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Political Harvests: Transnational Farmers' Movements in North Dakota and Saskatchewan, 1905-1950

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Political Harvests: Transnational Farmers' Movements in North Dakota and Saskatchewan,
1905-1950

Political Harvests: Transnational Farmers' Movements in North Dakota and Saskatchewan,
1905-1950

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in History

by

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Abstract

This research uses as a case study farmers' movements in North Dakota and Saskatchewan, two identical locales in terms of wheat monoculture, demographics, and agrarian ideology, and traces the differing social, economic, and political outcomes between 1905 and 1950. The research, however, moves beyond this and also investigates the transnational integration, connections, and engagements among agrarian groups across the broader North American northern plains and across the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, to Europe, the Soviet Union, and Australia.

Methodologically, this study applies social movement theory, pioneered by sociologists Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilley, which seeks to replace a static view of social movements with a more dynamic one and allows for baseline comparison and elucidation of cross-border interactions. This investigation utilizes personal and organizational papers, along with movement newspapers and other movement publications from archives in the United States and Canada. For the first time, this research delves deeply into the shared histories of the U.S.-Canadian northern plains—and movements' relationships with similar agrarian histories around the globe—and takes the story from the late nineteenth century through the tumult of the Great Depression, when the divergent paths of farmers' movements began, and into the early Cold War period, when two distinct political outcomes became apparent.

Table of Contents

I. Preface.....	1
II. Chapter One: The Beginnings of Transnational Farmers Movements.....	7
III. Chapter Two: Grain Exchanges and Grain Elevators: Farmers, Farm Organizations, and Ideas Across the Forty-ninth Parallel, 1905-1915.....	51
IV. Chapter Three: The Politics of Prairie Socialism, 1915-1918: The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota and Saskatchewan.....	126
V. Chapter Four: The Failure of Agrarian Politics and the Rise of the Wheat Pools, 1919-1929.....	185
VI. Chapter Five: Hard Times, Organization, and Politics: The Great Depression on the Transnational Plains.....	249
VII. Chapter Six: Farm Organizations and Social Democrats in War and Cold War, 1939-1950.....	320
VIII. Chapter Seven: Conclusion.....	380
IX. Bibliography.....	385

Preface: “We are tied together with invisible bonds in a hundred different ways.”

In the first half of the twentieth century, the northern plains of North America was characterized by geographic integrity, a wheat monoculture economy, and similar settlement patterns and demographics. This provided the context for the free flow of agrarian ideas, organizations, and policy approaches across the forty-ninth parallel. The existence of an international boundary separating two distinct political cultures, however, often led to divergent developments and outcomes related to the forms of organization, strategies, and trajectories of farmers’ economic and political movements.

From the turn of the century until the Great Depression, the U.S. and Canadian agrarian organizations and their development in the northern plains roughly paralleled each other and often intertwined across the international line. Cooperatives, agrarian political parties, and large-scale marketing organizations advanced in tandem in North Dakota and Saskatchewan through the end of 1920s. The agricultural catastrophe that was the 1930s sent political shockwaves across the northern plains and reoriented farmers’ organizations and political movements. By the end of the decade and into the war years and early Cold War period, farm movements in North Dakota and Saskatchewan moved away from previous institutional equivalency, altered their transnational connections, and developed in ways unique to the political cultures of the U.S. and Canada.

It has been almost seventy years since a scholarly monograph examined the intertwined histories of farmers and farm associations across the North American northern plains, and that story, though told well, only looked superficially at the history through the World War I period. The binational experiences of borderland farmers in the 1920s, through the Depression, and into the postwar period have never been studied. Though there is literature on the interwar wheat pool

movement in the Canadian prairies, there is virtually none on the pools in the U.S., and certainly no one has traced the cross-border connections among North American wheat pools and their relationship with the international large-scale agricultural commodity marketing movement. Though the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) is the perhaps the most written about third party in Canadian history, a transnational context allows for new insights on how that political insurgency interacted with Saskatchewan cooperatives and with social democrats in the United States, and why the rise of the CCF accompanied alterations in long-standing connections between northern plains farmers in the two countries. Finally, this work is the first to apply to farmers' movements a social science theoretical approach which allows for a clearer understanding of comparative and binational histories. For the first time, this research delves deeply into the shared histories of North Dakota and Saskatchewan, and takes the story from the late nineteenth century through the tumult of the Great Depression, when the divergent paths of farmers' movements began, and into the early Cold War period, when two distinct political outcomes became apparent.¹

¹ Paul Sharp's *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (St. Paul: University of Minnesota Press, 1948) still holds up under scrutiny for its readability and novel methodological approach. Mildred A. Schwartz, a sociologist, has for many years been at the forefront of suggesting such transnational connections between U.S. and Canadian farmers' groups and political organizations in the northern plains, but her work never rises above generalities and theoretical assumption, and relies upon secondary literature. See, for example, Schwartz, "Cross-Border Ties Among Protest Movements: The Great Plains Connection," *Great Plains Quarterly* 17 (1997): 119-30.

Not only have borderlands scholars mostly focused on the Mexico-U.S. region, but those few who acknowledge the U.S.-Canadian border region often ignore the vast shared histories across the northern plains. See, for instance, William G. Robbins, *Colony and Empire: The Capitalist Transformation of the American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), ch. 3; Richard White and John M. Findlay, eds., *Power and Place in the North American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1999); and Stephen J. Randall, ed., with Herman Konrad and Sheldon Silverman, *North America Without Borders? Integrating Canada, the United States, and Mexico* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 1992).

Chapter Summaries

The introductory chapter examines briefly the ways in which scholars have treated the history of the American-Canadian West and the northern plains borderlands, and lays out nineteenth-century patterns in settlement, demography, agriculture, and political economy. It also includes an explanation of the theoretical framework that undergirds the research.

Chapter Two, “Grain Exchanges and Grain Elevators: Farmers, Farm Organizations, and Ideas Across the Forty-ninth Parallel, 1905-1915,” shows how the Canadian organized wheat farmers created the largest and most successful marketing cooperatives in North America, and how they did so within a favorable political environment. The Grain Growers’ Grain Company of Western Canada and the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association helped the North Dakota farmers build their own co-ops, though due to hostile politics and other factors the Americans lagged behind.

The economic and political frustrations of the organized wheat farmers in North Dakota led to the creation of a powerful agrarian insurgent group, the Nonpartisan League, and its expansion into prairie Canada. Chapter Three, “The Politics of Prairie Socialism, 1915-1918: The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota and Saskatchewan,” traces the development of farmers’ political insurgency in North Dakota and Saskatchewan, and examines the differing political outcomes during the period of World War I.

The emasculation of agrarian politics in both the U.S. and Canada in the immediate postwar period and the emergence of the wheat “pool” movement of the 1920s is the topic of Chapter Four. “The Failure of Agrarian Politics and the Rise of the Wheat Pools, 1919-1929” shows how, in the prairie provinces of Canada, innovative large-scale wheat pools became the most successful agricultural commodity marketing cooperatives in the world. They influenced

the creation and development of pools in Australia and the Soviet Union, as well as in the United States. In North Dakota, the pool movement never became as powerful or successful as did its counterpart in Saskatchewan, despite repeated direct assistance by the Canadians. On the eve of the Great Depression, the wheat pool in Saskatchewan provided farmers of the province with one of the highest living standards in North America.

The Great Depression changed forever the parallel development and binational interaction of farmers' movements in North Dakota and Saskatchewan. Chapter Five, "Hard Times, Organization, and Politics: The Great Depression on the Transnational Plains," demonstrates how the Farmers Union came to be part of the New Deal coalition, and how President Franklin Roosevelt's administration muted agrarian radicalism during the decade. In contrast, the lack of a New Deal in Canada allowed political insurgency to flourish and provided for the rise of the farmer-labor social democratic Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, which challenged the political status quo in Saskatchewan and across the Dominion.

Chapter Six, "Farm Organizations and Social Democrats in War and Cold War, 1939-1950," examines the continued advance of the divergent paths of the Farmers Union in North Dakota, and the CCF, the cooperative movement, and other agrarian organizations in Saskatchewan, and how the postwar Red Scare affected leftist farmers' movements in both countries. The chapter also explains the ways in which the ideal of agrarian cooperation sustained the transnational connections of farm groups through the tumultuous period of World War II and the early Cold War.

In the wake of the Great War, a Canadian observer of his country's relationship with the United States noted, "The International Boundary is an invisible and intangible thing. Trade may be controlled, but ideas cannot be excluded. Owing to the geographical situation it is almost inevitable that schemes of social reform in the two countries will go hand in hand...We are tied together with invisible bonds in a hundred different ways."²

For farmers, their families, and their organizations in the U.S. and Canadian northern plains, the idea of agrarian cooperation represented the most pervasive, deep seated, and long-standing "invisible bond." Cooperation in marketing wheat, cooperation in purchasing farm necessities, cooperation in selling insurance, and cooperation in creating more equitable health care systems. This was the cooperation born of the Rochdale weavers in England in 1844 and reinterpreted to become a veritable agrarian religion in the United States and Canada through the late nineteenth century and into the first half of the twentieth. In 1944, exactly one hundred years after the Rochdale pioneers opened their first cooperative store, North Dakota Farmers Union editor A.W. Ricker delivered a speech to the stockholders of the Farmers Union Central Exchange, a thriving general purchasing cooperative in North Dakota. He told the audience, "There is nothing, in and of itself, spectacular about starting a [cooperative] grocery store any more than there is anything thrilling and spectacular about the birth of a child in a stable. Grocery stores have been started since civilization emerged from barbarism and children have been born in even less convenient places than stables. But at Bethlehem a boy born created Christianity, and like cooperation found its way around world."³

² Charles W. Peterson, *Wake Up, Canada: Reflections on Vital National Issues* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1919), 22.

At about that same time, president Frank T. Appleby of the United Farmers of Canada, an economic and educational farm organization in Saskatchewan, told the delegates to the annual convention, that “We common people must march as one, in that I am [re]minded of the lady who fell overboard, a sailor plunged to her rescue, grabbed a limb and began to swim, but her arm came off. He turned back, she was sinking. He grabbed again, caught her by the hair but soon that also came loose. Then he admonished, ‘Lady, if you will but stick together you can be saved.’ The same stands in regard to us.”⁴ Through boom times and depression, farmers’ governments and hostile opposition politics, war and peace, red scare and social democracy, cooperation remained the tie that binds.

³ A.W. Ricker, “A Century of Cooperation,” speech delivered at the Thirteenth Annual Meeting of Stockholders of the Farmers Union Central Exchange, Feb. 1944, 1, Folder 7, Box 11, Ole Olson Papers, North Dakota State University Archives, Fargo.

⁴ Report of the 1945 UFC Annual Convention, 20, Folder 1.18, Annual Conventions—Reports, 1927-1949, United Farmers of Canada—Saskatchewan Section, Ltd., Collection, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina.

Chapter 1

The Beginnings of Transnational Farmers' Movements

“In this common environment, the boundary was no more a barrier to ideas and movements than it was to the prairie winds which ceaselessly blew across it, bending the interminable fields of wheat, Canadian and American alike.”¹

Two Nations, One Countryside

In the late nineteenth century, Frederick Jackson Turner, the most famous interpreter of the western United States, argued that the West and the ever-moving western frontier defined the essence of America and American democracy. Individualism, independence, and progress, all catchwords for America, were born and reborn amongst the Americans of European extraction who pressed the line of civilization further westward and clashed throughout history with “savage” Indians. Thus, for Turner, the American West played a crucial and influential role in the development of the entire nation. Turner’s West was a continual “process” rather than a particular “place.”²

Perhaps because Canadians have often defined themselves and their country against the United States, Turner’s “frontier thesis” was never put forth to explain Canada’s western development. Three Canadian historians helped define an alternative model. Harold Innis, Donald Creighton, and J.M.S. Careless viewed the relationship between Europe and North America, and between central Canada and western Canada, through the framework of the political economy of two regions: the dominant metropolises and subservient hinterlands. North American civilization was a hinterland of major metropolitan centers in Europe, and the

¹ Donald F. Warner, “The Farmers’ Alliance and the Farmers’ Union: An American-Canadian Parallelism,” *Agricultural History* 23 (Jan., 1949): 9.

² Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Holt, 1921).

Canadian West a hinterland to the major metropolitan areas of central Canada. The metropole imposed as well Eastern Canadian Anglo-Saxon Protestant values and religion upon the hinterlands. The economic sinews of these connections, according to Innis, were “staple trades” such as furs, fish, and wheat. This approach, in whole or in part, is variously referred to as metropolitanism, the “Laurentian thesis,” or the “staples thesis.” American historians also note the unequal place of the economies of some western states, especially North Dakota, within a “hinterland” system in the United States.³

Turner’s thesis dominated the historical literature of the U.S. West for many decades. The New Western Historians, building upon the social history revolution of the post-World War II period, convincingly challenged Turner’s teleological view and his emphasis on the centrality of the Euro-American in the evolving West. They also characterize the West more as a place than a

³ R. Douglas Francis, “Turner versus Innis: Bridging the Gap,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 33 (Dec., 2003): 473-85; Frances W. Kaye, “An Innis, Not a Turner: Comparative Historiography of the Canadian and U.S. Wests,” *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 31 (Winter, 2001): 597-610. This theme underlies Elwyn B. Robinson’s influential *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), though by the twentieth century the Twin Cities of Minnesota, rather than the East Coast, represented the “heartland.” Many works have investigated the idea of the U.S. West as a colony of Eastern interests and of the federal government. See Bernard DeVoto, “The West: A Plundered Province,” *Harper’s Magazine* 149 (Aug., 1934): 355-64; William G. Robbins, “The ‘Plundered Province’ Thesis and the Recent Historiography of the American West,” *Pacific Historical Review* 55 (Nov., 1986): 577-98; Carl Abbot, “The Federal Presence,” in eds. Clyde A. Milner II, Carol A. O’Connor, and Martha A. Sandweiss, *The Oxford History of The American West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 496-500; Robert G. Athearn, “Colonialism: The Enduring Dilemma,” in ed. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1986), 108-30; Patricia Nelson Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest: The Unbroken Past of the American West* (New York: Norton, 1987); and Gerald D. Nash, *The Federal Landscape: An Economic History of the Twentieth-Century West* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1999).

process, and argue for a more inclusive history of Indians, minorities, women and the pervasive role of the federal government in the region.⁴

Innis initially conceptualized the Canadian nation from its center. Thus he did not delineate a line between “civilization” and “savagery” as did Turner. Innis focused on the utilization and exploitation of natural resources, which enabled him to form a more inclusive view of the Canadian West because he recognized the central import of Indians, in the fur trade especially, and noted the continual aboriginal impact in Canadian history. If Turner suggested the whole of America was a reflection of western and frontier values, Innis contributed to the contemporary image of Canada’s multiculturalism (a “mosaic”) through his history of the development of the West.⁵

Despite these divergences in broad interpretations, the two Wests do have similar histories. Both regions were incorporated into the industrial/capitalist economies of their respective countries. Their respective governments confronted indigenous populations, though the hundreds of Indian wars in the U.S. West contrast with the relatively peaceful process of treaty-making with Canada’s First Nations. The often lawless and violent American frontier differed from Western Canada in that the Northwest Mounted Police force preceded settlement, and those pioneers above the forty-ninth parallel came with the British belief in deference to authority and “respect for ‘Queen’s Law’.”⁶

⁴ Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, “New Directions in Rural History,” *Agricultural History* 81 (Spring 2007): 155. For examples of the New Western Histories, see Limerick, *The Legacy of Conquest* and Richard White, *“It’s Your Misfortune and None of My Own”: A New History of the American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991).

⁵ Kaye, “An Innis, Not a Turner,” 600-605; Elizabeth Jameson and Jeremy Mouat, “Telling Differences: The Forty-Ninth Parallel and Historiographies of the West and Nation,” *Pacific Historical Review* 75, no. 2 (2006): 191-94.

⁶ John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies*, 4th ed. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), 47-50; William A.

A more narrow focus on the northern plains of North America makes it possible to think of the region as having a common history. One helpful way to conceptualize the possibilities of this shared regional history is through a “continentalist” approach. This approach assumes a “regional integrity that crosses national lines.” In other words, the northern plains of North America, despite the very real political boundary at the forty-ninth parallel, can be viewed as an identifiable regional and geographic area covering parts of the Dakotas, Montana, and Minnesota, and in Canada, much of Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan.⁷ Paul F. Sharp pointedly noted in 1952 that “the region is bisected by an international boundary which...is of such recent origin that population movements and commerce have tended to ignore it and to conform to the geographical integrity of the region.”⁸

However, the border did act as a conspicuous political divide, and this work will explore the impact of this divide while contributing to the growing literature on transnational borderlands. Older histories tended to frame their subjects within the assumptions of the nation-state, thus limiting analysis of lands and peoples beyond the confines of national borders. There were exceptions, such as the work of Herbert Eugene Bolton, who in the 1920s and 1930s examined the borderlands of New Spain’s northern empire and in doing so initiated what is today known as borderlands history. For the next decades the U.S.-Mexico border garnered most of the scholarly attention. Scholars, however, did not ignore the borderlands of the U.S. and Canada.

Katerberg, “A Northern Vision: Frontiers and the West in the Canadian and American Imagination,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 33 (Dec., 2003): 545-48.

⁷ Thomas D. Isern and R. Bruce Shepard, “Duty Free: An Introduction to the Practice of Regional History along the Forty-ninth Parallel, in ed. Sterling Evans, *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian West: Essays on Regional History of the Forty-ninth Parallel* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), xxx-xxxii.

