing cultural communities (notably the Finns and Ukrainians), the "local stages were as barren as the landscape."¹³⁴ One of Dent's goals was thus to create Sudbury's first professional dance company through fostering Mine Mill's dance program. As stated in an initial advertisement: "It is hoped that in the seasons to come a professional

¹³¹ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD..

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid. and Huggins, "Dance Community: Training, Education and Performance," First Generation, 1.

dance company will develop alongside the dance schools to create original, creative, Canadian dance works.”¹³⁵

In hiring Nancy Lima Dent, Mine Mill acquired an elite artist from one of Canada’s foremost cultural centres, and thus at the same time it also gained the prestige that went along with it. Amy Bowring writes that Dent was an “outstanding dancer who [had] studied many forms of dance in the USA and Canada. Her individual approach stimulates students to an understanding of movement and interpretation.”¹³⁶ Mine Mill 598 had acquired a real innovator and socialist, on the cutting edge of Canadian modern dance, which she felt was the “more democratic art-form.”¹³⁷

Even union outsiders recognized Dent’s potential importance to Sudbury. *The Sudbury Daily Star*’s entertainment reporter Bette Meakes welcomed Dent to the community. She introduced the new instructor to Sudburians through the following description from an early article about the school: “We had been interested to see what has been accomplished at the Garson Community Dance School . . . under the direction of Nancy Lima Dent who came . . . so highly recommended by those ‘in the know,’ in dancing circles.”¹³⁸ Both the local union and “bourgeois” publications publicized Dent’s impressive credentials, which included having recently completed her nine-year stint as director of the

¹³⁵ Advertisement for “Dance School Sudbury Mine Mill Hall,” DCD Archives, 1-11.

¹³⁶ Amy Bowring. *Nancy Lima Dent: A Woman Ahead of her Time*, “Beginnings.”

¹³⁷ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

¹³⁸ Bette Meakes, “About People ‘n’ Things,” *The Sudbury Daily Star* 18 May 1956.

NDT in Toronto. As a result, Sudburians both inside and outside the union knew that she had earned international recognition for her choreography of original work.¹³⁹

Dent sought to empower Sudbury's children, specifically those belonging to members of Mine Mill, by training them in dance. Union leaders felt this was normally a privilege accorded to the city's elite. This aligned with Local 598's goal to "wipe the slate clean" by providing artistic opportunities, a philosophy that underpinned the union's cultural programs.¹⁴⁰ In Dent's past as a dancer and teacher, she had learned that form, technique and method were tools she could use to enlighten and empower her students to tell their own stories. Rather than teaching classical ballet or another single dance form to perfection, Dent taught her students using a topical, multi-styled and collaborative training regimen based on her previous experiences. She felt this provided her students with the tools to express their identity and beliefs throughout the rest of their lives.

Dent's approach toward teaching and choreography relied on her passion and inspiration. In her youth she had believed that "the arts were going to change the world."¹⁴¹ Later, her body of work as a professional dancer and choreographer demonstrated that she attempted to realize her youthful ideals. As an instructor, Dent took very seriously what she considered to be the vital responsibility of a person who has the capability of influencing others. According to Dent, persons of influence could be either dangerous or helpful.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ "Welcome Dancer to City," *The Sudbury Daily Star*, 19 November 1955 and "Famed Dancer Will Teach at Mine Mill," *Mine Mill News*, 26 October 1955.

¹⁴⁰ Thibault and Solski 25 May 1981, LU.

¹⁴¹ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

¹⁴² Ibid.

Later, looking back on her thirty years of teaching, Dent felt satisfied that she had belonged to the latter category.

Dent considered teaching and providing inspiration to Mine Mill Local 598's children through dance a political act. In her mind, changing the whole world in a practical sense was impossible. She later reasoned, "I can't change the world but I could help individual people grow."¹⁴³ She addressed this challenge through choreography, as she felt that she was able to draw things out of people and to "try to get them to come out of themselves."¹⁴⁴

Dent faced some immediate challenges in terms of performing these functions in this blue-collar community. She was shocked upon her arrival to discover that culturally, Sudbury was devoid of the arts to which she had grown accustomed in Toronto and New York. She thus wanted to help expand her students' cultural horizons. This implied much more than the need to address her new students' lack of exposure to the fine arts. Beyond that, she believed she could be most helpful by instilling self-confidence in her students and faith in their own abilities. To that end, Mine Mill's children were taught to appreciate dance as a means of individual expression, creativity and communication.

Dent noticed that the students in Sudbury were more than receptive to her lessons. According to her, the children of Mine Mill's membership were hard workers who would "not go home" when faced with challenges, and remarked that their "dedication was

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

incredible.”¹⁴⁵ One student [Liv Slettemoen] would “come in the midst of a blinding snowstorm” after she had completed her paper route.¹⁴⁶ Slettemoen was one of several dancers who exhibited the robust northern character frequently associated with Sudbury’s mining lineage.

