

# A question of culture? Evangelicalism and the failure of socialist revivalism in Airdrie, c.1890 – 1914.

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The Higher History course to be introduced in Scottish schools from August 1999 includes a new topic, “Changing Scottish society, 1880 - 1939: the impact of urbanisation with reference to popular culture, education and religion”.<sup>1</sup> Indeed. The religion section has been allocated an hour of class time out of a total of forty for the whole British unit and eight for the Scottish topic.

That hour for religion in Scotland, meagre though it is, is certainly “better than a slater up your nose” and suggests a recognition, however reluctant, that religion is of some importance in modern Scottish history. It perhaps indicates, at the very least, an awareness among Scottish history teachers that significant advances in the study of religion in modern Scotland have been made in recent years.

In spite of these advances, however, it has to be said that there are still glaring gaps in our knowledge and understanding of religion in Scotland since 1750. For instance, apart from S.J. Brown’s 1982 biography of Thomas Chalmers<sup>2</sup> there are virtually no recent published biographies of *any* of the well-known ecclesiastical figures – from any of the churches – who made such an extraordinary contribution to Scottish society in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Perhaps more important, we still know little about popular religious consciousnesses. We have nothing in Scottish religious history to compare with, for example, the late Richard Cobb’s astonishing study of the *mentalités* of the *sans culottes* of the French revolution.<sup>3</sup> Nothing to compare with Eamonn Duffy on the Reformation in England<sup>4</sup> or James Kirk on the Reformation in Scotland.<sup>5</sup> Nothing to match Orlando Figes on the people in the

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<sup>1</sup> For details of which see: Higher Still Support Materials, Higher Still Development Unit. Edinburgh, Aug. 1998.

<sup>2</sup> S.J. Brown, *Thomas Chalmers and the Godly Commonwealth in Scotland* (Oxford, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> R. Cobb, *The People’s Armies* (Yale, 1987).

<sup>4</sup> E. Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Yale, 1992).

<sup>5</sup> J. Kirk, *Patterns of Reform* (Edinburgh, 1989).

Russian Revolution<sup>6</sup> or James McPherson on why men fought in the American Civil War.<sup>7</sup> We still know little about what motivated people who left the Established Church in 1843 even though it has become something of a cliché to describe the Disruption as a turning point in the history of modern Scotland.

This lack of detailed knowledge and understanding of popular religious consciousnesses is no doubt due, in part, to the reluctance of publishers to take on such works. But it is also the result of an absence of detailed studies of religion at local level. And the absence of local studies, perhaps an unfortunate consequence of the current obsession with Scottish national identity, is particularly serious for a country where, as John McCaffrey has recently re-emphasised, in the nineteenth century

much of the initial Scottish urban experience ... was of *small town society, intensely localised* and given great diversity by the country's highly contrasting topographies.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, town, and indeed country, dwellers were aware of national events, personalities, movements and organisations just as they were conscious of national identity. In communities across Scotland individual dissenters or Established Church men and women argued for their respective positions on the basis of theological or ecclesiological principles held by their denominations as a whole and in line with what they knew to be happening at national level. But their arguments were *refracted through the prism of locality*. The Voluntary Principle or the Establishment Principle were not abstractions but were articulated in ways that depicted what people saw to be happening in their own communities. Religious ideology was worked out in terms of local social – and spiritual – experience and this had nothing to do with narrow parochialism. On the contrary, it was about the attempt to translate, and to express, Christ “in our town”, “in our community”, “in our culture”, “in our idiom”, “in our accent”.

This is not to say that local studies should be encouraged but at the price of undervaluing the national story, the story that is greater than the sum of its parts. Nor can we afford to exaggerate local eccentricities or to avoid generalisations. But local studies can do an enormous amount to deepen our understanding of religion and society.