⁸ Paul F. Sharp, “The Northern Great Plains: A Study in Canadian-American Regionalism,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 39 (June, 1952): 61. Other scholars agree that the boundary is in this manner “artificial.” See, for example, William Lass, “The North Dakota-Canada Boundary,” *North Dakota History* 63 (Fall 1996): 2-23.

Walter Sage, John Bartlet Brebner, and Paul F. Sharp utilized a continentalist approach that emphasize how, for instance, the border had little meaning for those peoples in the regions adjacent to the forty-ninth parallel across western Canada and the United States. Other influential writers such as Wallace Stegner spoke of how the border played a recognizable role during his early life in southern Saskatchewan.⁹

The works on the southern borderlands of North America evolved, multiplied, and diversified over several decades, and dwarfed the scholarship on the U.S.-Canadian borderlands. By the late twentieth century, even when borderlands historians looked north, much of their transnational histories focused on the edges of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century empires and imperial-indigenous interaction.¹⁰ More recent borderland histories of the first decade of the twenty-first century indicate how the U.S.-Canadian borderland literature is burgeoning and expanding.¹¹

⁹ Benjamin H. Johnson and Andrew R. Graybill, eds., *Bridging National Borders in North America: Transnational and Comparative Histories* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 1-13; Wallace Stegner, *Wolf Willow: A History, A Story, and a Memory of the Last Plains Frontier* (New York: Viking Press, 1962).

¹⁰ Stephen Aron and Jeremy Adelman, "From Borderlands to Borders: Empires, Nation-States, and the Peoples in Between in North American History," *American Historical Review* 104 (June 1999): 814-41.

¹¹ Notable recent works are Robert C. McMath, Jr., "Populism in Two Countries: Agrarian Protest in the Great Plains and Prairie Provinces," *Agricultural History* 69 (Fall, 1995): 517-46; Evans, ed., *The Borderlands of the American and Canadian Wests* and Evans, *Bound in Twine: The History and Ecology of the Henequen-Wheat Complex for Mexico and the American and Canadian Plains, 1880-1950* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007); Beth LaDow, *The Medicine Line: Life and Death on a North American Borderland* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Kyle Conway and Timothy Pasch, eds., *Beyond the Border: Tensions across the Forty-Ninth Parallel in the Great Plains and Prairies* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2013); Elizabeth Jameson and Sheila McManus, eds., *One Step Over the Line: Toward a History of Women in the North American Wests* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2008); Sheila McManus, *The Line That Separates: Race, Gender, and the Making of the Alberta-Montana Borderlands* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2005). For an introduction to borderlands history and historiography in general, including that of Mexico, the U.S., and

This work embraces the idea that “boundaries are also crossroads,”¹² and, especially with regard to the northern plains, inhabitants “had more in common with their counterparts directly across the international boundary than they did with their respective Canadian and American countrymen in the distant East.” U.S.-Canadian borderlands studies have become more nuanced and recognize the permeability of the forty-ninth parallel and the free movement of peoples and ideas between western Canada and the United States. This is especially relevant for the northern plains. Finally, the recent borderlands histories demonstrate that transnational history can be regional and local, while still having much to say about larger and broader national interactions.¹³

Settlement, Immigration, and the Agricultural Economy of the U.S.-Canadian West and the Northern Plains

Railroads and federal government policies made possible the settlement of the northern plains by people of European descent. In the United States the federal Homestead Act (1862) provided the impetus for populating and settling the Great Plains. Under this act any head of household could receive 160 acres of public land, so long as the claimant paid a filing fee, made improvements to the land and built a dwelling, and lived on the homestead for five years. Or, if

Canada, see Pekka Hämäläinen and Benjamin H. Johnson, *Major Problems in the History of North American Borderlands: Documents and Essays* (Boston: Wadsworth, 2012).

¹² Pekka Hämäläinen and Sam Truett, “On Borderlands,” *The Journal of American History* 98 (Sept., 2011): 338, 354.

¹³ Johnson and Graybill, eds., *Bridging National Borders*, 14-15, 22-23.

a prospective settler had the money to pay \$1.25 per acre, he or she could gain the title to the land immediately.¹⁴

With the British North America Act of 1867 (“Confederation”), the Dominion of Canada came into existence as a nation-state independent of British colonial rule, although it remained in the Commonwealth and did not have full sovereignty over foreign policy until the 1930s. The incorporation of the Canadian West—the prairie provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta, and mountainous British Columbia—into the Dominion was a key element of Confederation and the “National Policy.”¹⁵

As in the American West, the completion of a transcontinental railroad across the Canadian prairies to British Columbia and the Pacific was central to the development of the region. Railway construction went forward at a brisk pace in order to placate Canadian fears of American annexation of the lands north of the forty-ninth parallel and possibly head off an actual attempt. The main western line, the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) reached the Pacific in 1885. As railway construction pressed west the Dominion government, just as its American counterpart, offered free homesteads through the Dominion Lands Act of 1872. Similar to the Homestead Act, this legislation allotted 160 acres to settlers.¹⁶

Through an examination of the similarities in railroad development and federal policy regarding settlement of the northern plains, the regional integrity of the American-Canadian

¹⁴ David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 113-114.

¹⁵ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 162-69. Policing the West, the extensions of railways into the region, settlement, and a protective western tariff represented the cornerstones of the National Policy. A police force preceded settlement in order to preempt the violence that, for Canadians, characterized the American West. The Northwest Mounted Police supervised Indian affairs and kept the region relatively peaceful as the settlement period moved forward.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 171-84.

Wests becomes clear. The CPR was the main transportation line of the northern plains above the forty-ninth parallel. Below the border, the central railroad line was the Great Northern, which was built without federal support and stretched from Minneapolis into North Dakota and continued west through Montana. These two lines intertwined via north-south branch lines that crossed the boundary line. The two most significant were the branch lines from Minot, North Dakota to Regina, Saskatchewan, and from Great Falls, Montana towards Lethbridge, Alberta.¹⁷

These transportation linkages across the northern plains were part of larger railroad connections across the broader American-Canadian West. The first railroad in Manitoba, the St. Paul and Pacific, entered the province in 1878 and connected the eastern edge of the prairies to the grain marketing center of Minneapolis. When the CPR solidified the all-Canadian transcontinental route, it brought with it American businessmen and financiers who, as executives and contractors, played influential roles in the construction of the line.¹⁸

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries four major railroad entities crossed the boundary and connected through dozens of border crossings along tens of thousands of miles of track. Between the Northern Pacific (NPR) and Great Northern (GNR) in the United States and the Canadian Pacific (CPR) and Canadian National (CNR) railroad systems there were, by the early 1930s, twenty-one railroad gateways in the American –Canadian West. Through these gateways Canadian railroads in the West had contact with a total of 20,304 miles of railroads in the United States. Across the North Dakota-Canada border, by 1935, the NPR

¹⁷ John W. Bennet and Seena B. Kohl, *Settling the Canadian-American West, 1890-1915: Pioneer Adaptation and Community Building: An Anthropological History* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 3.

¹⁸ John C. Everitt, “The Borderlands and the Early Canadian Grain Trade,” in ed. Robert Lecker, *Borderlands: Essays in Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1991), 150.

operated a junction at Pembina into Emerson Junction, Manitoba. The GNR linked Neche to Gretna, Manitoba; Walhalla to Haskett, Manitoba; St. John to Bannerman, Manitoba; and Northgate, North Dakota, to Northgate, Saskatchewan. The CPR operated connections from Portal to North Portal, Saskatchewan, and from Neche to Gretna. And the CNR had a gateway from Northgate, North Dakota, to Northgate, Saskatchewan. In an exhaustive study of the railroad interrelations between the United States and Canada, William Wilgus argues that the major population centers of the northern plains and their extended economies enjoyed “the benefits of the rivalry of the Northwestern Railways of both countries just as effectively as if there were no border to separate them politically.”¹⁹

In addition to the railroad connections across the northern plains and the North American West, the western settlement policies of the United States and Canada were structured in similar ways, although Canada’s settlement period lagged behind their southern neighbor’s. Settlement of the northern plains began in earnest in the United States soon after the Civil War and in Canada around the 1870s. Scattered fur traders and disconnected pioneer farmers gave way, first, to cattlemen and ranchers. But stable settlement opportunities stemmed from the same sources in both countries: the extensive promotion of settlement from railroad companies and national governments through railroad land-grant tracts and federal lands. Settlement in much of the northern plains states, including the Dakotas, peaked in the 1880s, while the homesteading period in the Canadian West extended from the 1890s into the first decade and a half of the twentieth century.²⁰

¹⁹ William J. Wilgus, *The Railway Interrelations of the United States and Canada* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1937), 123-144.

²⁰ Bennet and Kohl, *Settling the Canadian-American West*, 14-20.

Demographic similarities among the northern plains of both countries further support the concept of regional integrity. In addition to American migrants mostly from the Great Plains who sought cheap land and profits from commercial wheat production, many immigrants from Europe and elsewhere streamed into the American Great Plains in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many historians of those regions hardly mention the subtleties of European ethnic composition.²¹ As Frederick C. Luebke's work clearly demonstrates, however, European immigrants and their children usually constituted a majority of the population in the early years of Great Plains settlement. Within the context of broader U.S. immigration after the Civil War, the Great Plains received German, Scandinavian, English, Irish, and Russian farmers.²²

Germans represented one of the largest ethnic groups in the Great Plains by the turn of the century, with significant numbers in North Dakota. English, Scottish, Welsh, Irish, and English Canadians also came in large numbers to farm. The Scandinavian countries supplied a further pool of immigrants to the plains. Heavily concentrated in North Dakota, Scandinavians' culture meshed easily with the agricultural cooperative ventures and radical politics of the twentieth century. Rounding out the immigrant groups were Czechs, Poles, Jews, and French Canadians.²³

²¹ For example, Luebke notes, Walter Prescott Webb, in *The Great Plains* (1931) treats the white population of the Plains as homogenous. Luebke also takes on "new western" historians such as Limerick in *The Legacy of Conquest* and White in *"It's Your Misfortune and None of My Own* for their lack of sensitivity to European ethnicity. Frederick C. Luebke, ed., *European Immigrants in the American West: Community Histories* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998), vii-viii.

²² Frederick C. Luebke, "Ethnic Group Settlement on the Great Plains," *The Western Historical Quarterly* 8 (Oct. 1977): 405-407.

²³ *Ibid.*, 411-423; Frederick Luebke, ed., *Ethnicity on the Great Plains* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1980), xviii.

The prairie settlement aspect of Canada's National Policy included the willingness to reach out to European immigrant groups. The aggressive recruitment policies of Minister of Interior Clifford Sifton in the last years of the nineteenth century contributed greatly to populating the prairies. Sifton helped the federal government establish immigration offices throughout Europe and targeted those he believed would be successful farmers. This led to a large immigration boom between 1897 and 1913. In addition to courting the British and Americans, Sifton promoted immigration of non-Protestants peasants from eastern and central Europe.²⁴

Between 1900 and 1930, immigrants from Europe poured into western Canada. Ukrainians were the most conspicuous of the eastern European peasant cultures, and they came as experienced farmers "prepared to work and to endure privation."²⁵ In some instances the federal government granted community tracts to certain groups such as the Mennonites in southern Manitoba, and the Doukhobors and the Hutterites who fled religious persecution in their Russian homeland.²⁶

The post-1896 period also witnessed an influx of American migration to the Canadian prairies. American Great Plains agriculture had reached an economic impasse including an increase in land prices and mortgage rates, as well as a rise in agricultural tenancy. This, along with Sifton's aggressive recruitment policies, resulted in northern migration. Ontario-born Canadians, who had previously settled in the American plains, composed as many as ninety percent of the northern-bound migrants, followed by those born in England, Scotland, Quebec,

²⁴ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 245; John C. Lehr, John Everitt, and Simon Evans, "The Making of the Prairie Landscape," *Prairie Forum* 33 (2008): 25.

²⁵ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 265.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 262-72.

Ireland, Germany, Russia, Sweden, Norway, Northern Ireland, Iowa, and Minnesota. American-born immigrants composed a little over six percent of prairie settlers, and most settled in Saskatchewan and Alberta. This move was usually the final one for these former American residents.²⁷

As with immigration, settlement and railroads, the international boundary did not constrain the basic environmental, agricultural, and economic contours of wheat farming and the grain trade across the northern plains. “The climate and soils of the hard spring wheat belt were the same on both sides of the forty-ninth parallel,” Paul Sharp observed, and “could not be contained by an arbitrary political boundary.”²⁸ Even early-twentieth-century contemporaries understood that with regard to the basics of wheat farming and the grain trade “the western provinces of Canada are really one vast prairie which is included in the [G]reat [P]lains region” of the United States.²⁹

Railroads and American and Canadian government efforts brought in farmers of hard spring wheat, the only type of grain that could flourish in the bitter cold of the dry northern plains. No matter the side of the divide on which they resided, American, Canadian, and European settlers aimed to create a commercially viable agricultural enterprise. North American wheat producers were integrated into the world grain system and their crops competed on the global market with wheat from Argentina, Australia, Russia and other countries.³⁰

²⁷ Randy Widdis, “American-Resident Migration to Western Canada at the Turn of the Twentieth Century,” in ed. Gregory P. Marchildon, *Immigration and Settlement, 1870-1939* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2009), 347-372.

²⁸ Paul F. Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1997 ed.), 16.

²⁹ A.M. Ten Eyck, *Wheat: A Practical Discussion of Raising, Marketing, Handling and Use of the Wheat Crop, Relating Largely to the Great Plains Region of the United States and Canada* (Lincoln, NE: Campbell Soil Culture Publishing Co., 1914), 134.

³⁰ Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 153.

Farmers in both countries faced the primary task of financing an agricultural venture. In the long term they had to borrow money to buy and improve land and in the short term they had to pay to grow their crop and get it to market. The lack of flexible currency to provide money where it was needed in a reasonable amount of time led to high interest rates and indebtedness. In North Dakota, farmers' long-term loans (five years or more) averaged eight percent interest, and short-term loans at 10.75 percent were the highest in the nation before World War I. This resulted in early and long-standing debt for wheat farmers.³¹

Canadian prairie farmers faced the same financial difficulties. As Kenneth Sylvester demonstrates in his study of Montcalm, Manitoba, country merchants provided seasonal credit and also acted as grain buyers. Wheat farmers also used mortgage funds to buy land and meet production and maintenance costs. By 1913 banks took over the arbitrage business in grain.³² Most farmers invested directly back into the land and farm business. Not many had large savings or investments outside the farm as late as 1930. Prairie wheat farmers were "land-rich and wage-poor."³³

In the early years of the wheat economy in both countries, before grain elevators dotted the landscape, the farmer took the harvest to the nearest flat warehouse or loading platform. The former was a rudimentary structure with low bins inside from which farmers loaded carload quantities by hand. From there a railroad car transported the grain to terminal elevators where the elevator operator or owner sold it on the world market. Railroad companies built the other

³¹ Theodore Saloutos, "The Spring-Wheat Farmer in a Maturing Economy, 1870-1920," *The Journal of Economic History* 6 (Nov., 1946): 177-78.

³² Kenneth Michael Sylvester, *The Limits of Rural Capitalism: Family, Culture, and Markets in Montcalm, Manitoba, 1870-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 66-84.

³³ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 318.

marketing and transportation method, the loading platform. Farmers loaded grain from this elevated mound directly into a railroad car for sale on the terminal market.³⁴

Grain elevators were clearly superior to flat warehouses or loading platforms. Unlike the latter two, the standard elevator did not rely on human or animal power. A steam-powered vertical moving belt with metal cups attached automatically scooped grain, lifted it and deposited it into bins.³⁵ Though they served the same mechanical function, line, cooperative, and independent elevators operated differently within the structure of the grain trade and grain marketing systems. The line elevators, dozens or perhaps hundreds of them owned and controlled by corporations (railroad companies or grain commission houses, for example) were more than simply storage elevators. Their owners and operators (“line elevator companies”) also participated in trading operations at the dominant regional grain exchange.³⁶

Farmers across the northern plains often attempted to compete with line elevators by forming cooperative elevator systems. Farmers’ organizations pooled money in various ways to purchase or erect elevators at competitive points in an effort to bypass line elevators or other middlemen. Independent elevators, owned and operated by individuals, were usually only storage elevators and their owners did not operate as traders in the grain marketing system.³⁷ By the 1880s Dakota Territory harbored hundreds of elevators, mostly line elevators owned by grain

³⁴ Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 106.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁶ Harald S. Patton, *Grain Growers’ Cooperation in Western Canada* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 17; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 107.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

or flour milling interests in neighboring Minnesota.³⁸ In Saskatchewan and Western Canada, however, most elevators were farmer-owned cooperatives.³⁹

From any one of these types of elevators the farmers' grain ended up at a terminal elevator in the terminal market. Terminal elevators, with capacities of millions of bushels, were located at strategic transportation points that enabled global shipments. In the United States, wheat arrived at terminals in Minneapolis or Duluth, and in Canada terminals were located at Port Arthur or Fort William in Ontario, along Lake Superior.⁴⁰ The bulk of all grain arrived at the terminal market, but farmers almost always sold their wheat well before it reached these points. Farmers participated more heavily in the local market due to immediate needs for money or the prohibitive price of shipping wheat hundreds or thousands of miles to the terminal market. Add to this situation the glut of production and marketing during the harvest season (which depressed local prices) and inadequate storage facilities on farms, and northern plains farmers had little to no bargaining ability on the terminal market. No significant competition existed at these points in the grain trade.⁴¹

Several factors determined prices at local points and on the terminal grain market. The world supply of wheat set the global market price, but competition set local prices. For example, in 1914 a noncompetitive point in North Dakota set local grain prices at two cents per bushel less than a more competitive point just six miles away.⁴² In general, wheat prices for the prairies were set at the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, and for North Dakota at the Minneapolis Chamber of

³⁸ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 154-55, 273.