For the first time Dent was given complete creative control that enabled her to harness this robust character in order to maximize the artistic potential in the community. In this new role as compared with her former positions, Dent had a unique opportunity in Sudbury. In conjunction with this autonomy came unprecedented support. Writing to a friend in mid-1956, Dent attested to the strong support she received from the union and the community: “I have never found such a willing and cooperative group of people as here,” Dent explained. “I ask for something . . . it’s done. Just like that. No fuss no bother . . . no how do you do it . . . no well maybes . . . I outlined the work needed to be done . . . suggested types of committees necessary to carry it out, etc.”¹⁴⁷ The enthusiastic support from the community was encouraged and made possible through the efforts of Mine Mill 598’s cultural director, Weir Reid. His vision for the dance school was congruent with Dent’s, whom he had hired in 1955.

Blue-collar and ethnically diverse, Sudbury and its surrounding communities were steeped in folk traditions. Various cultural groups engaged in their respective traditional

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Nancy Lima Dent letter to Betty Meakes 8 May 1956, Nancy Lima Dent Collection, DCD Archives, Nancy Lima Dent 1955-1957, Sudbury + Garson, Ontario Recreation Dept. Mine Mill Union, 1-11. *Sudbury Daily Star* entertainment reporter Betty Meakes was very supportive of Nancy, the dance school and Mine Mill’s cultural programs. Betty also participated in the adult classes.

dance forms. Ukrainians and Finns, for example, boasted rich cultural participation in the community as did Italians, Poles, Russians, French Canadians and many more. Mine Mill's dance program would thus feature a variety of Sudbury's ethnic folk traditions.

Dent attempted to bridge the cultural gaps between her students, and the gap between the concept of professional dance and her students' lifestyles, through the use of folk music. She felt she could gradually introduce her students to dance through various recognizable folk styles and provide them with a concrete understanding of and appreciation for the forms and methods of dance. Dent believed that children and adults would be more amenable to developing their artistic capabilities on their own familiar terms and with music and movements with which they could freely engage. This was particularly helpful in instructing adults, whom she first began teaching in Sudbury. She observed that "they wanted folk work . . . a lot of steps . . . adults could do that."¹⁴⁸ Therefore, Dent helped to expand the cultural vocabulary of adults and their children through using the more familiar music and dances from their different folk traditions.

Dent's hybrid use of folk styles from within the community drew upon her training experiences in Toronto and New York with NDG. This strategy coalesced with Mine Mill Local 598's philosophy of establishing racial, ethnic and political equality. According to local unionist and author Jim Tester, "If the union movement had done nothing more than provide the practical means for realizing social equality – racial, ethnic, religious and political – it would have made a big contribution to the lives of the people in Sudbury."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

¹⁴⁹ Jim Tester, *The Shaping of Sudbury: A Labour View* (Sudbury: Mine Mill, 1979), 29.

At Mine Mill's dance schools, Dent employed multi-ethnic representation, built individuals' confidence and fostered greater cultural appreciation through her training, and this was perfectly congruent with the union's own strategy in the community.

Dent's methods of instruction enabled Mine Mill's children to develop cultural fluency. Her intentions went beyond simply exposing them to culture. She wanted them to be able to use it to express themselves. A typical teaching experience outlines the comprehensive process Dent implemented for Mine Mill. First she introduced movements that were associated with a given type of folk dance. Next in the sequence the students were taught the rhythms of a piece of music, often classical. The only rule that she imposed on her students was that they were required to match the steps of the folk dance with the rhythm or beat of the music. Beyond that condition they could express themselves through movement in any manner that they chose. For Dent, this was a means of creating "wonderful variations."¹⁵⁰ It was also a means for her students to acquire a unique fluency in classical music and fine art.

Dent was hired to teach her students to dance and thereby to expose them to "high" culture. Most importantly, her intent was to teach the children to appropriate multiple forms of dance culture for their own purposes. Dent brought her own values into the classroom, and developed her methods and courses around these values. Her school emphasized original work, improvisation, adaptation, a strong work ethic, innovation, and an emotional connection to dance. Through dance, she sought to instill the competency and confidence in students with respect to using their bodies. In Dent's classes, technique was not the long-

¹⁵⁰ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

term objective but rather a short-term means to realizing her goal. She felt that appendages such as arms and legs were merely components of the human instrument. How each individual used that instrument was for her the value of the pursuit. She realized that to create meaning, you had to consider “the physical, mental and emotional, that is dance [and] art.”¹⁵¹ Through these means, Dent taught her students to trust themselves, to believe in themselves and to express themselves. Her efforts were aimed at first exposing the children to culture, followed by fostering their abilities to appropriate it.