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<sup>6</sup> O. Figes, *A People's Tragedy: The Russian Revolution 1891-1924* (London, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> J. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades* (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> J.F. McCaffrey *Scotland in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1999). My emphasis.

and to make the big picture clearer and more revealing – as Asa Briggs demonstrated for Chartism in his ground-breaking *Chartist Studies*.<sup>9</sup>

Bearing these remarks in mind this short article will make two suggestions arising from research into the relationship between evangelicalism and socialist revivalism in Scotland at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup>

First, the ethical socialism of the Independent Labour Party in Scotland was soaked in evangelical Protestantism, so much so that it is appropriate to describe that socialism as socialist *revivalism*.<sup>11</sup> And second – and consequently – the early ILP missionaries found it most difficult to advance their cause in places where, down to 1914, evangelicalism was still deeply embedded in local communities. The industrial town of Airdrie was one such place. Here the *religious* history of the locality provides a clue to understanding why the socialist revivalists failed to make significant progress in the town from the 1890s to 1914, a town considered by the Scottish ILP leadership to be a “natural constituency” for the advancement of socialism.

In short, socialist revivalism cannot be properly understood outwith the evangelical-mission culture of which it was a part. In towns like Airdrie the continuing vibrancy of evangelicalism, its key role in shaping community and culture right down to the First World War, meant that there was no room for socialist revivalism to move in and to grow. The Airdrie story suggests that an understanding of religion at local level can shed new light not only on the social significance of religion, but also on other puzzling questions about, for instance, the history of socialism in later nineteenth Scotland.

### Socialist Revivalism and Evangelicalism

Among Labour historians it is generally recognised that from the later 1880s to the early 1900s there was a revival of socialism in Britain.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>9</sup> *Chartist Studies*, ed. A. Briggs (London, 1959).

<sup>10</sup> The work suggests that the failure of socialism to advance in key industrial areas (outside of Glasgow), for instance, in Airdrie, may be attributed to the continuing strength and diffusion of evangelicalism in communities and cultures in Scotland down to 1914. See M. McCabe, “Evangelicalism and the Socialist Revival: A Study of Religion, Community and Culture in Nineteenth Century Airdrie”(unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Edinburgh, 1992).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 56-137.

<sup>12</sup> Though there is a wide variety of opinion about the importance of religion in that revival.

In Scotland, this revival was dominated by the James Keir Hardie's ILP.<sup>13</sup>

The conventional view of the socialist revival is that it should be understood in secular terms; that is, it should *not* be understood in religious, or to be more specific *evangelical Protestant*, terms. Evangelicalism may have influenced the *style* of the socialist revivalists but was otherwise of superficial importance. Socialist revivalism was not a child of evangelicalism. It was a new ideology that challenged evangelical hegemony. And since evangelicalism could only operate successfully as a single, unchallenged ideology it was fatally undermined – or at least badly crippled – by the rise of the labour and socialist movements. However, this argument, most recently rehearsed by Callum Brown in the second edition of his social history of religion in Scotland,<sup>14</sup> ignores the fact that the *sine qua non* of the socialist revivalism of groups like the early ILP (from c.1893 to c.1914) was evangelicalism. Evangelicalism was the defining context in which British socialism had been nourished. Evangelicalism informed not just the style and methods of socialist revivalists, but also their *values* and, more importantly, *the substance* of their gospel. Evangelicalism shaped the *mentalités* of socialist revivalists even when they rejected conventional institutional religion. (Indeed it is fair to say that where an ILPer was an atheist or a secularist the form that that atheism or secularism took depended on the particular Christian denominational tradition that was being rejected. To a great extent, then, the majority of ILP atheists or secularists in Scotland before the First World War might fairly be described as Protestant atheists or secularists.<sup>15</sup>)

The language of evangelicalism pervaded socialist revivalism. And with that language evangelical categories entered socialist discourse.<sup>16</sup> The vocabulary of socialist revivalists differed little from that of, for instance, the Salvation Army.<sup>17</sup> Words like “apostles”, “missionaries”, “evangelists”, “gospel”, “mission”, “preaching”, “new life”,

<sup>13</sup> It is from William Stewart's official biography of Hardie (1921) that the enduring image of Hardie as Old Testament prophet is derived. See W. Stewart, *J. Keir Hardie: A Biography* (ILP London, 1921) esp. xxi.

<sup>14</sup> C.G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh, 1997). Brown's views on this subject have not altered since the first edition, 1987.

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of arguments in support of this thesis see McCabe, “Evangelicalism and the Socialist Revival”, 1-137.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. W. Jaeger, *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia* (Harvard, 1961).

<sup>17</sup> See V. Bailey, “‘In darkest England and the Way Out’: The Salvation Army, Social Reform and the Labour Movement, 1885-1910”, *International Review of Social History*, 29 (1984), 133-171.