³⁹ Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 107-8.

⁴⁰ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 273; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 107.

⁴¹ Saloutos, "The Spring-Wheat Farmer," 189.

⁴² Ten Eyck, *Wheat*, 85.

Commerce. As major centers of the North American grain trade, Winnipeg and Minneapolis prices reflected the world price set on the Liverpool market.⁴³

Wherever prices were set, they were done so according to the grade of wheat. Weight, quality, purity, soundness, dryness, texture, hardness and softness, and potential for making flour all contributed to the grade. The highest grade was “No. 1 Hard,” followed by lower grades such as “No. 2,” or “No. 3,” and so on. Until a state, provincial, or federal government set grading standards, grading was often arbitrary and at the judgment of individual elevator inspectors.⁴⁴ Grading standards varied across the international boundary.⁴⁵ Those elevators that did not perform grading or inspection came to be known across the northern plains as “country elevators.”⁴⁶

Dockage (the reduced weight after foreign materials were removed from the wheat) and shrinkage (loss of weight/wheat particles during receiving, shipping, or storage) were also factored into the offered price. Thus the farmer had few choices: take the price the elevator offered, or allow the elevator operator to send the shipment to the terminals. Those choices were only available if the farmer had a full carload of wheat. If otherwise, the farmer had to accept a “track” price (wheat combined to fill a car at local points) or the lowest price, the “street” price (price paid for less than a carload of wheat).⁴⁷

The existence of different shipping points, elevators, and track and street buyers did not necessarily result in competitive prices. The North West Grain Dealers’ Association (NWGDA),

⁴³ Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 17.

⁴⁴ Ten Eyck, *Wheat*, 85-91.

⁴⁵ Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 22-23.

⁴⁶ Everitt, “The Borderlands and the Early Canadian Grain Trade,” 151.

⁴⁷ Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 108-110; Patton, *Grain Growers’ Cooperation*, 16.

founded in 1903 in Winnipeg, and the Grain Bulletin, founded in 1905, of Minneapolis, both sent out a set price to every significant local marketing point with the understanding that no buyer would pay more for farmers' wheat than the stated price.⁴⁸

The creation and solidification of the grain trade on the U.S. side of the forty-ninth parallel preceded the development of its Canadian counterpart. Nonetheless, many aspects of the grain trade in the northern plains of the U.S. and Canada were bound together in a myriad of ways. Before the completion of the first transcontinental rail line across the prairies most Canadian grain found its way on American railroads to the terminal market. Even after 1886 when the CPR reached across the Canadian nation, American vessels still transported significant amounts of Canadian grain across the Great Lakes. As late as 1929, U.S. ports exported around one-third of all Canadian wheat.⁴⁹

Not only did many Americans, and especially many North Dakotans, settle in the Canadian prairies, but American land companies purchased vast tracts of farmland in Saskatchewan and across the prairies, subdivided them, and sold the land to settlers. Many of these American settlers desired to deal with Americans, rather than Canadians, in the grain trade system. Between 1902 and 1921 American grain buyers and elevator owners and operators dominated the grain trade of the Canadian prairies. Minnesota grain men held important positions on the board of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, and in 1907 an American was elected as president. The city of Winnipeg also housed several Minneapolis and Chicago grain commission organizations. American-owned elevator companies dotted the prairies. By the beginning of the

⁴⁸ Saloutos, "The Spring-Wheat Farmer," 188; Fowke, *The National Policy*, 115-16.

⁴⁹ John C. Everitt and Donna Everitt, "American Influences in the Canadian Grain Trade: An Overview," *Bulletin of the Association of North Dakota Geographers* 34 (1984): 7; Everitt, "The Borderlands and the Early Canadian Grain Trade," 151.

second decade of the twentieth century, “American entrepreneurs had large or controlling interest in at least nineteen of thirty-nine major elevator-owning companies, and these enterprises owned at least 37 percent of the elevators on the prairies.”⁵⁰ By the first decade of the twentieth century Americans owned forty percent of elevators in Saskatchewan.⁵¹

The Farmers’ Place within the Structure of the Transnational Grain Trade

Wheat farmers in both countries found much to despise in the functioning of the grain trade. They viewed as unfair many facets of the transportation, marketing, and banking systems in the wheat economy. Farmers were correct in claiming that some of their economic problems stemmed from genuine collusion and wrong-doing among railroads, grain elevators, or large-scale grain exchanges. However, some structural and economic conditions of the grain trade adversely affected wheat agriculture, though were not the result of premeditated malice on the part of grain merchants or bankers. Weather events, such as hail or drought, also affected crop production and were beyond human control. Agrarian reformers of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries recognized these distinctions. Farm organizations attacked the dishonest actions of big grain exchanges, for instance, but also sought remedies to increase the farmers’ inherent disadvantaged economic position.⁵²

⁵⁰ Ibid., 156-59; Everitt and Everitt, “American Influences in the Canadian Grain Trade,” 5-6.

⁵¹ Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 129.

⁵² Some of the earlier literature implies farmers’ and farm organizations’ critique of elements of the grain trade represented imagined problems or irrationality. This is of little help in understanding and differentiating farmer grievances as related to truly dishonest or illegal practices in the grain trade and to underlying economic structural challenges. For examples of such claims of irrationality, see Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 24; Patton,

Wheat farmers of the northern plains often focused their ire on railroads. During and after harvest time, when farmers needed to ship grain to market, railroads often could not or would not furnish adequate cars for transportation. In 1901 the Canadian West experienced a car shortage due to an exceptionally abundant harvest, leading thousands of bushels of wheat stranded and rotting across the prairies. The same thing occurred during the 1905-6 harvest season in North Dakota, when farmers experienced severe financial losses. When railroads did manage to transport the wheat crop, high freight rates emptied farmers' coffers. The interlocking ownership of railroads and grain elevators received criticism. Railroads often owned lines of elevators, and those that did not were often charged with favoritism when they offered certain elevator companies rebates on freight charges.⁵³

Farmers argued these railroad practices were often a result of collusion, and both the federal governments of the U.S. and Canada agreed. In the U.S., a series of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century federal measures addressed these issues. Beginning in 1887 the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) regulated freight rates and fought rate discrimination, though the Supreme Court emasculated the law by the 1890s and railroads strategized to work around the commission's provisions. Agricultural interests in Congress did push for the strengthening of the ICC's powers after the turn of the century. In 1903 under the Elkins Act railroads were fined for rebates, and in 1906 the Hepburn Act empowered the ICC to set a ceiling on rates. In Canada, through the Crows' Nest Pass agreement (1897), the CPR, in return for federal land grants and subsidies, agreed to lower freight rates on grain traveling to eastern

Grain Growers' Cooperation, 17; and John D. Hicks and Theodore Saloutos, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 134.

⁵³ C.F. Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), 29-30; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 118-19; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 203, 240; Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation*, 17, 31.

Canadian markets. The Manitoba Grain Act of 1900 imposed upon railroads a regulatory regime including provisions requiring an adequate distribution of cars for harvest time shipment.⁵⁴

Truly dishonest practices existed among grain elevators, and they formed a large part of the farmers' purview because they were the marketing entities at the local level with which most farmers dealt. It was said line elevators constituted a monopoly and destroyed competition, and thus reduced the price paid to farmers for their wheat. Farmers pointed as evidence to the price cards sent out to country elevators by the NWGDA of Winnipeg and the Grain Bulletin of Minneapolis. Farmers believed local elevators conspired to reduce the amount they paid for wheat by unfair and excessive dockage, underweighing, undergrading, mixing higher and lower grades of wheat, and insufficient cleaning of wheat. Terminal elevators came under the same scrutiny. In addition, farmers complained that they did not have adequate access to the terminal market and thus their bargaining power was reduced because they were forced to sell at local points with price deductions for transportation, storage, and cleaning.⁵⁵

Indeed, many of these charges against the grain trade were true, but they were also personalized for the farmer in the form of the local elevator operator. The Sherman Anti-Trust Act in the U.S. forbade such monopolistic price-fixing among corporations, but it could also pertain to combinations of terminal and line elevators that dominated the market. The Manitoba Grain Act directly dealt with these issues in the Canadian West. The 1899 Royal Commission of the Shipment and Transportation of Grain report acknowledged bona fide abuses in the grain trade, especially the existence of monopolistic practices that decreased competition. The Royal

⁵⁴ Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 195-209; Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain*, 117-118; Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt*, 20-21.

⁵⁵ Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain*, 29-30; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 112-25; Saloutos, "The Spring-Wheat Farmer," 177-78; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 203, 272-74.

Commission's recommended reforms, codified in the Manitoba Grain Act, empowered the newly created federal Warehouse Commission of Winnipeg to license country and terminal elevators, oversee grain handling and storage, investigate farmer complaints, and required railroads to distribute an adequate number of cars for grain shipment.⁵⁶

Broader structural and economic factors adversely affected the grain farmer, and had little to do with dishonest practices on the part of grain merchants or railroads. As a capital-intensive enterprise in the industrial capitalist system, farmers required access to money. Farmers' chronic undercapitalization and a dearth of financial institutions in the northern plains resulted in a lack of sufficient money to loan, and thus excessive interest rates. It was not uncommon for farmers of the northern plains to face double-digit interest rates on the loans necessary to begin and continue their agricultural operations.⁵⁷

The wheat economy of the U.S. and Canada comprised part of the global grain trade. North Dakota and Saskatchewan wheat competed on the world market alongside grain from Australia, Russia, and Argentina, among other producing nations. Price fluctuations, based on simple economic principles of supply and demand, became common. Though some farmers suggested bankers or international grain dealers schemed to set prices at Liverpool, this is difficult to document. More commonly, wheat farmers organized on a large scale to exercise clout within national and international markets to mitigate against capricious price changes.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 117-18; Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation*, 23-31.

⁵⁷ Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 154. Danbom states that ten percent represented a common interest rate in the Plains states. See also Saloutos, "The Spring-Wheat Farmer," 177-78; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 124-25; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 251.

Wheat farmers of both countries pointed to the monopolistic position of powerful grain exchanges. Such large-scale organizations—the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and the Winnipeg Grain Exchange—dominated the terminal markets of the United States and Canada and established rules for the grading, inspection, weighing, and selling of grain. They controlled much of the marketing of northern plains wheat due to a centralized business structure, ownership of grain elevators and warehouses throughout the region, high levels of capitalization, and coordination with powerful railroads and banks. The grain exchanges represented another structural obstacle to farmer control of marketing: they were institutions operating on a vast scale with resources enabling them to dominate the grain trade. In terms of basic operation, the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and the Winnipeg Grain Exchange did not violate any antimonopoly statutes or other laws, so they were not in this sense illegal entities.⁵⁹

On the other hand, the Chamber excluded organized farmers from membership due to a stipulation denying membership to those firms that returned patronage dividends among its members. That is to say, “no cooperation allowed.” The Chamber frequently responded with enmity to organized farmers’ efforts to enter the terminal market. In the 1920s the Federal Trade Commission found the Chamber guilty of purposefully targeting for ruin a North Dakota farmers’ cooperative marketing company. Lawsuits in Canada charged the Winnipeg Exchange as well with discriminating against farmers’ wheat co-ops. In both countries judges heard lawsuits regarding other accusations, such as collusion between the grain exchanges and grain

⁵⁸ On global wheat conditions, see Wilfred Manenbaum, *The World Wheat Economy, 1885-1939* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953).

⁵⁹ Saloutos and Hicks, in *Agricultural Discontent*, ch. 5, have a good discussion of the Chamber of Commerce. On the Winnipeg Exchange, see Allan G. Levine, “The Voice of the Canadian Grain Trade: A History of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange to 1943” (Ph.D. diss. University of Toronto, 1984). Levine argues that the Winnipeg Exchange received unfair criticism, and presents a more balanced view of the institution.

elevators. However, these never resulted in formal conviction. The large-scale grain exchanges of the northern plains, then, straddled the line between operating as a legal and legitimate structural barrier to farmers' financial success, and using their power and marketing clout to intentionally hinder agricultural free trade and attack farmers' marketing organizations.⁶⁰

Identical grain trade systems, structural and economic conditions, and dishonest practices contributed to transnational agricultural reform movements across the northern plains. American and Canadian wheat farmers organized to combat these abuses and improve their economic position. The identical criticisms of railroads, grain elevators, middlemen, banks, and grain trade monopolies resulted in farmers' organizations on both sides of the boundary using similar strategies and approaches toward reform. Since the northern plains represented a binational region of agricultural integrity, it is not surprising that most every American agrarian organization of importance spread in some form into prairie Canada in the first two decades of the twentieth century.⁶¹

Towards An Understand of Farmers' Organizations as Social Movements and Party Movements

In examining farmers' movements, it is vital to consider ways in which the farmers actually organized, the particular methods used in engagement with the perceived opposition, the political context in which they operated, and the various uses of cultural norms and familiar strategies to achieve agreed-upon goals. Social scientists have in the past few decades offered an

⁶⁰Saloutos, "The Spring-Wheat Farmer," 185; Hicks and Saloutos, *Agricultural Discontent*, 133-34; Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1977), 91-2; Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 131; Sharp, *Agrarian Revolt*, 22.

⁶¹ Sharp, *Agrarian Revolt*, 15, 25.

effective methodological approach to examine and explain these aspects of organization and the ways in which social and political movements interacted with challengers over time. This framework enumerates causal mechanisms that enable baselines for transnational comparisons and allow for explanations of differing outcomes. I call this approach “sustained contentious politics.”⁶²

Historians of the past sometimes characterized social and party movements as loose unstructured groups of aggrieved, reactionary individuals seeking unreasonable and possibly irrational concessions from legitimate authorities, political or otherwise.⁶³ To break out of this mold, one of the most influential practitioners of the recent social scientific literature on the subject, Charles Tilly, called for the treatment of social movements “as an established way of doing political business rather than a set of deviant individuals.” From this important premise, social and political movements became more fully defined, enabling a new methodological approach to their study. The sustained contentious politics framework grew from the historical study of eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and twentieth-century social and political movements, mostly in Europe and the United States. It is historically grounded and can be used without forcing it upon the evidence.⁶⁴ The social movement is a product of the nineteenth-century, a group of

⁶² Three scholars pioneered this approach and use similar terminology to this phrase. See especially Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁶³ With regard to the historiography of farmers’ movements since the nineteenth century, the most influential of such “status anxiety” claims is made by Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955). Other historians, the epitome of which is John D. Hicks, *The Populist Revolt: A History of the Farmers’ Alliance and the People’s Party* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1931), suggest economic distress is the only necessary condition for agrarian organization. Still others influenced the idea of a “movement culture” of resource mobilization—see Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

people who purposefully adopt a shared identity and beliefs, and collectively struggle to fulfill a common program. Over time the social movement organizes a sustained challenge to existing economic, social, and political authorities. Existing social networks provide the foundation for the movement, which becomes animated in sustained interaction with authorities through collective methods of action and beliefs that resonate with and among the members.⁶⁵

Party movements differ slightly. They still retain most of the qualities of social movements, especially in the sustained challenge they offer to power holders and members' shared convictions and beliefs that mobilize them to advance a common program. The convictions and beliefs are more oriented towards political change, and animate an idea that existing parties do not offer solutions to particular problems. In contrast to social movements, which seek solutions in a variety of settings, including politics, party movements work for change via elections and legislatures because of the opinion that these are the most direct routes to seek redress and reform. Party movements work for solutions, then, through the nomination of their own candidates or through support of party candidates. Once in power, of course, those elected with the support of the party movement must work toward compromise with like-minded interest groups and engage in political maneuver with opposition figures, groups, and parties.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Charles Tilly, "Social Movements and National Politics," in eds. Charles Bright and Susan Harding, *Statemaking and Social Movements: Essays in History and Theory* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1984), 315. See also Robert C. McMath's assessment of the efficacy of utilizing this methodology when explaining and comparing social movements, in "The History of the Present," in eds. Angie Maxwell, Todd Shields, and Jeannie Whayne, *The Ongoing Burden of Southern History: Politics and Identity in the Twenty-First-Century South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 80-115.

⁶⁵ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2-5; Tilly, "Social Movements and National Politics," 303-304.

⁶⁶ Mildred A. Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada: Strategies of Persistence* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 7-11.

From these designations the goal is to connect social and party movements to their historical settings with a focus on interactions—to identify sustained interfaces between mobilized movements and various authorities, within which demands are made in a context of collective interests. Particular causal mechanisms are the explanatory vehicle by which scholars can bring to light sustained contentious politics. Several key terms represent these causal mechanisms. After identifying and defining the causal mechanisms, we can begin to apply this approach to make the study of movements “dynamic,” to put them in motion over time and in historical context, and reveal methods by which movements and their outcomes can be compared across national borders.