Dent’s primary teaching method was to support her students’ creation of “original work.” It entailed more than making new dance professionals. In the context of Dent’s school, this was accomplished when individual students developed a means of authentic expression. Students were encouraged to express themselves personally and emotionally through dance and the highest form of that expression was through “original work”. To express themselves authentically, students also had first to learn the basics and become fluent in various cultural dance forms. Thus, Dent’s classes were geared at teaching her students how to use their bodies to create a meaningful form of communication. Her aspiration was to give her students a new means of expressing themselves and the confidence to do so.

Dent sought to enrich the creative palate of her students by immersing them in poetry, paintings and classical music. According to Dent, her students had little exposure to Brahms, Bach or Beethoven. To remedy the situation, she would translate classical works

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

“into simple ABC’s using folk music.”¹⁵² This concept was part of a fluid system of teaching, which she continued to hone throughout her career. The purpose was to enable her students to become fluent with “high” culture, and to enrich the lives of Sudbury’s working class community.

Exposure to high art as a means of generating artistic inspiration was another key component of her pedagogy for the school. The following is an example of how one such activity was executed. Images were used to stimulate creativity. Students gazed at an image or a painting for five minutes with the goal of deriving ideas - words or adjectives - anything that evoked a feeling from the paintings. From these abstractions or phrases the class would be dispersed into groups of three, four or five. Each group discussed the word and in turn, generated a movement piece or mini-scene with a beginning, middle and end, followed by a title. The addition of the title was a necessity, as it marked the point where the group claimed ownership of the new idea.¹⁵³

The curricula taught at the Sudbury and Garson Dance Schools were aimed at promoting the ethnic and cultural diversity of the community. Multiple stimuli were combined with training in a variety of dance forms. As well, Dent felt that there was “great value in utilizing various structural components in technique.”¹⁵⁴ As a baseline structure, for example, children would move in circles or diagonal lines.¹⁵⁵ From here Dent’s students

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

superimposed their authentic performance. The aim of this process was to allow the students eventually to be able to perform what was rehearsed in a recital for their parents.

A “Rhythm and Folk Class” provides further insight into Dent’s teaching philosophy and the system that she applied specifically at Mine Mill’s dance schools.¹⁵⁶ “Running Circle” was one activity where students would prance, tiptoe, “bear walk” and “pigeon walk” in a circle around the room. She reflected that this “Opening Class” featured a balance of both ballet and modern positions, following warm-up movements and stretches. These positions were stationary and completed respectively in standing and sitting positions. When the class was released from this activity and sent into the “Space” of the room, it was done accompanied by “Drum” or “Turkey.” It is not clear what Turkey was. It is clear that there was varied instrumentation that accompanied the students. A general summary of this class reflects how she felt it was necessary to inculcate her students with basic rhythms and forms. This was part of the physical component of the training.

Another priority for Dent to provide Mine Mill’s dance students with cultural fluency was the improvisational aspect of her teaching philosophy. The groups were to “compose dances based on these figures, but using a theme as motivation – joyful, sad, carefree happy go lucky basis etc.”¹⁵⁷ Her main goal was to enable her students to create and interpret beyond the foundational techniques she had taught them. The content that they generated using their own individual creativity was authentic. Dent felt this was the

¹⁵⁶ “Teaching Notes,” Nancy Lima Dent 1955-1957, Sudbury + Garson, Ontario Recreation Dept. Mine Mill Union, DCD, 1-11.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

significant accomplishment rather than perfect mimicry of established forms. The final instruction on the page was: “Invent a title.”¹⁵⁸ Evidently the students in Garson were either winded or over-stimulated because Dent added a note to herself, “Garson – Lie on floor relax – deep breathing.”¹⁵⁹ Appropriating dance was hard work.

Beyond expanding their cultural horizons and helping them build communication and art skills, Dent intended to offer her best students an opportunity to pursue a career similar to her own. She wanted to create Sudbury’s version of the NDT, a local dance company made up of the offspring of blue-collar workers. This would allow cultural exposure and political expression through dance to evolve continuously in Sudbury.

Dent’s motivation for pushing the development of a professional dance company was manifold. She wanted to continue to create her own original works. Locally, she was inspired by the lives and issues inherent in the mining town, and wanted to address them as part of her ongoing artistic work. She was also motivated to contribute to the development of an innovative dance scene in Mine Mill, along with improving her students’ career prospects.

Despite her lack of success in launching a local dance company, Dent felt confident that, by the end of her tenure in Sudbury, some of her advanced students were capable of becoming professional dancers and instructors. She noted after her first season concluded that “[o]nly 4 [sic] students (Tini Pel (who performed the only solo dance) Gloria Barylski, Luigi Renzella and Catherine Sadich) were capable of standing this strenuous class of 2 and

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

sometimes 3 hours. But they were the ones who lifted the whole level of the [Sudbury] recital . . . sometimes almost [her emphasis] to professional heights.”¹⁶⁰ Their stamina was up to par and the quality of their work was at a professional level.