“regeneration”<sup>18</sup> were commonly, indeed instinctively used by socialists. Even more significant, the crucial aspect of the socialist crusade was the business of changing individuals – *conversionism*.<sup>19</sup> Stephen Yeo has noted that conversion to socialism was indistinguishable from religious conversion.<sup>20</sup> David Howell in his detailed study of the ILP argued that socialist revivalists urged individuals to turn to socialism just as sinners were urged to turn to Christ by revivalist Christian missionaries.<sup>21</sup> ILP evangelists called for a change of heart and subsequent evincing of socialist endeavour. Socialism was to be brought about by a host of individually consenting *enthusiasts* rather than by the class struggle.<sup>22</sup> And the success of “the cause” was seen as depending on the moral rectitude of the converted. Party propagandists lived for “the cause” and looked reprovingly on backsliders.<sup>23</sup>

ILP men and women were often members of Temperance organisations too, and of course the Temperance movement, like socialist revivalism, cannot be properly understood outwith the evangelical-mission culture of which it was an expression.<sup>24</sup>

### Socialist Revivalism And the Churches

It is of course right to say that the Churches viewed socialist revivalism as a challenge. And the seriousness of that challenge lay partly – perhaps crucially – in the fact that socialist revivalism was re-orchestrating key components of evangelicalism to put forward a vision of society that emphasised cooperation and collectivism rather than competition and individualism. Socialist revivalists in Scotland were able to do this not least because evangelicalism – especially in its Presbyterian form – had always contained within it the seeds of a form of society quite different from that envisaged by radical individualists. The Scottish Presbyterian Churches, in particular the Established

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Yeo rightly highlighted the importance of vocabulary in his “A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883-1896”, *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (Autumn, 1977), 5-56.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. David Bebbington’s “Quadrilateral of [evangelical] priorities” in *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London, 1989).

<sup>20</sup> S. Yeo, “A New Life”, 8-9 and 17.

<sup>21</sup> D. Howell, *British Workers and the Independent Labour Party 1888-1906* (Manchester, 1983), 358.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 358.

<sup>24</sup> Lilian Shiman for England suggests, quite wrongly, that the Temperance Movement was a new religion. See L. Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (London, 1988), 19.

Church, were concerned about socialist revivalism because it threatened to steal the evangelical initiative from them.

William Stewart, Scottish ILP Secretary (1912-36), boon companion and official biographer of Keir Hardie, argued that the working classes did not go to church because the churches supported the rich against the interests of the poor and oppressed.<sup>25</sup> The churches had allowed the Christian gospel to become a vehicle of capitalist ideology. But the desertion of the churches by the bulk of the working classes was, said Stewart, "the highest testimony to the essentially religious strain in the Scottish character".<sup>26</sup> And socialism was enlisting the enthusiasm that the churches had cast out:

moral fervour and sincerity must have an outlet, and the Socialist movement provides that outlet.... [It] gives practical expression to that eternal spirit of rebellion against wrong, that eternal consciousness of human brotherhood which are fundamental to all genuine religious thought and life.<sup>27</sup>

For Stewart, as for Hardie, the ILP was ready, willing and able to take up its inheritance as the *fulfilment* of true Christianity, the successor to effete institutional religion. The ILP, so its leaders thought, was poised to cross over the Jordan.

The socialist revivalists, then, expressed a revivalist *mentalité*, presented their message of social and individual salvation in revivalist terms and claimed the cure of souls. In practice, however, this meant that they had to compete not so much as a new ideology against evangelicalism but within it, as yet another evangelical-type group among a range of evangelical groups, including the churches, which in places like Airdrie had a much older and greater investment in local community and culture upon which to draw. To Airdrie, then, and its dominant religious culture.