First, actors must identify changing external opportunities, constraints, or threats. From this recognition, the movement can engage in contentious politics. In other words, altering circumstances, collectively identified, provides the impetus for a sustained challenge against existing authorities. For example, Arthur Townley, the leader of a World War I-era North Dakota-based socialist agrarian party movement called the Nonpartisan League, recognized that the emergence of the direct primary at the state level provided a path to take over the state Republican Party. Or, for instance, the agricultural devastation of the Great Depression and the failed policies of ruling provincial governments allowed an opening for the agrarian Cooperative Commonwealth Federation to enter the parliamentary system in Saskatchewan.⁶⁷

There must be a collective agreement or understanding of specific grievances or injustices, and potential methods to ameliorate them. These collective action frames, drawn from the cultural stock of the participants in the movement, also define the “us” and “them” in the struggle. Ideas and sentiments, along these lines, validate and animate collective action and make

⁶⁷ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 20; Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada*, 15.

actors feel aggrieved but also hopeful that solutions can be had by working as a movement. Frames are the “cultural tool kit” of social and party movements. Thus the Equity Cooperative Exchange, a wheat farmers’ cooperative marketing organization, successfully framed the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce as the embodiment of all farmers’ grievances against the grain trade and thus as the main enemy of the agrarian movement during the pre-World War I period. During the 1920s, as another illustration, a large proportion of farmers in both the wheat belt of the U.S. and Canada framed the new wheat pool style of commodity marketing as a natural extension of traditional agrarian economic cooperation.⁶⁸

Frames are then translated into action. The movement actors recognize, understand, and agree to the forms of collective action—some based on historical experience, others recently learned or improvised—and, at a strategic moment or in response to a particular threat or opportunity, know how to utilize them. These are repertoires of collective action, the catalog of available means, the movement’s “tool kits.” When repertoires change significantly, this is a potential signal of a major transformation in the structures of power and in the currents of sustained contention. Any of the social or party movements of farmers discussed in this study, for example, might have an organizing repertoire that included, among other things, canvassing the countryside by automobile. Farm organizations had canvassed farm-to-farm for a long time, but by the 1910s they utilized a new technique, driving a mass-produced and inexpensive Ford. Other farm cooperatives utilized long-standing propaganda and educational repertoires, but moved beyond print to the new technology of the radio in the 1920s.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Mayer N. Zald, “Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing,” in eds. Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, *Comparative Perspectives of Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 261; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 21.

The movements themselves built upon and mobilized existing social networks—“host” settings in which they can develop and evolve. These networks, at the base of society, provide a recruitment pool and offer an interlocking grid of groups and social conglomerations. Similarly, party movements operate within a multiorganizational field, and network partners provide resources and membership at crucial initial stages. These networks produce “embeddedness” as the social and party movements become intertwined over time with the social and political fabric. We see this as the Nonpartisan League worked through the existing organizational channels of the Equity Cooperative Exchange, or as the wheat pool movement in Saskatchewan took root quickly in the 1920s by tapping into the long-standing local branches of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association and the Farmers Union of Canada. Such existing networks also include common rural social bodies such as churches, educational societies, administrative units, or a diverse array of local cooperative organizations. Conversely, when identical movements fail to take advantage of existing social networks, the level of success is usually much lower. There is also the method of borrowing organizational forms or techniques from former or existing social groups or movements, rather than completely occupying or working through another existing organization.⁷⁰

Finally, these elements combine into “cycles of contention.” Confrontations and clashes between early phases of the movement and existing authorities realign supporters and detractors on both sides, create new opportunities and constraints, and lead to mobilization and demobilization. Innovation occurs in forms of contention, and frames are created and altered.

⁶⁹ Tilly, “Social Movements and National Politics,” 307-310; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, chapters 2 and 3.

⁷⁰ John D. McCarthy, “Constraints and Opportunities in Adopting, Adapting, and Inventing, in eds. McAdam, et. al., *Comparative Perspectives of Social Movements*, 141-48; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 10, 22-23, 124; Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada*, 35-36.

These competitions for power between movements and authorities rarely begin and end cleanly, and movements do not simply dwindle away—they leave behind determined supporters, memories, and knowledge of repertoires, and replace some forms of action with others. All of these allow movements to congeal again when the cycle is over and when new opportunities arise.⁷¹

All these causal pieces must now be put into motion to create a dynamic model of social and party movements. More than just put into motion, they must be made dynamic in relation to one another and to other significant actors. Movements engage in sustained contentious politics when actors recognize that opportunities, constraints, or threats change, and they then mobilize with strategic and innovative repertoires of collective action. Movements frame disputes among the challengers and all other parties, and utilize existing sites and social networks, creating new opportunities which others use in broadening cycles of contention. In this formulation, the focus is the mobilization process rather than a single episode of contention or an emphasis on sufficient conditions for the development of the movement.⁷²

There remains one more element in the utilization of this approach. As Sidney Tarrow notes, “it will not be particularly fruitful to examine the outcomes of single social movements on their own.” Through a binational comparison of sustained contention scholars of politics can analyze responses to opportunities and threats, the use of frames and repertoires, the mobilization of existing sites, and the resulting cycles of contention. Most importantly, this methodology focuses on and explains different outcomes through an assessment of different political systems and power structures. Transnational comparison allows scholars “to have an almost

⁷¹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 24, 164.

⁷² McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention*, 43-44.

experimental opportunity for watching the playing out of social movements [in different countries] when there are similar threats or causes for movement action.”⁷³

For instance, political opportunities and constraints for movements, and their responding strategic collective action, are relative to the political characteristics and structures of different countries. Issues can be framed differently in various societies, even if, as is the case with the U.S. and Canada, those societies have closely parallel rhetoric. Framing is also affected by dissimilar forms of media. When examining mobilizing structures, furthermore, the comparative approach must identify the organizational infrastructures and how the national and subnational political structure affects them and the movement in each society. One must also consider how and to what degree international events and pressures open or close domestic political opportunities.⁷⁴

Scholars must also explain how movements and ideas diffuse across national borders. First the historian must identify the conditions under which diffusion occurs, and then explain how it occurs. A person or organization acts as a transmitter or emitter, the idea or movement forms then pass through some sort of channel, and then it is absorbed or utilized by an adopter. The channels, through which the movement, movement form, or idea passes, can be individuals or an institutional/organizational equivalent (of which there were many between North Dakota and Saskatchewan). The large American population in southwestern Saskatchewan could also act

⁷³ Zald, “Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing,” 273-74; McAdam, et. al., *Dynamics of Contention*, 305-306; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 25

⁷⁴ Doug McAdam, John D. McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, “Introduction: Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing Processes—Toward a Synthetic, Comparative Perspective on Social Movements,” in eds. McAdam, et. al., *Comparative Perspectives of Social Movements*, 2-4; Doug McAdam, “On the International Origins of Domestic Political Opportunities,” in eds. Anne N. Costain and Andrew S. McFarland, *Social Movements and American Political Institutions* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 251-66; Zald, “Culture, Ideology, and Strategic Framing,” 273-74.

as a channel, or, for examples, the new technology of the radio during the 1920s, the increasing ease of travel via improved road systems, or even the maturing postal systems in both countries. Essentially, diffusion operates in diverse ways: perhaps challengers in one country adopt the organizational forms, collective action frames, or repertoires of challengers from another country; or, challengers confront similar targets in binational locales; or any other manifestation of transnational connection.⁷⁵

Farmers' Movements across Borders

This study engages the sustained contentious politics methodology with the transnational movements in the U.S. and Canada from 1905 to 1950, something that has rarely been done with late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century farmers' movement. Agrarian organization and binational movements, however, paved the way in the late nineteenth century and left among rural Americans and Canadians residual memories, organizational strategies, and assumptions. A sustained contentious politics approach can help outline the reasons why farmers organized in the late nineteenth century, how they used cultural frames and repertoires to engage with existing authorities, how the bodies mobilized existing sites in cycles of contention, and how ideas and movements crossed political borders. It also contributes to an understanding of the types of

⁷⁵ Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht, "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July, 1993): 56-74; Donatella della Porta and Sidney Tarrow, "Transnational Processes and Social Activism: An Introduction," in eds. della Porta and Tarrow, *Transnational Protest and Global Activism* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), 2-9; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 184-86; Margaret E. Keck and Kathryn Sikkink, "Transnational Advocacy Networks in the Movement Society," in eds. David S. Meyer and Sidney Tarrow, *The Social Movement Society: Contentious Politics for a New Century* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1998), 217-38. International influences must also be taken into account. See Thomas D. Isern, *The Cultures of Agriculture on the Northern Plains* (Marshall: MN: Southwest State University, 1999), for a brief treatment of the cultures of agriculture in New Zealand and Australia.

experiences, memories, and strategies that influenced agrarian reformers of the first half of the twentieth century.⁷⁶

The farmers' organizations of post-Civil War rural America emerged from and connected to the social and cultural fabric of the countryside. Farmers and their families, in the Great Plains and across the American countryside, energized social networks through participation and engagement in churches, schools, a variety of fraternal and social organizations, and in various forms of agricultural cooperation such as threshing rings or barn-raising. As new and threatening large-scale economic institutions formed from industrialization, farmers turned to familiar ideas for explanation. "Producerism" suggested the farmer should receive a fair return for his work, and the idea of antimonopolism chastised a system that allowed a single business entity to dominate an entire sector of the economy. Thus late-nineteenth-century agrarian unrest began within social networks animated by "cultures of protest," and farmers turned to familiar organizational forms: voluntary associations.⁷⁷

The Patrons of Husbandry, commonly referred to as the Grange, was the first national agrarian reform movement of industrial-age America, and it also spread into Canada. The Grange began in 1867 as a recreational and education body, a way to tie isolated rural homesteads and families closer together. Due to the changing market structure of industrial agriculture, the economic downturn of the 1870s, and bad weather, the Grange as a remedy adopted an English version of cooperation, the Rochdale plan, by which members purchase stock to raise capital, and cooperatively buy goods and sell their crops. Members' investments (and

⁷⁶ A notable recent work that utilizes components of this theoretical approach is Donna A. Barnes, *The Louisiana Populist Movement, 1881-1900* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2011).

⁷⁷ Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism: A Social History, 1877-1898* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), ch. 1.

sometimes a profit) were returned to them through patronage dividends. Long after the Grange lost clout, many farmers' organizations continued to use the Rochdale structure. Strongest in the American Midwest but present throughout the South and West as well, the order boasted more than 750,000 members nationally by the mid-1870s. Around the same time Dakota Territory harbored over 1,000 Grangers and over fifty sub-organizations. As the 1870s depression took a toll on farmers, and state legislatures seemed prone to inaction, the Grange pressed for reform legislation targeting the abusive practices of railroads. In Illinois, Minnesota, Iowa, and Wisconsin, for example, the Grange managed to pass state laws in the early-to-mid 1870s creating railroad commissions to oversee transportation practices and to regulate freight rates and grain warehouses.⁷⁸

During this same period, commercially viable wheat agriculture had not taken root in Western Canada, nor did sufficient population centers exist in the prairie to support large-scale agrarian organization. In Eastern Canada, though, Ontario and Quebec farmers built upon social and community ties in the second half of the nineteenth century and created the beginnings of a farm movement. Changing economic conditions and industrialization moved them towards cooperative practices such as building homes and barns or slaughtering animals, and the formation of various farmers' organizations. These bodies represented simple gatherings in schools or farm houses of dues-paying community members who came together to elect officers and draw up constitutions. At meetings members discussed agricultural topics, ate a common meal, sang songs, and in general engaged socially. Such farmers' clubs blanketed the eastern Canadian countryside.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 154; Sanders, *Roots of Reform*, 106-8.

A long history of contact between farmers in Vermont and the agriculturally rich Eastern Townships of Quebec facilitated information, via newspapers, travelers, and visitors, about the Grange. Many of the farmers' clubs in the area sought the benefits of cooperative purchasing and selling, and believed the relatively more centralized structure of the Grange could make the Rochdale model successful in Canada. Unlike farmers in the American Grange heartland, those in Ontario and Quebec did not have significant grievances against railroads, only middlemen, and economic cooperation offered a remedy. Farmers' clubs in Stenstead County, Quebec, invited prominent Vermont Granger and Mason Eben Thompson to transplant the American Grange into Canada, which he did in 1872. From there the Grange spread into Ontario, and by the end of the decade a national body formed, the Dominion Grange. Beginning in 1879 and continuing for decades, a Canadian representative attended the annual national Grange meeting in the U.S.⁸⁰

Though cooperative marketing and purchasing brought modest benefits to the members, the lakeside picnics, music, oratory, and camaraderie drew many Canadian farmers into the Grange fold. The association reached its peak in 1879 with an estimated membership of 31,000 throughout Canada and over 750 sub-Granges, but declined steadily during the 1880s and into the twentieth century. One reason is that foes of the Grange successfully framed the Canadian organization as a "Yankee institution." In the West and the wheat-growing regions of Canada the Dominion Grange never had a measurable immediate impact. There is little literature on the

⁷⁹ Louis Aubrey Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975 ed.), 13-19.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 29-45.

Canadian Grange, but one scholar claims it represents the “tap-root” for all subsequent agrarian organizations.⁸¹

Although present in Dakota Territory, the Grange lacked the significant numbers or organization in the sparsely settled region to make important or lasting contributions in terms of agricultural reform. Through the 1880s and into North Dakota’s early statehood period, another voluntary order, the Farmers’ Alliance, and later the People’s Party (Populism) entered politics and heavily influenced the course of agrarian reform and political struggle in the American northern plains. The economic and social arm of late-nineteenth-century agrarian protest, the Farmers’ Alliance, developed from long-standing traditions of socio-political movements and built on rural cultures of protest and local cooperative, community, and social ties. As a voluntary association similar to the Grange, the Farmers’ Alliance created a “federal” structure and hierarchy, from local “suballiances” and state bodies to larger interstate—or “national”—organizations. In dealing with the farmers’ disadvantaged position in the new industrial-capitalism order, and in response to economic downturns beginning the 1870s, farmers in the South and West formed local and state Alliances based on the two core principles of producerism and antimonopolism in regard to transportation, finance, and land conglomerates.⁸²

Farmers’ Alliance bodies across the agricultural South and West at first created varieties of purchasing and marketing cooperatives, specific to the crop region. In places such as Texas, leaders moved towards highly centralized, state-wide Alliance businesses aimed at the bulk marketing of members’ cotton. Though the smaller, local co-ops usually provided modest

⁸¹ Ibid., 13, 59-106.

⁸² McMath, *American Populism*, ch. 2. Religion, mostly of the Protestant variety, also animated the Farmers’ Alliance. See Peter H. Argersinger, “Pentecostal Politics in Kansas: Religion, the Farmers’ Alliance, and the Gospel of Populism,” *Kansas Quarterly* 1 (Fall, 1969): 24-39.

benefits to members, the more ambitious business efforts floundered due to lack of capital and the opposition of entrenched commercial and financial interests. Wheat and corn farmers across the Great Plains organized similarly. By late 1889, the Dakota Alliances became part of the National Farmers' Alliance & Industrial Union (NFA&IU), connecting them with the Southern Alliance and some sympathetic elements of the labor movement, especially the Knights of Labor. The Territorial Dakota Alliance formed in 1884 in response to falling agricultural commodity prices, rising transportation costs, the bust of the land boom, and drought conditions. The organization pursued economic cooperation and formed a long-lasting and successful co-op hail insurance company. However, the failure of cooperative marketing of wheat at the local and terminal fields pushed the Alliance to call for public ownership of grain elevators and stringent regulation of railroads. To realize such goals the Dakota Alliance, and by the early 1890s the NFA&IU, grappled with the question of if, when, and how to enter politics.⁸³

With 28,000 members and 744 suballiances by the late 1880s, first the Dakota Alliance sought to pressure both major parties to support its program of railroad regulation, grain trade reform laws, and financial and land measures. This strategy generally succeeded in both the 1887 and 1889 territorial legislatures. The Alexander McKenzie GOP political machine, however, managed to stymie most of the reform bills. McKenzie, a former Northern Pacific agent, ruled Dakota Territory and later North Dakota through his control of the Republican Party and his connections to railroad interests and their allies in business, finance, and the grain trade, especially in the Twin Cities.⁸⁴

⁸³ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 198-205; McMath, *American Populism*, ch. 3. One study of the Dakota Alliance found a high percentage of German, Scandinavian (especially Norwegian), and Canadian members. See John Dibbern, "Who Were the Populists? A Study of Grass-Roots Alliances in Dakota," *Agricultural History* 56 (Oct., 1982): 677-91.

With statehood in late 1889, the Dakota Alliance split into North and South Dakota branches, the former led by farmer Walter Muir. The North Dakota Alliance talked of forming a third party, as memories remained of the three previous territorial legislatures which failed to enact and enforce most of the Alliance programs. At the same time nationally, Western Alliancemen engaged in political insurgency and formed the People's Party, while the Alliance in the South continued their attempts at reform through the Democratic Party. Not surprisingly, the North Dakotans, too, divided over the strategy of political action. As its gubernatorial candidate, Muir led one Alliance faction into the Independent Party in 1890, while most other Alliance members pursued a strategy of supporting sympathetic Republicans. With McKenzie "bossism" at work, the Independents lost badly. The third party made a strong comeback in 1892, when it fused with the state's Prohibitionists, adopted the national Populist Party platform, and ran a full slate of Independent candidates, many of whom the state Democrats supported. The Independents won big, electing governor Eli Shortridge and candidates to most other state offices. The Populist presidential candidate James Weaver came very close to carrying North Dakota in 1892.⁸⁵

Though Governor Shortridge campaigned on Populist issues, he quickly turned against the farmers, favoring Democrats for political appointments and privately assuring railroads the support of his administration. With governor Shortridge's support, the GOP legislature quashed a

⁸⁴ Larry Remele, "'God Helps Those Who Help Themselves': The Farmers Alliance and Dakota Statehood," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 37 (Autumn, 1987), 22-33; Jon K. Lauck, *Prairie Republic: The Political Culture of Dakota Territory, 1879-1889* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2010) traces religious and republican impulses in the Dakota Alliance.