At the end of her time in Sudbury, some of her students had earned her praise for their abilities as dance instructors. A printed farewell message after her final recital in 1957 commented that “[a] number of our students have developed to a stage where they can be regarded as student teachers.”¹⁶¹ Artists such as Ida Sauvé and Tini Pel would emerge from the Sudbury region as professional instructors, creators and innovators in the field of dance; they owed much of their artistic development to their experiences in the Mine Mill’s schools.

Pel and Sauvé personified how Dent’s training had effectively taken hold in the community. Pel opened up the Wahnapiatae Dance School in 1957, and by 1958 had become a teacher and director at Arts Guild and offered instruction in tap, character, ballroom, ethnic, national, jazz, modern, RAD (Royal Academy of Dance) ballet and examination coaching.¹⁶² Sauvé also started teaching in the late 1950s and opened up her own studio, which eventually became “one of the foremost dance schools in the area.”¹⁶³ She taught a variety of classes including acrobatics, tap, ballet and modern. In addition, both dancers contributed to the development of Sudbury’s dance scene well into the 1980s by fostering local dance companies and instructing dance courses. Ida Sauvé continues to do so into the

¹⁶⁰ Teaching Notes, Nancy Lima Dent Collection, DCD Archives, 1-11.

¹⁶¹ “Sudbury Mine Mill Dance School Second Annual Recital,” 7 June 1957, Nancy Lima Dent Collection, 1955-1957, 1-12.

¹⁶² Huggins, “The Shape and Shaping of the Dance Scene in Sudbury Ontario,” 5.

¹⁶³ Huggins, “Dance Community: Training, Education and Performance,” *Second Generation*, 4.

present day.¹⁶⁴ Significantly, both dancers followed in Dent's footsteps, emulating her values and dedicating themselves to their local students through the highest standards of instruction, and by fostering an appreciation for free expression.

Dent enabled her advanced students to participate within a political context when they performed for the first time as representatives of the school. The eighth annual Mine Mill national convention, held in Sudbury in 1956, was a public and political affair. This was reflected through the event's entertainment line-up. Acts included the union's own theatre group, the *Haywood Players*, and controversial singer Paul Robeson. Included in the event was a performance of *The Union Maid* by the dance school.

The Union Maid expressed Mine Mill's political views through dance. Dent and her students were a highlight in the *Mine Mill News*' coverage of the event. Their theatrical working class costumes were prominently displayed on the publication's pages, contrasted with other images that depicted suit-clad union delegates photographed in the act of shaking hands. Dent's predisposition to using dance as an ideological, emotional and personal mode of expression was evident. The story of *The Union Maid* reflected the climate of the convention. The group delivered a jab at individuals who broke the bonds of union solidarity.

Against this political backdrop, students from the dance school promoted the concept of worker solidarity. The naming of these students further demonstrates how they were active participants in local politics. Their contribution was described in the *Mine-Mill News*: "*The Union Maid* is the title and the theme of this very expressive dance put on by a

¹⁶⁴ Huggins, "The Shape and Shaping of the Dance Scene in Sudbury, Ontario," 8.

group of pupils of the Mine Mill Dance School, under the able direction of Nancy Lima Dent. The sneaky scab is being told off by Union maids. This performance was particularly appreciated by the delegates. The boy is Luigi Renzella and the girl . . . Joan Racicot, Kathi Zadic (sic), Gloria Barylski. Tini Pel who is not in the picture was also a participant.”¹⁶⁵

As a result of its inclusion at this event, Dent’s dance school was also thrust into Sudbury’s political spotlight. The *Sudbury Daily Star* was concerned about the potential for the convention to be used as a political weapon to further Mine Mill’s and the working class’s agenda. In fact, journalists from the *Star* slandered the proceedings, giving their articles headlines such as “Breath of Communism Cools City Welcome,” “Union Convention Picketed, Red Leaders and Soviets Denounced,” and “Delegates Have Left Red Stigma Remains.”¹⁶⁶ The content of these articles was ideologically opposed to the equality and political freedom which Dent promoted through the dance school, and that underpinned the artistic entertainment that was featured at the union’s annual convention. Clearly, Mine Mill’s dance program at its public debut was an effective conduit for political expression.

The fact that Dent’s students were able to use this occasion to express their own political views through dance was a glowing testament to how well she had conveyed to them a remarkable cultural fluency. In 1956, for instance, Pel performed an original dance adaptation of Francisco Giner’s poem *The World Will be Ours*.¹⁶⁷ In doing so, Pel employed a similar approach to the one Dent had previously used when she had incorporated poetry and other art forms into her own work.

¹⁶⁵ “Convention H...” *Mine Mill News*, 13 March 1956, 4.

¹⁶⁶ *Sudbury Daily Star*, 27 February 1956 and 3 March 1956.

¹⁶⁷ Francisco Giner was a Spanish Intellectual and philosopher (1839-1915).