### **Evangelicalism and Dissent in Airdrie, c.1790 - c.1850**

Reporting on a journey through west central Scotland in 1942 A.G. Williamson wrote:

What interested me about Coatbridge was the number of church spires pointing the way to heaven. But in Airdrie the majority of them appeared to be short and blunt ... not unlike

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<sup>25</sup> See, for instance, William Stewart ("Gavroche"), "A Cardinal Question to Clergymen", *Labour Leader* (3 June 1904), 108.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

eastern mosques, as if the men who built them ... felt that the way to heaven from Airdrie was too well-known to need pointing out.<sup>28</sup>

Smarty-pants Williamson was more insightful than he knew. The continuing dominance, vitality and diffusion of evangelical values – and ambiguities – in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Airdrie (when the church buildings remarked on by Williamson were put up) was the result of their triumphant progress and key role in moulding community and culture there during the critical, turbulent period from 1790 to 1850. Only a few scattered dwellings in the early eighteenth century, Airdrie was situated towards the south-west tip of New Monkland parish, some three miles from the parish kirk the principal public building of the area and a focal point of community identity in pre-industrial times.

The religious consciousness of the parishioners had been deeply affected by the later covenanters. Men of New Monkland fought and died at Bothwell Brig. The covenanting banner under which they had rallied had been carefully preserved.

During the later eighteenth century, as Airdrie developed into a weaving village specialising in pullicates [cotton], the heirs of the covenanting remnant, the Cameronians, were first to open a meeting house in the village.<sup>29</sup> So the flame of the covenanting myth was kept alive in the midst of the growing Airdrie settlement. The covenanting myth was an important post of Airdrie's *symbolic* boundary.<sup>30</sup> It was a myth that could be, and was, appropriated by local New Dissenters and also by Established Church evangelicals. And it is no coincidence that the covenanting banner came to be lodged in the Airdrie Public Library, where it still is but does not really belong.

The growth of Airdrie village prompted the Established Church to open a chapel-of-ease in 1792.<sup>31</sup> This was an attempt to cater for the Airdrie villagers specifically who otherwise had to make the long trek to New Monkland kirk on Sundays. But the Established Church also wanted to counter a threat from New Dissent for the Burghers had opened a church in the village in 1790.<sup>32</sup> Scottish weavers were notorious for their predilection for dissent – religious and political –

<sup>28</sup> A.G. Williamson, *Twixt Forth and Clyde* (London, 1942), 39.

<sup>29</sup> In 1790.

<sup>30</sup> For a striking study of the symbolic construction of community see: A.P. Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985).

<sup>31</sup> Hamilton Presbytery received a petition asking for a chapel from a group of Airdrie inhabitants (who were members at New Monkland) in January 1790.

<sup>32</sup> Wellwynd church, built in a weaving neighbourhood.

and at Airdrie the Burghers' church in the Wellwynd quickly became regarded as the "Weavers' Kirk". Furthermore, since chapels-of-ease were a product of growing evangelical influence in the Established Church it is fair to say that by the beginning of the nineteenth century Airdrie's identity had been decisively shaped by evangelicalism and dissent. Airdrie now developed a community and culture quite distinct from, and at variance with, the pre-industrial parish community focused on New Monkland parish and the Established Church.

By the time Airdrie became a burgh in 1821 its population stood at just under 5000.<sup>33</sup> Thirty years later the weaving village had been transformed into a bustling industrial town of some 14000 souls. Between 1831 and 1841 in particular the population had leaped from six and a half to twelve and a half thousand – a hundred percent increase – as the exploitation of rich local coal and ironstone seams, and all the spin-offs, drew people in to live and to work.<sup>34</sup> But – and crucially – religion, every bit as much as economic change, continued to shape community and culture in the town destroying Airdrie's association with the old parish of New Monkland. Indeed, Airdrie's evangelical-dissenting identity was strengthened and then consolidated between 1820 and 1850 not least as a result of the Disruption of 1843 and the events leading up to it.

Well before that momentous year the old New Monkland parish kirk was being marginalised, its geographical location alone enough to ensure that its influence on affairs in the busy, expanding industrial town was increasingly limited. Moreover, the character of the Established Church's *quoad sacra* churches in the town was such that they had more in common with New Dissent than with the older parish church outside.<sup>35</sup> Clearly, then, evangelicalism and dissent formed another post of the community's symbolic boundary. Evangelicalism and dissent shaped local social analysis and social criticism, provided a cutting-edge for local radical politics<sup>36</sup> and trades unionism<sup>37</sup> and were, of course, potent influences on and expressions of popular *religious* consciousness in Airdrie.

It is not surprising to note, then, that in the years after 1843 the Established Church was in deep trouble in the town. Three of the – by this time – four *quoad sacra* churches' ministers left the Establishment

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<sup>33</sup> 1821 Census figure.