⁸⁵ D. Jerome Tweton, "Considering Why Populism Succeeded in South Dakota and Failed in North Dakota," *South Dakota History* 22 (Winter, 1992): 331-35; R. Alton Lee, *Principle Over Party: The Farmers' Alliance and Populism in South Dakota, 1880-1900* (Pierre: South Dakota State Historical Society Press, 2011), 60-61; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 221-222.

state terminal elevator bill and sidestepped all major Independent reform measures. In 1894, 1896, and 1898 North Dakota voters rejected Independent-Democratic fusion tickets that called almost exclusively for free silver and downplayed the Populist subtreasury plan and other reforms. Presidential hopeful Democrat William Jennings Bryan, whom the Populist Party also nominated, made a poor showing in North Dakota in 1896. Little agrarian reform came out of the Bismarck statehouse during the 1890s. After the economic depression of 1893, crops improved, the Great Northern reduced freight rates, and railroads built grain loading platforms, while the Independents' focus on free silver failed to stir the electorate. As the twentieth century dawned, McKenzie and the "Old Gang" solidified Republican power over North Dakota, and Populism as a political force disappeared from the local, state, and national levels.⁸⁶

It is instructive to compare the efflorescence of Populism in North Dakota with the more successful agrarian political insurgency in South Dakota in the 1890s. A more able leader than Walter Muir, South Dakota Alliance head Henry L. Loucks directed an independent strategy for Populism in the state. Loucks guided the Alliance to reject fusion with state Democrats and to adhere to the national People's Party platform at the expense of a narrow focus on the issue of free silver. Though South Dakota Populists lost in 1892 and 1894, they surpassed the Democrats to become the state's second-strongest party. From this seat of power, Populists were able to dictate the terms of fusion with Democrats in 1896, and they captured the state government where Populist governor Andrew Lee signed several reform measures into law. In 1898 Populists entered into an uneasy fusion arrangement with silver Republicans and Democrats, whereby the People's Party lost its identity and disappeared from the scene in the wake of a big state GOP victory that year. In comparison, North Dakota Populists narrowly focused on free silver and

⁸⁶ Tweton, "Considering Why Populism Succeeded in South Dakota and Failed in North Dakota," 335-38; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 224-26.

operated an inflexible political strategy, committing the insurgency, election after election, to fusion with Prohibitionists and Democrats. In South Dakota, Loucks, an exceptional leader in comparison with his counterpart in North Dakota, steered the Alliance and later Populism along an independent course guided by a broader reform agenda and engaged in political fusion only at opportune political moments, though fusion still diluted the party in 1898.⁸⁷

Though Populism in the long-run did not enjoy traditional political success, the party and the movement behind it did influence agrarian ideology and strategy for the next generation of movement actors. Populists placed a high value on the education of members in political economy. Its publishing wing, the National Reform Press Association, and adoption of new publishing technology, demonstrated the importance of movement propaganda. Populism revealed the need for a concrete political strategy, as its “wars of maneuver” in the formation of state People’s parties showed, and in the “fusion” strategy in both the South and West. As a movement, Populism represented an innovative form of collective action, one that showed the importance of framing issues such as antimonopoly, organizing through mobilizing structures, using novel repertoires of economic and political action, and operating strategically in response to real opportunities and constraints.

An examination of the rise and fall of farmers’ movements in the Canadian West during the same period through the lens of sustained contentious politics reveals reasons for differing levels of success and divergent outcomes between Canadian and American farm organizations in the late nineteenth century. After a land boom in southern Manitoba in the early 1880s, the bubble burst, drought set in, and frost destroyed the wheat crop of the nascent grain industry.

⁸⁷ Tweton, “Considering Why Populism Succeeded in South Dakota and Failed in North Dakota,” 338-44.

Similar to the responses of farmers in the northern plains to times of economic stress, in late 1883 the Manitoba and North-West Farmers' Protective Union formed at Winnipeg. The American Farmers' Alliance inspired its creation, and one scholar calls it a "brother to the Alliance," but unlike the Alliance, the Canadian organization did not have strong ties to existing social or community networks. The body opened membership to any male over eighteen years of age, regardless of occupation. Not limiting membership to agriculturists meant the Farmers' Protective Union could only make limited use of agrarian-specific frames and repertoires for collective action. Many of its demands, such as provincial control of natural resources, railway construction under provincial guidance, a lower tariff, and the call for end of western immigration until the federal government addressed these issues, did not reflect themes reasonable or familiar to farmers, nor were they supported by relevant strategies or repertoires of collective action. Outlandish suggestions that Manitoba should secede from the Dominion did not garner the Union additional support. By the mid-1880s, the Union only boasted a few hundred members and dissolved under the charge that it was merely a Liberal Party puppet.⁸⁸

With exception of the short-lived late-nineteenth-century Farmers' Protective Union in Manitoba, the rest of the prairies—at this time organized into the Northwest Territories—simply did not have sufficient population density or a fully developed wheat economy to support agrarian organization commensurate to the Farmers' Alliance and Populism in the United States. The province of Ontario did, however. In Michigan in the 1880s a farm group, the Patrons of Industry, organized around purchasing co-ops. Calls from the contiguous farmland in Lambton, Ontario, led the Patrons to send Norman Smith in 1889 to set up the first Canadian lodge of the

⁸⁸ Warner, "The Farmers' Alliance and the Farmers' Union, 9-19; W.L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 10; Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada*, 123-24.

Patrons. The Canadian body set up sub-lodges based upon school districts, and into the early 1890s spread into adjacent Ontario counties and then into Quebec. By 1894 the organization boasted around 50,000 members in the Canadian east, and began to pursue various forms of cooperation and operated joint-stock companies.⁸⁹

In Ontario the Patrons decided to field third-party candidates in the 1894 provincial election on a vague, milquetoast platform of antimonopolism and tariff reduction. This declaration conflicted with the nonpartisan character of the organization and immediately Patrons candidates had to defend themselves against claims they were Tory adjuncts attempting to unseat the sitting provincial Liberal government. With a muddled platform, no official party leader, and no supportive press, the Patrons still managed to elect seventeen candidates as the electorate returned the Liberal government. In the Ontario legislature, the Patrons never formally created a party caucus, because they long claimed partisan politics represented the ills of modern industrial capitalism. Thus the Patrons, situated in the netherworld between party politics and a group of independent candidates, could not effectively play the parliamentary game. That some Patron legislators leaned Liberal and others Conservative also hampered political solidarity, as did their parliamentary leader's drinking problem. A dismal showing in the federal election of 1896 only reinforced the order's political inadequacy. Politics pushed the organization away from familiar cooperative and economic endeavors, and essentially dissolved the organization. The Patrons' political failures left a lasting conviction that Canadian farmers' organizations should tread lightly in politics and remain focused on education, economics, and cooperation.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada*, 110-19.

⁹⁰ Ramsay Cook, "Tillers and Toilers: The Rise and Fall of Populism in Canada in the 1890s," *Historical Papers/Communications historiques* 19, no. 1 (1984): 1-20; Wood, *A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada*, 125-42. On the Ontario agrarian movement, see Russel

What value does social movement theory add to a transnational study of farmers' movements of the North American plains on both sides of the U.S. and Canadian border? First, it can explain commonalities and differences in mobilization. Farmers in both countries viewed society through agrarian-specific frames—their vision of a rightly-ordered society.⁹¹ Ideas about a free market in the grain trade and a fair return for the labor of the producer emerged conspicuously as the rise and concentration of industrial capitalism affected rural America and Canada in the second half of the nineteenth century. The farmers' movements utilized and built upon mobilizing structures—they used organizational techniques and approaches tied to familiar community and social networks. And they framed enemies within the powerful and flexible idea of antimonopolism. This framework also helps identify the ways in which farmers' organizations promote their agendas, and it sheds light on the movements' interactions with existing authorities, including engagement with political challengers and even with other social organizations.

This methodological approach helps identify common strategies across the international border and the impact of divergent repertoires. Most of these organizations began with cooperative economic strategies with which they were already conversant. They formed purchasing or selling co-ops, or took ownership and control of local grain elevators, or called for a larger share of the terminal market or for regulation of railroads. Some went beyond to demand public ownership of grain elevators and transportation systems. Farmers, their wives, and their children—often isolated on rural homesteads—came to meetings to better themselves economically and intellectually, but also to sing songs, play games, and generally fraternize with

Hann, *Some Historical Perspectives on Canadian Agrarian Movements: Ontario Origins of Agrarian Criticism of Canadian Industrial Society* (Toronto: New Hogtown, 1973).

⁹¹ Robert C. McMath makes a strong case for this in the introductory chapter of *American Populism*.

like-minded folk. The organizations published newspapers and educated members in particular views of political economy. Some members drew the movement into politics, where the farmers felt less comfortable and had to maneuver in a different atmosphere among lawyers and businessmen and professional politicians. Politicized farmers often found that simply passing a law favorable to agriculture did not automatically ameliorate the problem.

This methodological approach also helps explain the different ways the ideas and strategies, and the movements themselves, “diffused” across political borders, and in doing so focuses analysis on the cross-border interaction of farm groups. Though not widespread in the late nineteenth century, connections did exist. Twenty-year-old future Ontario agrarian leader W.C. Good, for example, wrote to his uncle in the U.S. in 1896, “What do you think of the Populist idea, co-operation instead of competition, union instead of antagonism in trade? Don’t you think the principle is sound, economic and Christian?” By the first decade of the twentieth century, such binational connections represented a powerful impulse. Finally, the approach assists in explaining the differing outcomes of similar movements. It helps identify incongruent political structures, the efficacy of strategies, opportunities and constraints and their effect upon the movements, and the relationship to and response of existing authorities.⁹²

Essentially, the shared experiences of the late-nineteenth-century farmers’ movements of the United States and Canada left a residue of memory and experience upon which twentieth-century movements drew and built. The recognition that economic cooperation was familiar, relatively effective, and tied to farmers’ daily activities was probably the biggest lesson taken into the twentieth century. The scale of such cooperation would become much vaster after the turn of the century, but the basic premise and accessibility of working together made sense to

⁹² Quoted in Cook, “Tillers and Toilers,” 15.

generations of farmers. Twentieth-century wheat farmers also realized that political involvement is often perilous. Americans and Canadians learned that lesson from Populism, and the Canadians experienced it first-hand with the Patrons of Industry in Ontario. Farmers still chose the political route in the first half of the twentieth century, but they did so with previous experiences in mind and with new and innovative strategies. Essentially, farmers on the isolated northern plains faced challenges together and struggled to make their lives and the lives of their children a little better. It is to those struggles that we now turn.

Chapter Two

Grain Exchanges and Grain Elevators: Farmers, Farm Organizations, and Ideas Across the Forty-ninth Parallel, 1905-1915

North Dakota state senator S.S.H. Greeley strode before his colleagues in the Bismarck statehouse in early 1915. Sympathetic to the farmers' plight, he gave an impassioned speech describing the unscrupulous actions of the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, a grain exchange that monopolized the terminal market and could continue to do so without a North Dakota state grain elevator. Greeley called the trading floor, where speculators bought and sold the farmers' grain, "The Pit." When trading commences in the morning, Greeley began, the greedy grain speculators "swoop down upon one another with the swiftness of the vulture and the talons of the eagle, to devour the dollar even as buzzards push and fight for the dead carcass of the plains." In this frenzy, he noted, the Elevator Monopoly calmly stands aloof, assessing the situation. The Elevator man, experienced, confident, protected by law and wealth, waits for the opportune time when he "dives upon the maddened throng" and as a "lion [he] scatters the small beasts." Greeley, now thoroughly worked up, paced the capitol floor and finished his speech with a flurry: "The mad pit in action! [T]his is the game which shapes the destinies of the farm, controls legislatures, subsidizes the press, molds public opinion and forces children to follow the plow."¹

¹ "The Pit," Extract from Address of S.S.H. Greeley Before the North Dakota Legislature, 2 Feb. 1915, in *Proposed Farmers Terminal Elevator, St. Paul, Minnesota* (Equity Cooperative Exchange: St. Paul, 1915), 16, Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, 1915," Box 1, Equity Cooperative Exchange (ECE) Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

Only weeks before, the Republican-controlled state government ruled the construction and ownership of a public terminal grain elevator not feasible, though the measure had passed two previous consecutive legislative sessions and a 1914 referendum vote. The year 1915 represents a crucial juncture in the shared history of farmers' organizations in North Dakota, Saskatchewan, and the rest of prairie Canada. As Greeley's capitol exhortations suggest, by then farmers' cooperative marketing organizations had failed to make significant inroads at the terminal market, and North Dakota political leaders offered little more than words in support of breaking the Chamber's hold on grain marketing in the northern plains. In contrast, the interprovincial farmers' marketing organization in Canada channeled agrarian power in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba to win a significant victory against the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, realize financial success, and acquire a farmers' terminal elevator at the head of the Great Lakes. In this, both federal and provincial legislatures supported the farmers' movements to a significant degree. As the state of North Dakota struggled with the question of a public grain elevator, the federal government in Canada had already constructed a state-of-the-art terminal elevator at Port Arthur, Ontario.

The Equity Cooperative Exchange, the farmers' marketing body in North Dakota, recognized that their Canadian brethren had achieved success unknown to American wheat farmers, and Equity leaders reached across the boundary to forge connections with the Canadian agrarian organizations. Canadian leaders, eager to spread their successes, worked closely with Equity. The Canadians created not only an economic cooperative movement, but one that drew upon social and community networks. The North Dakotans needed to learn this lesson.

This is the story of the wheat country straddling an international boundary, which harbored similar groups of farmers who faced the same challenges with the same aspirations.

The divergent histories of farmers' marketing cooperatives and their relations to the state, provincial, and federal political structures in the United States and Canada reveals how a political line drawn upon a map can have significant repercussions in historical development.

The Grain Exchange and Organized Farmers in Western Canada

By the turn of the century, the European (especially British) and American settlers of Western Canada harbored a cooperative ethos built upon Old World traditions. Many soon-to-be agrarian leaders had also been a part of the English cooperative movement, itself an outgrowth of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, which established a cooperative store in 1844. In the city of Rochdale, hand loom weavers, increasingly displaced by industrial machinery, created a variety of cooperative wholesale societies, banks, and agricultural purchasing bodies to better their condition. The general cooperative principles by which they operated included one vote for each stockholder, patronage dividends (profits returned to members), cash-only business, and limiting individual ownership of shares. By 1900 similar co-ops in diverse fields blanketed Britain and Europe, did millions of dollars in business, and returned to members millions of dollars in profits.²

Though cooperating farmers did not always follow the Rochdale model exactly, most agreed on the general beliefs that undergirded the modern cooperative movement. The experience of those nineteenth-century English hand weavers suggested that agricultural cooperation could end farmers' exploitation by business and banking conglomerates, reduce the domination of capital in the industrial-agricultural arena, offer farmers a larger role in business

² Clyde H. Filley, *Cooperation in Agriculture* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1929), 18-28; Malcolm Sargent, *Agricultural Co-operation* (Hampshire: Gower Publishing, 1982), 13-41; John Lee Coulter, *Co-operation Among Farmers: The Keystone of Rural Prosperity* (New York: Sturgis & Walton, 1917), 18.

decisions, curb profiteering and speculation, and make more efficient the marketing of agricultural products. A sentiment common among prairie farmers indicated that only the cooperative strength of wheat farmers could match the power of grain trade, railroad, and financial conglomerates. To those steeped in the cooperative tradition of the Rochdale pioneers, the entire competitive ethic of industrial capitalism was wrong, and direct political involvement rarely if ever produced needed reforms. In this view, agricultural cooperation represented the only moral, ethical, and true way forward.³

Many late-nineteenth and early-twentieth-century settlers, some soon-to-be influential leaders in prairie agrarian circles, held a worldview informed by British Fabianism. Founded in the 1880s, Fabian socialism took a gradual, evolutionary approach to the alteration of the existing competitive economic system. Through education, the dissemination of socialist doctrine, persuasion, reason, and political pressure Fabians believed committed socialists could take the reins of capitalism peacefully and control it for the public good. This was a socialism not based on complete nationalization of industries, but on leaders steeped in the rational benefits of collective work. In the prairies and elsewhere in North America, Fabians created a transatlantic network of advocates and ideas.⁴

Before the creation of large-scale Canadian farmers' organizations in the first decade of the twentieth century, settlers in Saskatchewan and the prairie provinces created and participated in a variety of informal and formal cooperative and mutually beneficial bodies and practices.

³ Ian MacPherson, "The Origins of the Canadian Co-operative Movement, 1900-1914, in ed. MacPherson, *One Path to Co-operative Studies: A Selection of Papers and Presentations* (Victoria, BC: New Rochdale Press, 2007), 8-24.

⁴ John Callaghan, *Socialism in Britain since 1884* (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 30-44; T.L. Jarman, *Socialism in Britain: From the Industrial Revolution to the Present Day* (New York: Taplinger, 1972), 90-101; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998), 65-66.