Pel's performance of this dance demonstrated in so many ways why Dent was *the* perfect fit for Mine Mill's cultural program. *The World Will be Ours* is a poem about the working class rising up. Local 598's president Mike Solski welcomed the audience at the beginning of the dance school's first recital where the piece titled *Struggle* was performed.¹⁶⁸ Before reciting the poem to accompany Pel's dance, Dent introduced it as follows: "This dance is Tini Pel's impression of how a people feel who have known the fear and oppression, which her countrymen of Holland experienced in 1940."¹⁶⁹ The performance was overtly political as its introduction implied. It provided Pel with a platform to share with a contemporary 1950s Mine Mill audience the political circumstances she had experienced in her childhood. Giner's poem depicts life and death resistance: "The war fires our woods and our meadows, / the bodies of a thousand brothers break like branches, / our lips are sprayed with the blood of a thousand enemies. / But always we have life with us."¹⁷⁰ The visceral and descriptive violence from this one sample is consistent throughout the poem. Blood, gnashing teeth and assassin planes were not normal utterances at a children's dance recital, but they were integral to using this form of cultural expression to convey political ideas that both Mine Mill and Dent felt were important.

Dent intended for the political nature of the poem to resonate with a Mine Mill audience. The poem was revolutionary as exemplified through the following lines: "We shall be men. / And because our brothers grimly fight in blood, / Because our hands shudder

¹⁶⁸ 1st annual Sudbury recital prompt script, Nancy Lima Dent Collection, DCD, Sudbury and Garson 1955-1957, 1-11.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

as with red roses, / The very stars promise new hope for tomorrow: / The world will be ours. ” The poem depicted a bitter conflict, a struggle to achieve peace and a new order. These themes, although expressed in an extreme manner, were familiar to the rhetoric of a militant trade union local.

A departure from Mine Mill’s cultural mandate and on a more personal level, Dent and Pel used Giner’s poem to foment criticism toward the gendered divisions within the Mine Mill Community. The two women who presented this piece provided poignant social commentary. The combatants on both sides of the conflict in Giner’s poem are gendered male. “We shall be men” is repeated twice in the first stanza. Those men are “Brothers [who] are fighting with anxiety in their eyes” versus “they [who] gnash their teeth at their own impotency.” At the beginning of the second stanza, nature is gendered as female and, by extension, emotional: “It does not matter now that the earth is moaning / with the foam of the fight on her lips, / Nor that the trees are blown by the winds of crime: / Love is already on the way through the air / with her hands outspread like a hundred wings, / trembling in the song of a hundred seas.” The gendered world of the poem was relevant to Mine Mill’s context within Sudbury. The women were the protagonists in Giner’s piece. Unionists and Inco’s representatives were male. Similar to the conflict depicted in the poem, Mine Mill’s wives often were outside the “fight,” and yet bore the results of their community’s central conflict. Dent and Pell were calling for a louder voice for women in the working class struggle.

The *Magic Cup* was developed for Sudbury’s second annual recital and was another instance in which Mine Mill’s dance students demonstrated their newly acquired cultural

fluency. Ida Sauvé participated in this piece that evolved as part of a workshop for ten to twelve year-olds. As a case study it reflects Dent's impact on her students and how she affected the community. Dent regarded this piece as a significant event in her teaching career.¹⁷¹ When *The Magic Cup* was performed at the Mine Mill hall, it was described in the program as a "children's ballet in two scenes based on ideas suggested by the children."¹⁷² Dent's recollections and her teaching notes imply that the children's contribution greatly exceeded that description, for they had been central to the development of the piece. It featured the merger of various cultural forms, was created as an original story by a group of her students, highlighted their growth and personal development, and promoted cultural awareness in the community.

Dent choreographed *The Magic Cup* to evoke a child's point of view and it was generated from the ideas developed during a workshop to create an authentic story. According to Dent's description of the workshop, the children were engaged in a collective process. The students warmed up, stretched and then started moving around the room. The first step "[t]echnique [admitted Dent] was important and you had to suffer through it somehow." Once completed, the students reached the composition stage, where for her they had "come to the best part." She further remarked that "[t]his is where you live." She wanted to get through to the children, and endeavoured to "find out what was in their minds." The work needed to resonate with the ten to twelve year-old age group. She requested of this group, which was exclusively composed of girls, to "think what you'd like

¹⁷¹ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

¹⁷² "Mine Mill Dance School Second Annual Recital," 7 June 1957, Nancy Lima Dent Collection, 1955-1957, 1-12.

to see or do or feel.” They discussed the subject for a while and then the ideas and feelings were put to paper. Dent took the ideas home and by the next week’s session had formed the children’s ideas into a scenario. Through subsequent discussions and brainstorming the idea for *The Magic Cup*, its characters, and story evolved in this manner.¹⁷³

For Dent, it was essential that her students generated their ideas for *The Magic Cup* as part of a democratic process. As a group they functioned as a micro-community. The girls were given more creative power as the process moved to the “very important . . . next step,” the casting of the piece. A few characters in *The Magic Cup*, specifically the Fairy Queen, Little Girl and Fairies, surface at its forefront. Dent did not want “to pick who was going to be who[m].” Students had the opportunity of playing different roles; the decision on each casting choice was put to a vote. She instructed them to write whom they thought was best suited to play each character. Dent specified that they indicate “[w]hy you think this person [and] not your favourite girlfriend.” The children had an easier time with Dent’s democratic notion of casting than adults, as she would later discover. In her view, this was because children were capable of putting aside their personal ambitions and alliances.¹⁷⁴ This process reflected Dent’s need for the dance school to impart the potential strength of an inclusive community.