<sup>34</sup> 1831, 1841 and 1851 Census figures.

<sup>35</sup> Indeed they were in effect "Voluntaries". McCabe, "Evangelicalism and the Socialist Revival", 529-540.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 327-33.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 334-53.

to form new Free Church congregations so severing once and for all their links with the “parent” parish kirk, New Monkland. (The minister of one of these, the Broomknoll church, led out a one time Auld Licht Burgher congregation which had just rejoined the establishment in 1839 as a *quoad sacra* charge). If lack of accommodation had indeed been a root cause of the Established Church’s weakness – as Thomas Chalmers had tried to persuade the Melbourne government was so – then after 1843 the Established Church in Airdrie looked set to fade away un lamented. Indeed, until 1873 Airdrie Parish church – formed from the remnants of the chapels- of -ease – was the only Church of Scotland in the town.

### The Diffusion of Evangelicalism in Airdrie, 1850-1914

After 1850 Airdrie continued to develop as an industrial town of considerable importance in the Scottish economy.<sup>38</sup> And evangelicalism and dissent continued to invest an enormous amount in community and culture too. Competition and conflict among denominations, and between churches in the same denomination, continued to be an important source of vigour, activism and pride as had been the case in the 1830s.<sup>39</sup> But, when they chose to, the Protestant churches could cooperate in matters of common interest as they did during the 1859 Revival – an event greeted with some excitement, its credibility and authenticity fiercely defended in the local newspaper.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, by the last quarter of the nineteenth century the churches presided over a remarkable range of evangelical agencies that contributed to, and were a reflection of, the diffusion of evangelical values and ambiguities throughout local community and culture.<sup>41</sup> Churches continued to exercise a highly visible influence in every aspect of local civil society just as church buildings occupied a lot of space in the built environment. Together, the Protestant churches constituted the biggest single voluntary organisation in the town and, though most townspeople did not go to church, church membership was genuinely cross-class. (Local industries like mining and engineering, for example, were well represented – from unskilled labourers to managers – in the local churches.<sup>42</sup>) But evangelicalism

<sup>38</sup> Economic activity continued to be dominated by coal, iron and increasingly engineering.

<sup>39</sup> See McCabe, “Evangelicalism and the Socialist Revival”, 435-89.

<sup>40</sup> See, for instance, *Airdrie and Coatbridge Advertiser* (Saturday 27 August 1859).

<sup>41</sup> McCabe, “Evangelicalism and the Socialist Revival”, 656-92.

<sup>42</sup> See, for instance, the Baptismal Record of South Bridge Street United Free Church, 23 Dec.1900 - 19 Apr. 1917 (which lists 53 different occupations among babies’ fathers). Church membership relative to total population was declining. Even

was not confined to churches. It was, for instance, the bedrock of the Airdrie Savings Bank (still an independent bank today). And evangelicalism spawned a remarkable outburst of Temperance enthusiasm in the early 1900s, a reaction against the remarkable local enthusiasm for public houses.<sup>43</sup> In 1905 the Airdrie lodge of the Independent Order of Good Templars had a membership of almost 3000 and claimed to be the largest IOGT lodge in the world.<sup>44</sup>

### **Evangelicalism and the Failure of Socialist Revivalism in Airdrie**

ILP leaders thought that the industrial towns of north Lanarkshire were natural constituencies for socialism. But to their consternation they discovered that in places like Airdrie support for socialism was muted, enthusiasm non-existent. ILP activists and leaders blamed lack of success on organisational weakness, poor links with weak trades unions and the continuing strength of local radical Liberalism.<sup>45</sup> By and large scholars of Scottish political and Labour history have been content to accept these kinds of explanation at face value.<sup>46</sup> By themselves, however, such explanations are insufficient; they fail to take into account broader cultural issues like religion, and – just as important – local *identities and cultures*. The ILP was keen to establish itself nation wide and as a national political party. Naturally, however parochial in practise, in theory it also attempted to spread a socialist message that was internationalist in its outlook, its scope and its implications. This meant that in their enthusiasm ILP activists often ignored local communities and cultures as being of no importance in the great scheme of things. Once workers came to a realisation of their true condition, so the argument ran, the collective voice of their moral outrage would set in chain the beginnings of a movement that would

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so, in 1911 the Presbyterian churches together (8 in all) still had a membership that amounted to 16% of the total Airdrie population – a figure which leaves out local Cameronians, Methodists, Baptists, Congregationalists, Mormons, Scottish Episcopalians and Roman Catholics.