Churches and church buildings served as meeting places and organizing nodes in many rural Saskatchewan communities. In Pinwherry, near Biggar east of Saskatoon, community members built of sod the first Protestant church in 1908. The church building served as the center for summer picnics and rallies, and winter concerts and social gatherings. The early Saskatchewan farmers' organizations met in similar church buildings across the province.⁵

School districts represented the first formal organization structures in the countryside. Parents formed a School Board when the number of children in a community reached a dozen or so, and from there elected Trustees to guide and handle the formation of an educational system. Like the church building, the school house represented the meeting place for a variety of community activities. The schoolhouse in Tweedyside School District, also near Biggar, Saskatchewan, hosted the meetings and activities of six organizations, including a women's section of the locals Grain Growers' organization, and sports, theater, and study groups. In many rural communities, the School Districts often served as the starting point for the creation of local government units, within which residents directed area business.⁶

Of the provinces of Canada, Saskatchewan had a high rate of cooperation and farmers soon organized cooperatives to a large extent. The dispersed settlements, scattered rural populations, and need for sociability among isolation accounted for part of this, as did practical needs such as building roads, creating communication systems, or clearing snow, which could not be accomplished without habits of mutuality. As such, Saskatchewan farmers developed a cooperative ethos, as had their forbearers in Europe and the United States. This prepared them, as did the leadership of those familiar with and trained within the traditions of the English

⁵ Donald E. Willmott, "The Formal Organizations of Saskatchewan Farmers, 1900-65," in ed. Anthony W. Rasporich, *Western Canada: Past and Present* (Calgary: McClelland and Stewart West, 1975), 31.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-33.

cooperative movement and Fabian socialism, for the creation of and participation in the large-scale agrarian organizations of the twentieth century.⁷

The prospects of growing wheat brought these settlers to the province, and railroads expanded track lines into Saskatchewan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to meet the demands of the mono-crop economy and population boom. The Canadian Pacific especially worked with private companies to build line elevators along particular railroad routes. A few companies developed monopoly control of grain storage, which represented a significant development because by Saskatchewan by 1912 came to have the most elevators of any province in Canada. The farm economy developed rapidly, and Saskatchewan led the way among the prairie provinces as 461 homesteads in 1895 jumped precipitously to almost 20,000 in 1903. More specifically, the grain economy formed a foundation of around 13,000 wheat farms in 1900 to 56,000 in 1906. In the same period, wheat acreage increased from 650,000 to 3.3 million, and the number of bushels harvested improved to an amazing 50 million from only 4.3 million.⁸

The growing population of Western Canada, the economic importance of the grain economy, and the region's commensurate increasing political clout convinced Ottawa to address the agrarian concerns regarding dockage, weights, and shipping. At local hearings across the West, grain farmers highlighted unfair practices they encountered while marketing the crop. A farmer and former Presbyterian minister, James Moffat Douglas, elected in to the House of Commons from East Assiniboia, inaugurated the legislation calling for a royal commission

⁷ *The Grain Growers' Association of Saskatchewan: What Is Its Work?* (n.d.), 1-4, John Maharg Fonds, File 22, Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Regina; John W. Bennet and Seena B. Kohl, "Characterological, Strategic, and Institutional Interpretations of Prairie Settlement," in ed. Rasporich, *Western Canada*, 23-25; Willmott, "The Formal Organizations of Saskatchewan Farmers," 37.

⁸ See Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 128-30, and the Appendix, 494-95, for farm statistics in the province from 1895-2001.

investigation of the grain trade. An Independent Liberal with Patrons of Industry support, Douglas demonstrated to Parliament the need for federal oversight of certain aspects of the prairie grain economy. The resulting federal legislation, the Manitoba Grain Act (1900), set up a regulatory system for the grain trade, headed by a federal warehouse commissioner. The commissioner, not a politician or lawyer but a prominent Manitoba farmer, had the power to inspect and license country and terminal elevators, supervise the handling and storage of grain, and investigate any farmer complaints regarding unfairness, fraud, or wrong-doing in the grain trade. To break monopoly elevator control, the legislation also demanded railroads establish flat warehouses where needed.⁹

The royal commission visited the appropriate channels of the grain trade in Minnesota and based its recommendations, which became the Manitoba Grain Act, on that state's Railroad and Warehouse Commission Act. Despite the close similarities of the Minnesota and Manitoba acts, Canada entered the twentieth century with broad federal regulation of its grain trade system, while similar federal standards in the U.S. had to wait until 1916. Several reasons explain this. The state of Minnesota encompassed vast wheat growing areas, a terminal market, a dominant milling center, and a Great Lake shipping terminal all within its boundaries. The complete scope of the grain trade existed entirely within its borders, making such comprehensive regulations necessary and reasonable. In Canada, the grain growing areas were interprovincial, crossing Manitoba and the North-West Territories. The nearest terminal shipping point to the Winnipeg Exchange existed hundreds of miles to the east, at the Thunder Bay ports of Fort William and

⁹ Harald S. Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation in Western Canada* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928), 23-25.

Port Arthur in Ontario, along Lake Superior. This, combined with the fact that the Dominion government administered the Territories, necessitated federal regulation.¹⁰

In the mid-nineteenth century, the United Provinces of Upper (Ontario) Canada and Lower (Quebec) Canada established grain regulations, and after Confederation this legislation applied to the Dominion as a whole. Federal inspection began at Port Arthur and Winnipeg as Western grain began arriving later in the century. These regulations, applying only to inspection and grading, focused on the needs of grain dealers and middlemen. In 1900 with the Manitoba Grain Act, however, federal statute now operated at the behest of the farmer and applied to grain dealers and middlemen, and attempted to ensure fairness among all facets of the movement of wheat from the prairies to terminal market. To the envy of the American wheat grower, his Canadian counterpart by the turn of the century enjoyed the protection of the Dominion government.¹¹

Farmers soon realized that federal law did not necessarily or automatically create optimal marketing conditions. At Indian Head, along the CPR line near Regina in east-central Saskatchewan, a railroad car shortage failed to meet the demands of the 1901 bumper crop in wheat. Only a fraction of the 2.5 million bushels made it to market, the remainder rotting in fields, jammed in elevators, or stored floor-to-ceiling in quickly built ramshackle granaries. Local prominent farmers W.R. Motherwell and John A. Millar turned to the Indian Head Agricultural Society and its members for remedy. Here and at other farmers' meetings in eastern Saskatchewan, from the border with Manitoba to Regina, the car shortage affected all and produced a common experience around which Motherwell helped create the first province-wide

¹⁰ Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation*, 25-26.

¹¹ C.F. Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), ch. 1; Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation*, 26-29.

agrarian organization, the Territorial Grain Growers' Association (TGGA). At its first meeting in February 1902, the TGGA settled on a strategy of political pressure. They sent a delegation to Ottawa and demanded their resolutions be added as an amendment to the Manitoba Grain Act. Though the legislation had shortcomings, the now-organized farmers believed regulation remained the best way to address marketing problems. The TGGA resolutions became almost verbatim a significant amendment to the Act. It stipulated a series of measures designed to make marketing more efficient, especially through a requirement that railroads provide adequate cars at every shipping point and keep records of the shipper, the shipment, and the distributed boxcars.¹²

The harvest of 1902 revealed another bumper crop and yet another car shortage. Here the young farmers' organization altered tactics. TGGA leader Motherwell urged the Warehouse Commissioner to visit the shipping point at Sintaluta, which had been particularly hit hard by the lack of boxcars, and bring legal action against the Canadian Pacific, under the authority of the Manitoba Grain Act. Legislation and amendments at the moment did not produce results, so Motherwell and the TGGA turned to legal action. The Commissioner personally visited Sintaluta, affirmed Motherwell's account, and brought suit against the railroad. In a rural schoolhouse courtroom, the judge found the CPR liable for the car shortages, imposed penalties, and forced the equal distribution of cars under rule of law. The farmers had won.¹³

Even at this early juncture in the agrarian movement, the strategy of the TGGA is identifiable. Use the numerical clout of the farmers' organization to place political pressure upon Parliament. This pressure often led to the creation of protective federal legislation. Motherwell

¹² R.D. Colquette, *The First Fifty Years: A History of United Grain Growers Limited* (Winnipeg: The Public Press Limited, 1957), 17-20.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

then waited to see if the relevant regulatory body enforced the legislation. If this was not the case, the farmers brought legal action against the offending parties. This progression of tactics repeated itself in the Grain Growers' ongoing wars of maneuver with power holders in the Western Canadian grain trade.

The victory in the "Sintaluta Test Case" opened unprecedented opportunities for agrarian organizational expansion, opportunities of which Motherwell took advantage. TGGGA locals formed across the Qu'Appelle Valley, and he helped form in 1903 the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association (MGGA) which joined the TGGGA in applying pressure frequently upon Ottawa, usually by sending representatives to lobby on behalf of the prairie farmers, for various revisions and amendments of the Manitoba Grain Act. The two farmers' bodies became the "watchdogs" of the Grain Act.¹⁴

What is to account for the development of this remarkable organizational power in only a few years? It is clear the TGGGA framed agrarian organization uniquely around grain marketing. In this its cooperative approach differed from the European heritage, which focused on complementing small-scale farming, and selling and manufacturing. The TGGGA organized for one purpose: to address the marketing needs of large commercial wheat farms. This made the Grain Growers' Associations unique relative to earlier Western Canadian agrarian organizations, in that they formed to enforce the Manitoba Grain Act and to control and regulate marketing. W.R. Motherwell made the point: "It was not a question then of growing crops but of marketing them. In the fall when the elevator opened you would see a rush of wagons wheel to wheel, to see who would get there first. We on the frontier, with twenty-five miles and more to drive to market, spending hours on prairie trails under the midnight sky—we felt most the need of

¹⁴ Hugh Boyd, *New Breaking: An Outline of Co-operation Among Western Farmers of Canada* (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, 1938), 36.

organizing.” Another early TGGA leader stated, “Well, we grew the wheat, which was valueless unless marketed. Wheat was regarded as gold by the Easterner, but it held no value for us until shipped out of the country.”¹⁵

The underlying approach of mutualism was consistent with the Western farmers’ cooperative heritage. The Dominion Experimental Farm system made Indian Head a key location in the 1880s, and many early TGGA leaders had experience in the government program. They also had learned lessons from the political failures of the Patrons of Industry. Thus the TGGA used an innovative tactic—the political pressure group. Motherwell and the other leaders recognized the opportunity of the car shortages to press the Warehouse Commissioner to enforce the provisions of the Manitoba Grain Act. This type of pressure continued as the TGGA, later joined by the MGGA, constantly sought regulatory enforcement from the Commission and Ottawa. When Ottawa carved the North-West Territories into the provinces of Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905, the TGGA became the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association (SGGA) and it continued to protect the farmers’ interests in all manners, maintain a watchful eye on legislation, and when needed apply pressure to appropriate political bodies.¹⁶

The SGGA’s focus on marketing naturally led it to the grain’s final destination in Canada: the terminal market in Manitoba, where members of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange bought and sold the farmers’ crop. The organization desired more information on the operation of the terminal market, so members raised \$100 and sent their president, Edward A. Partridge, to

¹⁵ *Romance of the Grain Growers’ of Saskatchewan* (July, 1915), 1-3, Maharg Fonds, File 22, SAB, Regina; William A. Mackintosh, *Agricultural Cooperation in Western Canada* (Kingston: Queen’s University, 1924), 5-14; Boyd, *New Breaking*, 30-31.

¹⁶ *The Grain Growers’ Association of Saskatchewan: What Is Its Work?* (n.d.), 3-4; *Constitution and By-Laws: Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association*, 1913, File 22, Maharg Fonds; Boyd, *New Breaking*, 18-28. On Manitoba agrarianism, see Jeffery Taylor, *Fashioning Farmers: Ideology, Agricultural Knowledge and the Manitoba Farm Movement, 1890-1925* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1994).

investigate the workings of the Exchange. Partridge, a farmer for twenty-five years at Sintaluta, exuded passion and intensity in all he did. Even the loss of his foot in a binder accident did not stop him from indefatigably fighting for the grain growers. In 1905, after several months' stay in Winnipeg, Partridge returned to Saskatchewan and proclaimed the Exchange exclusionary and exploitative. Its members monopolized the grain export business and pressured smaller commission firms and country elevators to pay the farmers low prices at local points, he argued. Partridge did not frame the Winnipeg Exchange as an enemy the farmer should fight—instead of battling the Exchange, he suggested, farmers should join the Exchange.¹⁷

The constitutions of the Grain Growers' Associations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba defined the organizations as “educational,” non-trading entities. Partridge realized the farmers must instead organize a business entity that could garner a seat on the Winnipeg Exchange. He proposed the Grain Growers' Grain Company (GGGC), a joint-stock farmers' terminal marketing cooperative based on Rochdale principles. The company would sell stock, limit stockholders to four shares each, give one man one vote, and return patronage dividends to members. To the farmers this represented a familiar type of cooperative organization, but the purchase of a seat on the Winnipeg Exchange represented a common difficulty for such farmer terminal marketing experiments. Partridge based his proposal on the Minnesota Farmers Exchange (MFE). Founded in 1904, the MFE operated along Rochdale lines and in 1905 sought to purchase a seat on the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. As a terminal marketing co-op its situation looked promising, with already \$500,000 worth of stock purchased and members' grain selling through an outside commission firm. Though based in Minnesota, a North Dakota grain

¹⁷ Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation in Western Canada*, 43-45; Colquette, *The First Fifty Years*, 26-28.

grower served as president and many North Dakota wheat farmers sold their grain through the MFE.¹⁸

The stock-selling drive began at Sintaluta in 1906, where fresh memories of the farmers' victory against the CPR remained. The GGGC utilized the SGGA locals' structure, and sold shares through the SGGA membership structure. Partridge took the idea to Manitoba, where he met with a favorable response. He found an energetic, perennially optimistic Swan River Valley farmer, "Honest" John Kennedy. Ontario-born Kennedy had lived a life of hard labor, working as a young man as a Michigan lumberjack before settling in Manitoba and growing grain. At a local meeting he heard Partridge's idea for the farmers' company and as a delegate of the Swan River Grain Growers' Association Kennedy was well placed to head the province's stock drive.¹⁹

Seeming never to sleep or stop talking, Kennedy did two things that helped sell enough stock to garner a seat for the GGGC on the Winnipeg Exchange. As a supporter of the Manitoba Conservative Party, Kennedy convinced farmer and Tory Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) J.W. Robson to speak in support of the farmers' company. Second, Kennedy helped set up a GGGC booth at the annual Winnipeg Industrial Exhibition in the summer of 1906. Here Kennedy spearheaded stock sales and disseminated information. Through his efforts in Manitoba and along the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border, through the existing networks of the MGGA and the SGGA, and building upon the momentum of the legislative victories under the Manitoba Grain Act, the Grain Growers' Grain Company purchased a seat on the Winnipeg Exchange and

¹⁸ Theodore Saloutos, "The Rise of the Equity Cooperative Exchange," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 32 (June, 1945): 40-41; Steven J. Keillor, *Cooperative Commonwealth: Co-ops in Rural Minnesota, 1859-1939* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2000), 227; Mackintosh, *Agricultural Cooperation*, 18.

¹⁹ Colquette, *The First Fifty Years*, 31-34.

“prepared to compete with the established trade on the most highly organized market in Western Canada.”²⁰

Business began for the GGGC on 5 September 1906, but the Winnipeg Exchange soon found the cooperative structure of the company, that of patronage dividends, in violation of its internal by-laws. Returning profits to members looked a lot like paying a commission to both the purchaser and shipper of the wheat, an “undignified practice,” according to the board to which president Partridge testified regarding the matter. The Exchange expelled the GGGC and threatened to penalize any company that continued to do business with the farmers’ company. The expulsion has as much to do with the by-law technicality as it did with Partridge’s bellicose public manner towards the Exchange and trading companies on the Exchange that genuinely feared the upstart farmers’ business.²¹

Partridge and the Grain Company had to act quickly. Business was brisk in the fall of 1906, and consigned cars of wheat continued to line up outside the company’s headquarters. The sales managers shipped some of this wheat directly to millers in the East, or to the terminal elevator at Fort William. These acts of desperation drained the company’s bank account, which maintained solvency only through the personal collateral and guarantees of president Partridge and vice president John Kennedy. A Winnipeg representative of the Scottish Cooperative Wholesale Society managed to purchase a large portion of the consigned wheat. The sight of co-ops helping co-ops buoyed the farmers’ spirits for a while, but these measures were not permanent alternatives to trading outside the Winnipeg Exchange.²²

²⁰ Hopkins Moorhouse, *Deep Furrows* (Toronto: George McLeod, 1918), 90-95; Patton, *Grain Growers’ Cooperation*, 48-49.

²¹ Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 118-23.

²² Moorhouse, *Deep Furrows*, 93-126; Patton, *Grain Growers’ Cooperation*, 50-53.