Dent’s students also constructed *The Magic Cup* using various cultural forms that were transformed into a theatrical presentation. The music that accompanied the piece was not original, however it was suitable for the group’s purpose. *The Magic Cup* was

¹⁷³ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

¹⁷⁴ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

performed to Ferde Grofe's popular American jazz standard, *Grand Canyon Suite*, a rhythmic mixture of Jazz, dance and classical music. It is a lengthy piece of music and is structured as a story. It contains sections that vary according to tempo, mood and style. Grofe's work was a perfect accompaniment for this emotionally charged story that was written and performed by pre-teenage girls. The music suited every range of emotion. It accommodated moments of glee and horror, a glorious climax, dreamlike reverie, and an aggressive fight section. These girls developed a rapport with Grofe's music and used it for their own creative purpose.

The students created a dance piece whereby its content was reflective of the Mine Mill community in Sudbury. The most prominent feature of the script was that the girls created their own story; it was an original composition. Under Dent's guidance, the children developed a short fairy tale and performed it as a ballet. The plot and themes evoked innate aspects of the girls' lives. These culminated to form a unique twist for the Fairy Tale genre.

Dent made *The Magic Cup* a platform for social commentary through the fact that the piece enabled her students to express themselves through dance. For example, they created a story that reflected the likelihood that their fathers were absent from their domestic lives. As a result, men were omitted from the story and none appeared in the script. In a practical sense there were no boys in the group to portray a male character. The group included a singular masculine reference, "daddy's whiskers."¹⁷⁵ Yet there was substance to this omission. Fathers who belonged to Mine Mill worked underground or in

¹⁷⁵ "Rehearsal Script for Fairy Tale Ballet – 'The Magic Cup'," 1-11.

the smelter. While father was working his shift at Inco, mother was charged with the responsibilities of the household. This included her role as the prime disciplinarian.

Moreover, the piece that the students created illustrated the centrality of the mother figure to Mine Mill's families. In the script, mother performed the domestic task of sweeping when the little girl departed for school. At the end of the scene, to reinforce this notion of the domestic disciplinarian, it is mother who stopped little girl's day-dreaming in the forest and sent her home. These were mother's only actions in the story.

The girls created a tale whereby the figure of the adult female transcended her domestic status. The fairy queen and witch, two other mature female characters, are worthy of analysis. Both possessed enviable qualities from the perspective of their creators. The children demonstrated their creativity when they developed authentic interpretations of these classic fairy tale characters. For instance, the magical fairy queen character, with an entourage of fairies, exhibited the freedom to roam around and enjoy the woods. The character of the little girl is afforded a glimpse of this independence and envied the fairy queen for whom she "was gathering flowers."¹⁷⁶ The little girl's concluding reverie featured the "glorious climax" where she danced and celebrated with the fairy queen and her personal attendant. As a result, they were able to act out this unencumbered lifestyle that they had created.

The witch was another mature female figure who was featured in this script. This woman possessed the power to use magic to achieve her ends. She cast a spell on the fairy queen and entourage, and then coerced the little girl into doing her bidding. The witch was

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

pacified when the little girl provided her with “Live Forever Water” in the magic cup. As a result of the witch’s efforts, “immediately she changed – casts off her cloak and we see her in a beautiful costume . . . she removes [the] spell from the fairies [and] she moves dreamily off the stage.”¹⁷⁷ The witch was ambitious, employed magic and exerted her will. It was evident that this character’s drive and persuasiveness was appealing to the group. The children also clearly expressed through this piece the value that they attached to beauty.

In addition to being a source of cultural and creative exploration, the significance of *The Magic Cup* is that the children were able to perform it for their community. *The Magic Cup* was presented at Mine Mill’s second annual dance recital, which was also one of Ida Sauvé’s initial experiences in dance.¹⁷⁸

Mine Mill’s dance schools in Garson and Sudbury consistently made displaying the union’s cultural diversity the norm in their work. The recitals enacted Mine Mill’s collective social identity and evoked its multicultural community through dance. The program was based on inclusiveness and utility. Therefore isolated cultural traditions were elevated to a new local and communal purpose.

The dance schools’ recitals were public testimonials to Local 598’s profound commitment to its dance program. Dent choreographed and directed the first four recitals, two in Garson and two in Sudbury respectively, in 1956 and 1957. They were described in the *Mine Mill News* as having “something for everyone: for the parents . . . pride in the growth and training of their children. For our membership and the people of our community

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. Her name appears on the rehearsal script for the *Magic Cup*.