<sup>43</sup> James Knox, a key figure in the establishment of the Airdrie lodge of the Independent Order of Good Templars, noted that at the turn of the century Airdrie presented a lamentable spectacle from the temperance standpoint. Statistics suggested that of the ten burghs having the largest ratio of pubs per 10,000 people Airdrie came first with 42.5. For he and his supporters the IOGT was dedicated not merely to the eradication of drunkenness in drink-soaked Airdrie, but to the advancement of Christ's kingdom on earth as well. See: J. Knox, *The Triumph of Enthusiasm: Social and Temperance Reform in Airdrie* (Airdrie, 1905).

<sup>44</sup> Knox, *The Triumph of Enthusiasm*, 36.

<sup>45</sup> See, for example, *Labour Leader*, 29 July - 16 September 1904.

<sup>46</sup> As has, for example, I.C.G. Hutchison in his *Political History of Scotland, 1832-1924: Parties, Elections and Issues* (Edinburgh, 1986), 257-65.

change individuals, society, and the world fundamentally and forever. Such naivety – for that is what it was – reflected the optimism of the ILP activists; their typically Victorian belief in progress, in purposive history, in the moral rightness of their cause and in “the People” as the agent of change. ILPers claimed that what they offered was not only the economic transformation of society but also spiritually changed human beings: social salvation and individual salvation.

Their belief in the inevitability of history, however, meant that they were not always alert to the weight of history in the local communities and cultures that they sought to move into and to convert. The failure of the ILP to make significant headway in a town like Airdrie, for instance, cannot be adequately explained by recourse to familiar arguments about organisational weakness or the strength of local radical Liberalism or the weakness of local trades unions, important though these are.<sup>47</sup> In towns like Airdrie the ILP faced other serious difficulties which reflected, among other things, the embeddedness of socialist revivalism in evangelical-mission culture.

Socialist revivalism was not competing as a new ideology against evangelicalism at all, but within it as another kind of revivalism. In Airdrie where since the 1790s evangelicalism and dissent had shaped community and culture, where evangelical categories of thought and values were widely diffused, and where those among the respectable working class most likely to join the ILP were already committed to other evangelical or evangelically-inspired revivalism, socialist revivalism was simply blocked out. There was no room for it in local evangelical-mission culture. Now this would not have mattered a great deal if socialist revivalism had been genuinely new and secular. The fact that it was neither seriously hampered its progress.

This is not to say that the majority of Airdrie people were committed to the churches or other evangelical voluntary organisations; they were not. The bulk of Airdrie people were not committed members of any church or of the evangelically-inspired Airdrie Savings Bank and Temperance movement. But they were equally indifferent to the social gospel of ILP socialist revivalism because they did not see it as offering anything new or different from what was already on offer elsewhere. It was at local level, then, that socialists’ belief in purposive history and in their own inevitable triumph was most rigorously put to the test and found wanting. Too often ILP leaders and organisers based their plans on vague generalisations about “the working class” with the result that they

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<sup>47</sup> McCabe, “Evangelicalism and the Socialist Revival”, 588-655.

mistakenly assumed that the working class was homogeneous and so much the same in one locality as in another. Consequently, the ILP leadership tended to ignore local identities and cultures.

In Airdrie, emerging as a new industrial community from the late eighteenth century, evangelical Protestantism, particularly in its Presbyterian forms, was crucially important in the literal and symbolic construction of community. Although never attended by the majority of townsfolk, the churches were not driven to the margins of local society either by population growth or by industrialisation. On the contrary, these developments stimulated religious enthusiasm and activism and church growth. And the churches' investment in Airdrie community and culture paid dividends right down to the 1900s and beyond. Socialist revivalism simply did not have this cultural investment. Furthermore, the embeddedness of socialist revivalism in evangelicalism meant that at local level the success or failure of the ILP was closely related to the religious context and history of the localities into which it sought to move and grow. It was all a question of culture.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> The above paper is the text of an illustrated talk given to the SCHS in November of 1998.