Partridge and Kennedy turned to familiar allies and familiar tactics. On behalf of the GGGC the MGGGA filed with the royal grain commission a complaint against the Exchange. The complaint argued that the Exchange colluded with the Northwest Grain Dealers' Association to restrain trade. The MGGGA timed the issuance perfectly—a farmer had just become the head of the royal commission. From here the royal commission urged a federal legal investigation into the matter, from which came an indictment, but ultimately clearance of the Exchange of official wrongdoing. At the same time, in late 1906, the MGGGA used its clout to press the provincial government, soon to face an election, to require the Exchange to alter its rules and allow the GGGC a reinstatement of trading privileges. Here again the Grain Growers' used a combination of tactics to get results. They used political pressure to force the grain commissioners to investigate a complaint, and coupled that strategy with the implementation of legal action.²³

The Exchange understandably refused to alter its rules and methods of operation to accommodate a single company. In early 1907 the GGGC did earn back its seat on the Winnipeg Exchange, through its own flexible strategies. The company met Exchange demands to discontinue the cooperative patronage structure. In other words, it abandoned a central element of what made it a classic Rochdale-style farmers' cooperative. The directors decided to conform to the rules of the grain trade they had so frequently denounced. The GGGC became a typical grain commission firm, albeit owned by farmer stockholders, who understood that by jettisoning patronage dividends the company operated more competitively, funneled net earnings into capitalization rather than rebates, and ultimately became stronger and built a foundation for future expansion. The GGGC also pushed E.A. Partridge out of the leadership and replaced him

²³ Allan G. Levine, "The Voice of the Canadian Grain Trade: A History of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange to 1943" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1984), ch. 3; Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation*, 53-56.

with the less abrasive Thomas A. Crerar. Partridge had antagonized the Exchange leading up to the expulsion, and operated too rigidly for what had become a fluid situation in need of innovation and business acumen. Remarkable, the farmers accepted this whole-heartedly. It seemed as though they were willing to work within the system if it led to business success, even if it meant the abandonment of familiar and long-standing cooperative strategies. Indeed, the GGGC developed by 1914 into a financially successful, internationally respected, interprovincial farmers' grain marketing organization.²⁴

The farmers' organizations of the prairie provinces represented by 1910 a united, coordinated front fighting for rural interests. For instance, the financial successes of the GGGC enabled it to provide annual subsidies to the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, the MGGA, and the United Farmers of Alberta, an educational organization similar to its counterparts in the other prairie provinces. In the period 1909-14 the cooperative marketing organization provided financial assistance totaling \$85,000 to the three provincial societies. The GGGC also subsidized the official organ of the three organizations, the *Grain Growers' Guide*. These interprovincial connections provided uniformity and solidarity among farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba.²⁵

The Interprovincial Council of Grain Growers (ICGG), and later the Canadian Council of Agriculture (CCA) coordinated and harmonized the policies of the SGGA, MGGA, and UFA. Formed in 1907, the ICGG formulated common policies among the three agricultural societies

²⁴ MacPherson, "The Origins of the Canadian Co-operative Movement," 28-29; Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation*, 61-63. For business statistics up to 1914, see *Annual Report* of the GGGC (Winnipeg, 1914).

²⁵ Murray Knuttila, "*That Man Partridge*": *E.A. Partridge, His Thoughts and Times* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1994), 30; Paul Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1997 ed.), 26-27.

and formally represented them before government officials and government bodies. The CCA replaced the Interprovincial Council in 1909 and continued its coordinating work while it expanded membership with the addition of the Dominion Grange, the organizational body of Ontario farmers. The CCA also politically advised all the farmers' societies and more tightly knitted organized farmers together in purpose and goals.²⁶

Mobilization and Support through Education, Business, Religion, and Community

The interprovincial Grain Growers' Grain Company represented the business arm of the agrarian movement in the prairies—the farmers' marketing company operating on the Winnipeg Exchange and at the terminal market. The Grain Growers' Associations in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and the United Farmers of Alberta fulfilled a different need. As educational, religious, and community institutions, they put down roots among the farming population, and through co-ops sustained connections to the business interests of rural areas. Through these elements the SGGA grew and developed in an amazing manner through the prewar period. By 1915 the organization boasted 25,000 members and over 1,000 locals across the province. The SGGA appealed to most of the agrarian community through its social, education, business, and religious facets.²⁷

The average SGGA member had the closest and most regular contact with the local. Associated usually with a township or municipality, the local was embedded within the community. Mutuality, cooperation, social engagement, education, and work at the local level produced a collective ethos, attached the farmers to the SGGA, and strengthened the sinews

²⁶ Knuttila, "That Man Partridge", 33-34.

²⁷ *Romance of the Grain Growers*, 3-4.

between the movement and community. SGGA literature claimed the locals taught members “to know and trust each other and that they can act in common where there common interests are concerned.” In the sparsely populated rural areas of Saskatchewan, this trust often developed from a variety of social and entertainment functions conducted under the auspices of the SGGA.²⁸

SGGA locals usually created three committees to foster community development and fulfill rural people’s need for mental stimulation beyond the confines of agricultural economics. A Social Committee provided a variety of music and refreshments for the weekly winter meetings, and urged adherence to the motto of “Get acquainted. See how kind and social you can be.” The Literary Committee planned lectures on popular subjects, presented poetry, and organized study clubs focused on history, biology, or other topics. This group also organized literature theme nights, such as “Night with Tennyson” or “Night with Shakespeare.” Lastly, the Commercial Club focused on putting together debates on current events, including grain elevator monopolies, government ownership, party politics, and Canada’s place in the British Empire. The social activities of the SGGA, provided weekly at the local level throughout the winter down-time, gave rural folks, men and women, a sense of community development and personal interest.²⁹

The SGGA also sought to engage not only current members but entire towns and villages through large rallies. Through pervasive and frequent advertisements, organizers wanted town and village residents to feel as though the SGGA rally was the major social event in the area.

²⁸ Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909-1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 80-86; *Romance of the Grain Growers*, 4.

²⁹ *SGGA: What Is Its Work?* (n.d.), 9-11; *How to Conduct a Public Meeting*, Pamphlet No. 11 (Moose Jaw: 1916) File 22, Maharg Fonds, SAB, Regina.

Thus SGGA locals placed rally notices across communities in shop windows, in newspapers and magazines, on street corners, and anywhere else they might be seen. These rallies centered upon community singing, in which the SGGA local provided every attendee with a song book. As the main draw, community singing enticed farm folks to see SGGA skits (a mock trial for a farmer who had not yet joined the organization, for instance) and hear the SGGA message from a variety of male and female speakers. The SGGA, however, emphasized that the rallies should first and foremost be a fun and enjoyable social community event, with recruitment and SGGA business as secondary.³⁰

Increasing membership numbers, strengthening members' bonds with each other and increasing the cohesion between the movement and the community are implicit in these activities and approaches. The SGGA Central Office urged locals to recruit community leaders for organizational roles, and find a productive role for everyone in a given local. Selling subscriptions to the *Grain Growers' Guide*, for example, taught farmers the techniques and approaches toward organizing and canvassing—skills used to extend the reach of the SGGA into virgin territory. Though the SGGA, through the locals, sought to make “homes brighter” and “social life sweeter,” another motivation clearly existed, to extend the reach, influence, and membership of the organization.³¹

The inclusion of women and women's work represented a powerful and effective way to realize such goals. Many farmers' wives were already organized through Homemakers' Clubs, part of the adult education extension services at the University of Saskatchewan. Though mainly

³⁰ “Suggestions Re: Rallies,” (n.d.), Folder 2, File E.62, Violet McNaughton Papers, SAB, Saskatoon; *The Grain Growers' Song Book for Use in Local Meetings and Association Conventions* (Regina: Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, 1923).

³¹ *A New Line of Attack* (n.d.), 2-9, File 22, Maharg Fonds, SAB, Regina; *SGGA: What is Its Work?*, 9; Willmott, “The Formal Organizations of Saskatchewan Farmers,” 33-34.

focused on combating isolation and loneliness and improving the household, at local, district, and annual conventions the Clubs sought to have women transcend traditional roles by serving others through improving healthcare facilities, rural education, and promoting education through the establishment of libraries. With fourteen provincial sub-organizations and over 6,000 members by 1914, the Homemakers' Clubs provided the organizational foundation for one of the most vibrant women's collective of the early-twentieth-century prairies.³²

For many women, the Homemakers' Clubs served an important, though limited, function. Accompanying their husbands to SGGGA meetings and their participation in the activities of locals pressed many farmers' wives to elevate women's positions to be equal with men's within the Grain Growers' organization. The Women's Section of the SGGGA (WGGGA) moved beyond the Homemakers' Clubs in spearheading reforms of particular interest and relevance to women. The WGGGA brought increased respect and recognition for women within the farm movement in the province. SGGGA secretary F.W. Green helped convene, along with active Homemakers' Club participant Violet McNaughton, a convention of farm women as an auxiliary to the annual SGGGA convention in February 1913. From this meeting came the formation of the Women Grain Growers' Association the next year, with McNaughton as its first president. Born in England, Violet McNaughton moved to Harris, Saskatchewan in 1909 and married farmer John McNaughton soon after. She played a significant role in the major agrarian organizations of the

³² Georgina M. Taylor, "'Should I Drown Myself Now or Later?' The Isolation of Rural Women in Saskatchewan and Their Participation in the Homemakers' Clubs, the Farm Movement and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, 1910-1967," in ed. Kathleen Storrie, *Women, Isolation, and Bonding: The Ecology of Gender* (Toronto: Methuen, 1987), 81-84.

province, first as WGGGA president through 1920 and then as a director of the SGGA from 1919 to 1926.³³

Though they remained two distinct bodies, women were given full standing and membership in the men's section, the SGGA, which also financially supported the women's organization. Through the WGGGA McNaughton and the other farm women sought to nurture contacts between isolated farm families, introduce labor saving devices to the homestead, raise the rural standard of living, promote prohibition and peace, and especially enact female suffrage. The latter was achieved in 1916, when both the SGGA and WGGGA pressured Premier Scott and the ruling provincial Liberals for women's suffrage, which was made law with little struggle.³⁴

In addition to the female franchise, the WGGGA sought to improve the quality of rural life through various means. The Country Life Movement in the U.S., which aimed to revitalize rural America and combat depopulation, also influenced WGGGA approaches, as it did other prairie women's organizations such as the United Farm Women of Alberta. The Canadian Council of Agriculture disseminated to the prairie farm organizations study guides for Country Life subjects. For instance, in Saskatchewan particularly many farm women found when in town for shopping or business few social comforts existed for their specific needs. Thus the WGGGA pioneered the establishment in town market centers of "rest rooms," indoor places for travelling farm women to attend to their young children, warm themselves on cold winter days, read and

³³ *Saskatchewan Women Grain Growers' Association: Its History, Constitution and Platform* (1914), 2; R.G. Marchildon, "Improving the Quality of Rural Life in Saskatchewan: Some Activities of the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers, 1913-1920," in eds. David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, *Building Beyond the Homestead: Rural History on the Prairies* (Calgary: The University of Calgary Press, 1985), 106. See also, Marchildon, "The Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association: A Study in Agrarian Activism" (M.A. Thesis, University of Victoria, 1982).

³⁴ *Saskatchewan WGGGA: Its History, Constitution and Platform*, 3-23. James William Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan, 1905-1929" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1976), 278-79.

relax by utilizing the rest room's modest library, or even use a stove to prepare a light meal. Many considered WGGa- and SGGa-sponsored rest rooms as significant advances in rural social comforts. WGGa members also raised money through bake sales and sale of needle work to help finance the construction of SGGa community halls for social activities. Women Grain Growers established travelling libraries, pressed the provincial government for improved rural maternal and general health care, and pursued a variety of additional measures aimed at improving the quality of rural life.³⁵

The men's section of the organization considered the WGGa an important facet of the farm movement. SGGa leaders made it a point to have representatives from as many WGGa locals as possible attend the annual SGGa meetings every February. The interprovincial and official periodical of all the grain growers' organization, the *Grain Growers' Guide*, targeted farm wives extensively. SGGa literature and press releases boasted that the organization was probably the first in all of Canada to accord women members equal status with men. Farm women provided links to the organizational connections of the Homemakers' Clubs, and as voters they could support SGGa-sponsored legislation. If not the first Canadian organization to do so, the inclusion of women as full members of the SGGa represented a major key to the organization's success, alongside its robust social and community framework.³⁶

Again and again SGGa leaders and literature made clear how education represented the organization's main goal. This is not surprising given the Rochdale pioneers' emphasis on education and the basic principle of cooperation which suggested it was the basis for social

³⁵ Marchildon, "Improving the Quality of Rural Life in Saskatchewan," 97-104; Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 171-72.

³⁶ J.B. Musselman, "Important Notice" (30 Dec. 1914), 2, and "Instructions to Local Secretaries, Re: District Conventions," n.p., McNaughton Papers, Folder 1, File E.62, SAB, Saskatoon; *A New Line of Attack* (n.d.), 20, Maharg Fonds, File 22, SAB, Regina; *Romance of the Grain Growers' of Saskatchewan*, 4.

change and the foundation from which to solve problems collectively. The SGGA Central Office urged locals to meet at least once a week to study, discuss pertinent issues, hear speakers, and debate. In doing so farmers learned about up-to-date scientific agricultural techniques and various cooperative strategies. At picnics lecturers imbued audiences with the collective ethos. The Central Office sent literature to the locals, and local representatives took back to their communities information from the annual SGGA conventions. The WGGA worked for improved rural schools. Violet McNaughton headed the SGGA Educational Committee and proclaimed, “We want education and the more education we have the more we want.” McNaughton sent out to locals reading suggestions including topics on economic theory, taxes and the single tax, tariffs, socialism, railroads, finance, debating, political economy, international relations, and a biography of Robert LaFollette. Such educational foci allowed the SGGA to frame issues, grievances, and remedies more successfully, and created an organizational body more easily mobilized during opportune moments.³⁷

Religion, of the Protestant persuasion, composed an important element of the Grain Growers’ educational corpus. Ministers, SGGA leaders, and locals across the provinces interlaced religion with the movement’s cooperative and business goals. One part of this involved assuaging members’ concerns that financially bettering themselves through marketing reform did not conflict with cooperative Christian teachings. As SGGA president John Maharg explained, one the organization’s goals is to “bring religion and business closer together.” The SGGA did this effectively, and in the process made the farmers’ movement and Protestant

³⁷ “Suggestive List of Books,” File E.67, McNaughton Papers, SAB, Saskatoon; L.J. Wilson, “Educating the Saskatchewan Farmer: Educational Work of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association,” *Saskatchewan History* 31 (Winter, 1978): 20-21; *Romance of the Grain Growers’ of Saskatchewan*, 4; MacPherson, “The Origins of the Canadian Co-operative Movement,” 18-20; Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 161-69.

Christianity one and the same, thus stitching the organization into the social fabric of rural Saskatchewan.³⁸

In doing so, the farm movement of prairie Canada formed a part of a much larger, transatlantic phenomenon commonly referred to in Britain as Social Christianity, or, in North America, the Social Gospel. As both titles suggest, the Social Gospellers concerned themselves with the application of Christ's teachings to everyday affairs, to the social environment. Social Christianity gained adherents and prominence throughout the late nineteenth century, and sought practical uses for God's message. Believers wanted to revitalize Protestantism, make it more relevant to people's lives, and use it to shape and guide all facets of society, including rural and agricultural society. The preservation of rural life, the incompatibility of capitalism and competition with cooperation and concern for one's fellow man, and selflessness represented prominent strains of the Social Gospel in the Canadian countryside.³⁹

The SGGA and MGGA connected to the Social Gospel through various threads. As mostly Methodist, Anglican, and Presbyterian clergy and church-goers, many leaders imbued the organizations with religious emphasis, as did Presbyterian ministers R.C. Henders and W.R. Wood, president and secretary, respectively, of the MGGA. Though not officially part of the SGGA, Salem Bland, the most influential of the Social Gospellers in the West, spoke at SGGA annual conventions and penned a regular column, "The Deeper Life," in the *Grain Growers' Guide*, in which he related Christ's teachings to the farmers' movement. Bland and others, who framed agricultural life and its challenges in religious terms, brought pious farmers into the

³⁸ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 6 June 1917, p. 10.

³⁹ Paul T. Phillips, *A Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880-1940* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), xiv-xv, and chs. 1, 3, and 6; Ramsay Cook, "Ambiguous Heritage: Wesley College and the Social Gospel Re-considered," *Manitoba History* 19 (Spring, 1990): 2-11.

organizational fold and elucidated the purposes of the movement in the light of the Gospels. Proponents of the Social Gospel funneled into the West through Protestant church colleges, such as Wesley College in Winnipeg and Regina College in Saskatchewan. None other than E.A. Partridge, the founder of one of the first successful agrarian organization in the prairies, exclaimed in the *Guide*, “Take your love of God, which in its practical form is love of your neighbor, into politics. Practical religion is for every day, but more especially for Convention day, Nomination day, Election day until our legislative halls are purged of those who represent the most heartless and selfish instincts of the race.”⁴⁰

The farm organizations of the prairies were themselves centers of religious revival. So deep was the SGGGA commitment to the principles of the Social Gospel that leaders created a formal day of celebration. On “Grain Growers’ Sunday” in June 1917, ministers addressed dozens of SGGGA locals across Saskatchewan, connecting the organization’s principles to Christ’s teachings. Organizers wanted to make clear the SGGGA and the broader farmers’ movement included more than marketing reform—their aims and goals fit neatly within the effort to establish God’s Kingdom on earth, through equity in all things, through the betterment of homes, and through increased access to education. On that Sunday, thousands of farmers hoped that “Prophets or Seers will speak to us and reveal the deep spiritual meaning” of the farm movement.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-28* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 15-16; Allen, “The Social Gospel as the Religion of the Agrarian Revolt,” in ed. Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook, *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W.L. Morton* (McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 174-86.

⁴¹ *First Grain Growers’ Sunday of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association*, Pamphlet No. 16 (Regina: Leader Publishing Co., 1917), 1-4.