. . . first rate entertainment . . . and more, inspiration and satisfaction in a job well done and a promising future in which we can all share.”¹⁷⁹

Each recital was a noteworthy event for the Sudbury community as demonstrated by the fact that they were enthusiastically attended. According to the *Mine Mill News* “[b]oth first annual recitals of the Mine-Mill Dance Schools at Garson, on May 18 and at Sudbury on June 1, were big successes. Hundreds of people attended those recitals.”¹⁸⁰ The second year of recitals entertained “capacity crowds,” reported both *The Mine Mill News* and *The Sudbury Daily Star*.¹⁸¹ The Regent Street hall could seat over one thousand people. Mine Mill members as well as non-unionists comprised these capacity audiences, further demonstrating the significance of the dance school’s recitals to the community at large.

Dent ensured that multi-cultural content was the most visible feature of Mine Mill’s dance recitals. In 1956 students performed a diverse collection of dance numbers such as “The Red River Valley,” which was a Canadian folk dance, the Tarantella, an Italian folk dance, as well as a Danish polka.¹⁸² Dent’s use of folk music in her teaching flowed onto the stage and out through the community at her recitals. As an educational and engaging form of entertainment, Dent’s recitals were attempts to pull the community together in a new and exhilarating way.

¹⁷⁹ Advertisement for Second Annual Concert, *Mine Mill News*, 30 May 1957.

¹⁸⁰ “Mine-Mill Dance Schools Finish Year With Two Colorful Dance Recitals,” *Mine Mill News*, 4 June 1956.

¹⁸¹ “Students Say Tearful Goodbyes as Dance Teacher Leaves,” *Sudbury Daily Star*, 4 June 1957 and *Mine Mill News*, 24 June 1957, p. 5.

¹⁸² Recital Script, Nancy Lima Dent Collection, DCD, Sudbury and Garson 1955-1957, 1-11 and Meakes, “About People ‘n’ Things,” *The Sudbury Daily Star*, 18 May 1956.

To demonstrate the collective identity of the Mine Mill community and engage all its cultural groups, Dent conceived the “Canadian Folk Dance Suite.” It was performed at her last public recital in 1957.¹⁸³ Covering the event for *The Sudbury Star* Betty Meakes lauded high praise on the dancers. She described how “More than 150 of them poured out their heart and soul into making the evening of dance the finest yet staged in Sudbury.”¹⁸⁴ This was a unique commendation for a Mine Mill cultural program, especially since the dancers were receiving accolades from a publication that unionists saw as being traditionally hostile to their interests.

“Canadian Folk Dance Suite” was one omnibus act consisting of various styles of dance and music including Italian, Swiss, Ukrainian, Spanish, Filipino, and Canadian (also a subcategory). The latter was titled “Hoedown,” and was probably a square dance. Each cultural segment was an integral component in the performance and it demonstrated the labour union’s commitment to its creed of achieving membership equality. This mirrored many of the union’s efforts to resist a small Anglo-centric minority that exerted its influence in the Sudbury community. The segment encapsulated a redefined sense of Canadian identity, one that was inclusive. Dent recalled that the emergence of the “Canadian Folk Suite” in Sudbury was a true innovation to her teaching practice.¹⁸⁵ She valued the merger of various ethnic styles from Sudbury’s rich assortment of cultures and communities.

¹⁸³ “Mine Mill Dance School Second Annual Recital,” Program dated June 7th 1957, Nancy Lima Dent Collection, DCD, Sudbury and Garson 1955-1957, 1-12.

¹⁸⁴ Betty Meakes, “People ‘n’ Things,” *The Sudbury Daily Star*, 10 June 1957.

¹⁸⁵ Nancy Lima Dent Interview, 1983, DCD.

Ultimately, Dent believed that her public dance recitals were a means of legitimizing Mine Mill Local 598's multi-cultural identity within Canadian society. She articulated this message in her farewell address to the membership: "I go away with the feeling of having learned much more than I have given . . . a feeling of richness and warmth achieved through the experience of working with many peoples of diverse nationalities and beliefs . . . music and new ideas . . . a deeper feeling of what it means to be a Canadian."¹⁸⁶ This was a tonic for union members who were accustomed to racial prejudice, exclusion from the arts and suffering from other cultural and social constraints. The dance school's public recitals were instances in which Mine Mill Local 598 was applauded for its authentically Canadian cultural expression.

Dent left the Mine Mill Dance School in 1957 and moved to Toronto to pursue other career opportunities in dance. The circumstances that surrounded her departure were unsensational and its timing seemed apt. Mine Mill 598 was on the eve of a political transition, after which new leadership devalued the local's cultural programs. With Mike Solski, Nels Thibault and Weir Reid out of the leadership picture, the dance program was discontinued in 1960. In the interim, the nature of instruction had drastically changed with the hiring of Barbara Cook, a certified Royal Academy of Dance (RAD) ballet instructor.¹⁸⁷ Cook was a proponent of classical ballet and her teaching philosophy differed substantially from Dent's. Cook placed more emphasis on physical aesthetics and "scientifically planned,

¹⁸⁶ "Farewell Message From Nancy Lima Dent," in "Mine Mill Dance School Second Annual Recital," program dated 7 June 1957, Nancy Lima Dent Collection, DCD, Sudbury and Garson 1955-1957, 1-12.

¹⁸⁷ "Barbara Cook Dance Schools New Director," *Mine Mill News*, 26 August 1957, vo. 10, p 2. "Miss Cook is a member of the Canadian Dance Teacher's Association, ballet division, and holds the degree of C.D.T.A. (Ballet, advanced member RAD)."

and balanced [lessons], to strengthen and shape the muscular structure of the body.”¹⁸⁸

While personal expression for students was a significant priority for Dent, Cook felt that “For the child, with no dance career in mind, correct body placement, gives perfect carriage, and a feeling of physical well-being, and, consequently, poise and great assurance.”¹⁸⁹

As a result, when Dent departed from Sudbury in 1957, the aims for the program shifted. Social and political expression, work for an inclusive community and the development of cultural fluency were no longer priorities. The philosophical differences between Dent and her replacement Cook illustrated the program’s unique connection to these goals during its inaugural two seasons.

¹⁸⁸ “To the Parents,” Program title *Mine Mill Dance School Annual Recital*, 29 May 1959. Nancy Lima Dent Collection, 1955-1957, DCD, 1-12.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Conclusion

In the 1950s, when Communist purges, Red baiting and raids from larger American affiliated industrial unions were common, Mine Mill local 598 persisted in fostering a culture that emphasized community values, artistic production and social welfare. Yet, this culture was ultimately insufficient to protect Mine Mill indefinitely from the threats it faced on the international stage. The hostile raids launched by the United Steelworkers of America in the 1950s finally succeeded in destroying local 598 officially in 1962. Jason Miller writes of the takeover, that the most fundamental principle of unionism remained intact. In his words, “regardless of the influence of a union’s executive, the rank-and-file membership ultimately makes the final decision. Among the miners at Inco the final decision was to join the Steelworkers.”¹⁹⁰ And in doing so they accepted “bread and butter” unionism – and chose to focus strictly on bargaining for wages, job security and work related issues. Cameron Smith sums up the loss when he writes that “there was almost a total end to [Mine Mill’s] community involvement. There would be no summer camps for the children. No theatre group, no ballet classes, no great artists to bring in, no top flight sports teams to support, no union halls other than the one in Sudbury. No circuses. No Saturday programs for children. No dances for teenagers.”¹⁹¹

While Mine Mill local 598 had functioned autonomously, its community in Sudbury had flourished for a significant period. This was a unique occurrence during the Cold War, when free expression and art as political commentary were largely under attack, many left-

¹⁹⁰ Jason A. Miller, “Divided We Stand,” v-vi.

¹⁹¹ Smith, *Unfinished Journey*, 325-326.

leaning unions were losing their power, multi-cultural inclusivity was not common, and working class people were not generally able to participate in “high” forms of artistic expression. Going against the grain, Mine Mill had created a temporary oasis for its members, in the Cold War cultural desert that was Sudbury. Its cultural programs were notable, particularly its commitment to dance. A local trade union sponsoring a dance school was novel for any period in Canadian history, particularly the 1950s.

Between 1955 and 1957, Mine Mill was able to support two dance schools and a cultural movement. These served as political tools to expose its members’ children to various forms of culture and simultaneously foster their fluency with culture. These activities were also the means for delivering Mine Mill’s political message and celebrate its multicultural membership. The impacts of this decision stretched into the community’s political and cultural context. Nancy Lima Dent taught Mine Mill’s dance students to dance, but more importantly to have the confidence to express themselves creatively. Capacity audiences witnessed the school’s recitals, which asserted the union’s multi-cultural identity.

Dent left a lasting legacy both as a dance teacher and positive role model for the Mine Mill community. *The Sudbury Daily Star* arts reporter Betty Meakes confirmed Dent’s aptitude in these endeavours when she evaluated the impact Dent had had on students just as Dent was leaving Sudbury: “We have admired her talent, and the methods she used in teaching dance interpretation during the two years she has been here. We have watched absolute ‘stumblebums’ develop into graceful, lithe dancers under her tutorship. She has infinite patience, a great flair for handling both children and adults, and tremendous

knowledge of interpretive dancing.”¹⁹² Sudbury had truly benefited from Dent’s contributions to the community, and the most telling evidence of her impact was the fact that her legacy transcended the demise of Mine Mill’s Local 598.

¹⁹² Bette Meakes, “People ‘n’ Things,” *The Sudbury Daily Star*, 10 June 1957.

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