Preachers and ministers took to the pulpit in rural school houses and churches across the province. They spoke on how the SGGA approached the “Christian ideal for social living” and how through its cooperative work weaned the farmers’ from “Ishmaelitic isolation” and “foolish individualism.” The SGGA teaches us that “life is more than money,” proclaimed the Methodist Reverend H.D. Ranna at Mawer, Saskatchewan, and that the Grain Growers’ are all members of “one Body in Christ.” At the Lockerbie SGGA local, the Reverend John Kitchen espoused how the organization’s principles of equity and humility led the farmers to serve others. A minister spoke at a local church at the behest of the Riverhurst local, with a large “shock of wheat in front of the pulpit.” As he spoke he frequently pointed to the new SGGA banner hung above him, and expounded on the meaning of “equity.”⁴²

For farmers not interested in religion, social intercourse, empowering women, or education, the SGGA offered tangible benefits through its business arms. The SGGA founded and ran the Saskatchewan Hail Insurance Commission of Regina and a Co-operative Wholesale Department based in Moose Jaw. Locals too organized a variety of co-ops, numbering 172 trading bodies in 1915. These co-ops returned profits back into the SGGA Central Office and the locals, rather than shareholders, of which there were none. In true Social Gospel fashion, the SGGA cooperatives followed the mantra “business for service” rather than “business for profit.” By doing business through local associations, the farmers developed collective thinking and came to experience the pecuniary benefits of cooperative principles put into action.⁴³

An examination of the Cobourg Grain Growers’ Association reveals how all these social, cooperative, religious, and educational elements operated in a single SGGA local in 1915 and

⁴² *Grain Growers’ Guide*, 6 June 1917, p. 10.

⁴³ *Romance of the Grain Growers’ of Saskatchewan*, 3, 6.

1916. This local met in a school house, held debates, heard lectures on how to form community co-ops, listened to music on a gramophone, and sang “Rule Britannia” and “God Save the King.” Members’ children closed meetings with a song titled “Grain Growers.” They created a social committee to spearhead social activities. In early 1915 members approved the creation of a women’s section, which sent delegates to the annual convention. Delegates brought back information and reports from each convention. The Cobourg local organized shipments of seed grain, at the suggestion of the Central Office supplied groceries to its members, created its own cooperative selling agency, provided supplies to the local school, and petitioned the government for a grain elevator near the town. Its president W.W. Wagg urged members to participate in the SGGA hail insurance program and to do their business through the Central Office’s co-ops.⁴⁴

If the GGGC allowed farmers to market their wheat through their own company, the SGGA offered the farmer everything else. Through the locals, members created a community ethos which strengthened the SGGA in its work across the province and extended its membership reach and farmers’ attachment to the movement. The locals offered social intercourse, entertainment, religious instruction, a prominent place for women, and a variety of educational materials. Members could conduct all types of business through their local Association. When the SGGA needed to mobilize members at opportune times, it could do so.

Farmers’ Elevators and Federal and Provincial Governments in Canada

In 1910 the agrarian situation seemed promising in Saskatchewan: farmers organized on a vast scale, their wheat sold on the terminal market through their own company, and governments responded to their marketing needs and demands. Constant education and awareness of the grain

⁴⁴ *Cobourg Grain Growers Minute Book*, 3-59, File 5, John Maharg Fonds, SAB, Regina.

trade system, by now ingrained in the minds of SGGA members, led the farmers to continue their critical evaluation of problems in wheat marketing and their proposal of cooperative strategies to better their position. Though the GGGC represented a trusted outlet at the terminal market, the grain growers' movement still lacked a sufficient line of farmer-owned or cooperative elevators to channel their wheat to the terminal market. Those few farmer elevators that did exist were not under common ownership and suffered from bad management (a situation that drove business to the line elevators) and competition from companies with monopoly control over the province's elevator and grain system.⁴⁵

SGGA education implanted in the farmers' heads the awareness of such monopoly control. Only a few companies owned the majority of elevators in the prairies. As such, these companies controlled much of the grain trade through aggregations of capital, ownership of line and country elevators, integration in the terminal market and export business, operation as commission agencies, and connections to milling agencies. Farmers themselves experienced every autumn the ramifications of monopoly control. The price spread between the Liverpool and local price reflected a myriad of deductions from the money the farmer received for his sale. These deductions came in the form of fees for weights and dockage, improper grading and mixing, and other dishonest means practiced by local elevator operators associated with the monopoly companies. Investigators found this type of malpractice existed at terminal elevators as well, when in 1909 the warehouse commissioner paid a surprise inspection visit to terminal elevators and found irregularities in mixing and dockage fees.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain*, 36-41.

⁴⁶ *Grain Growers' Guide*, Sept. 1908, p.3; 14 Aug. 1909, p.12; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 104-35.

The farmers' organizations of the prairie provinces exercised significant social, economic, and political clout. For instance, the SGGA annual conventions represented a premier public forum in Saskatchewan, equaled only by the Legislative Assembly itself. The SGGA, MGGA, and UFA looked to their earlier successful efforts in pressuring the federal government to enact legislative protections for producers' position in the grain grade, and now turned to influence their respective provincial governments to address these issues related to grain elevators.⁴⁷

In 1908 E.A. Partridge, who remained a respected agrarian leader across the prairies, laid out his plan for government ownership of an elevator system for the prairie provinces of Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan. The "Partridge Plan" sought provincial ownership of line elevators in each province and federal ownership of all terminal elevators. It also involved broader structural changes to the grain trade and the expansion of government control embodied in the creation of public warehouses. Such storage facilities could allow farmers to avoid marketing glut of harvest time but also would serve to issue farmers low-interest government loans on stored grain, reminiscent of the Populists' subtreasury plan. The Partridge Plan implied vast expansions of provincial government power across provincial boundaries. In April, the leaders of the SGGA met with Saskatchewan Liberal Premier Walter Scott to discuss the Partridge Plan, and the Saskatchewan government created an Elevator Commission to investigate the feasibility of the proposal.⁴⁸

From the beginning the Scott government came out against the Partridge Plan and questioned the expanded role and jurisdiction of the provincial government in implementing the

⁴⁷ Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 200.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 109-12, 138-40; *Report of the Elevator Commission of the Province of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Government Printer, 1911), 16, 28-29, 94.

vast reforms. This juncture revealed the first significant conflict between the Liberal Government and the organized farmers. If not managed well the SGGGA could easily turn against the provincial Liberals. It turned out that the SGGGA had publicly supported the Partridge Plan only to press the government for action, as a “calculated tactic of a pressure group,” a tactic used prior against the Dominion government. In private, SGGGA secretary F.W. Green and Liberal MLA and SGGGA director George Langley told Premier Scott that the SGGGA was willing to accept alternatives to the Partridge Plan, as long as the remedy served to break monopolistic elements among elevators. Once again, as when the GGGC dropped its practice of patronage dividends in order to achieve practical ends, the Saskatchewan farmers demonstrated their ideological flexibility and willingness to pursue practical reforms at the expense of dogmatism.⁴⁹

The Saskatchewan Government’s *Report of the Elevator Commission* rejected government ownership and offered a system of farmer-owned and -operated cooperative elevators. The role for the provincial government under this plan involved a loan of up to eighty-five percent of the cost of acquiring or constructing interior elevators, but only after cooperative SCEC locals put up fifteen percent of the necessary stock. Provincial government security for the loan came from the government’s control over the company’s capital stock and right of mortgage upon the company’s propertied holdings. The SGGGA accepted the government’s plan for a cooperative elevator system in Saskatchewan. Though some locals opposed it and continued to advocate for a public solution, most agreed with SGGGA leaders that negotiation and flexibility had provided an acceptable alternative to government elevators. Even E.A. Partridge admitted the benefits of some elements of the cooperative system. One local SGGGA leader from Saltcoats

⁴⁹ Duff Spafford, “The Elevator Issue, the Organized Farmer and the Government, 1908-11,” *Saskatchewan History* 14 (Autumn, 1962): 81-86.

explained that to refuse the government's proposal was "like looking a gift horse in the mouth." Premier Scott knew of the SGGGA's commitment to cooperative ideals, and for no prominent SGGGA farmer was government ownership an end in itself. Essentially, the SGGGA had coalesced behind the Partridge Plan for practical reasons and used it to pressure the provincial government to take some type of action against monopolistic elements in the grain trade and produce an acceptable solution. The Premier admitted in private that the SGGGA's commitment to the Partridge Plan was more "apparent than real."⁵⁰

Following the Government's *Report of the Elevator Commission*, in March 1911 legislation created the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company (SCEC). In Saskatchewan, little more was heard about government elevators. The Liberal Party in the province became, for the next two decades, the "farmers' party" due to its support of the bill. The SCEC became a clear success. It combined cooperative aspects of organization with financial support of the provincial government. In the SCEC's first year of operation it added to its ownership of elevators and returned significant profits to stockholders. Soon the company secured a seat on the Winnipeg Exchange. Politically, Premier Scott's skillful handling of the SGGGA's demands tightened the bonds between the province's organized farmers and the Liberal Party.⁵¹

The leadership and operation of the SCEC also demonstrate how the farmers were willing to relinquish control of the cooperative to trusted leaders, and accept a reduced role in influencing the elevator company, as long as it produced results. The leaders, or officially, directors, of the SGGGA also managed the affairs of the SCEC. This "interlocking directorate" of

⁵⁰ Robert Irwin, "'The Better Sense of the Farming Population': The Partridge Plan and Grain Marketing in Saskatchewan," *Prairie Forum* 18 (Spring, 1993): 35-52; Spafford, "The Elevator Issue," 88-92.

⁵¹ Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 133; Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation*, 108-11; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 158-60; *Report of the Elevator Commission*, 95-96.

both organizations produced a technocratic leadership, dubbed the “Co-op Elite” for their tightly controlled managerial style. Charles Dunning, John Maharg, J.B. Musselman, and George Langley—all prominent members of the SGGGA and all with backgrounds in financial management—centralized control over the elevator company. Langley and Dunning, British immigrants inclined towards Fabianism, sought to work within the confines of capitalism, to control it and reform it for the benefit of wheat farmers. These four men created the business structure by which they themselves, not local delegates, elected the upper management, and by which local boards had little say in operational matters. When a SCEC local formed and applied for official integration into the SCEC system, these leaders were not reticent in rejecting those applications that did not have potential to produce a profit. Most participating farmers accepted this situation, and few complained of the absence of traditional cooperative techniques. They recognized the SCEC needed to make money, and that trained, educated leadership could make informed decisions on their behalf. By 1916, the SCEC had a seat on the Winnipeg Exchange and participated in futures trading and mixing grain—two aspects of the grain trade attacked and targeted for reform by the Partridge Plan and by prairie farm organizations for years.⁵²

In Alberta, the United Farmers of Alberta implemented a successful cooperative elevator system similar to that in Saskatchewan. Manitoba attempted to create a public elevator system, with disastrous results. In fact, as the Saskatchewan elevator commission investigated the Partridge Plan, the Manitoba government elevators experienced major problems, thus influencing in part the rejection of public elevators in Saskatchewan. The Conservative government of Rodmond Roblin acquiesced to the Partridge Plan, to the surprise of many. The MGGGA pressed hard for the program, delivering a 10,000-signature petition in support. Political considerations

⁵² Robert Irwin, “Farmers and Managerial Capitalism: The Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company,” *Agricultural History* 70 (Autumn, 1996): 626-52.

played a significant role, when the government elevator issue decided the winner in a by-election, presaging a provincial election expected in 1910. The Manitoba Elevator Commission began operation in 1910.⁵³

Problems soon emerged and led the government elevators to failure. The commission purchased many elevators, some in poor conditions, through politically-connected middlemen. An insufficient number of elevators operated at less than one-third of the total shipping points, where in many cases line elevators simply altered prices to undercut the government elevators. That the system operated to store and handle grain, not sell it, it produced no profit. The Manitoba Elevator Commission collapsed in 1912, after falling into debt, and the GGGC purchased the government elevators. That the GGGC destroyed 48 (out of a total of 164) useless elevators, rather than operate them at a loss, illustrates the poor planning and management of the government scheme. With the acquisition the GGGC became the grain company with the fourth-highest elevator ownership in the prairies.⁵⁴

On the eve of World War I, the organized farmers of Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba presided over remarkable reform and government oversight of the Canadian grain trade and exercised in significant ways their collective clout. The SCEC, for instance, owned and operated 300 grain elevators in the province and between 1915 and 1918 constructed terminal facilities at the head of the Lakes. The company represented profitability, independence, and versatility, and by 1920 could claim extensive experience in local and terminal marketing, and in the business of sales and grain export. Along with the elevator holdings of the GGGC, which expanded to the terminal market at Ft. William in 1912-13, the farmers' companies controlled

⁵³ John Everitt, "A Tragic Muddle and a Cooperative Success: An Account of Two Elevator Experiments in Manitoba, 1906-28," *Manitoba History* 18 (Autumn, 1989): 12-15.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 16-24.

one-third the capacity at the head of the Great Lakes. Willing to adapt to conditions and reinterpret the definition of “cooperation,” “the farmers lost much of their aversion to a number of practices of the terminal elevator companies by becoming terminal elevator operators themselves.”⁵⁵

The organized farmers also used the tested tactic of political pressure to convince the Laurier Government to establish federal terminal elevators. As part of the push for the Partridge Plan, representatives of the Interprovincial Council of the prairie farmers’ organizations testified in May 1909 before the federal Minister of Trade and Commerce regarding continued irregularities and dishonest practices at terminal facilities. Later investigations revealed mixed and under-cleaned grain. To address agrarian concerns and prepare for an upcoming federal election, Prime Minister Laurier toured the West in the summer of 1910, where farmers urged more federal action at the terminal market. Later that year, 500 farmers marched to the capital to demand such marketing reforms. The “Siege of Ottawa,” led by the Canadian Council of Agriculture, helped move the Laurier Government to action.⁵⁶

The resulting legislation, the Canadian Grain Act of 1912, tightened marketing regulations and broadened federal oversight of the grain trade. More importantly for the organized farmers, it provided Dominion terminal elevators at Port Arthur in 1913 and interior terminals at Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, and Calgary in 1913-14. A farmer-led Board of Grain Commissioners managed the government terminals and maintained close contact with the grain growers’ associations of the prairies. In the prewar years the organized wheat farmers earned the financial and moral support of provincial and federal governments alike, and presided over the

⁵⁵ Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 148-49, 163; Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain*, 40-45; Patton, *Grain Growers’ Cooperation*, 148.

⁵⁶ Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 121-22, 136-37.

impressive growth of a variety of cooperative and other farmer-owned and –operated businesses. Where they could maintain strict cooperative principles they did so, and where profit motive proved more practical they operated within the competitive, free-market system. These developments had no counterpart across the border in the United States. “Little wonder,” Paul Sharp comments, “that harassed American farmers looked across the international boundary with envy.”⁵⁷

The Rise of the Equity Cooperative Exchange in North Dakota

In the period of the populating of the province, and as Saskatchewan farmers organized successfully in response to marketing challenges, North Dakota experienced two great settlement booms. The first developed from the creation of Dakota Territory in 1861 to the mid-1880s, as railroad construction brought the northern plains into the nation’s transportation network and as Minneapolis became the most important flour-milling center in the United States. Between 1878 and 1890, the population soared from 16,000 to 191,000, and the almost 30,000 new wheat farms had created a new grain region in the northern plains, one that rivaled and then surpassed Minnesota as the most productive grain-producing state. In 1879 northern Dakota Territory grew 1,700,000 bushels; less than ten years later that number was 36,000,000. By the 1880s grain elevators and warehouses became a recognizable aspect of the landscape. The second occurred between 1898 and 1915 a quarter-million farmers streamed into the state, especially western North Dakota, and spearheaded the doubling of wheat acreage and an increase in wheat production from 69 million to 159 million bushels. Overall the state’s population increased 81%

⁵⁷ Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 27; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 162-63.

to almost 600,000 by 1910. A large part of this land rush centered on arid western North Dakota, where by 1910 over half the settlers were foreign-born. Norwegians predominated, followed by Germans and German-Russians, Canadians, and other Scandinavians.⁵⁸

Problems accompanied the second boom. Speculation led to rising land values and raised capital costs, and high freight rates hobbled agricultural shipments, especially from the wheat fields in western North Dakota, farther from markets. Marketing problems—as in the Canadian prairies—garnered the most attention from farmers and attracted the most reform energies. At local points, wheat farmers personally experienced unfair grading practices, the under-weighting of their crop, and egregious price deductions for dockage. Line elevator companies and the big grain exchanges shut farmers' marketing companies out of the terminal market. Government and private investigations by a myriad of entities, including state legislatures, the North Dakota Bankers Association, and the Federal Trade Commission, confirmed such conditions in the grain trade of the northern plains. In the Progressive Era, "experts" claimed to know the remedy. Country Lifers and state Agricultural Colleges printed tracts and convened conferences for "Better Farming," to teach the farmer to be more profitable. The gospel of diversification and dry farming, for instance, dominated the annual Tri-State Grain and Stock Growers convention of the Dakotas and Minnesota. Organized by the North Dakota Agricultural College, the convention sought the education of the farmers in scientific and up-to-date methods.⁵⁹

Unlike the responsive "farmers' government" in Saskatchewan, the sympathetic provincial governments of the other prairie provinces, and the active agricultural legislative agenda of subsequent federal administrations in Canada, state and federal politicians in the U.S.

⁵⁸ Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994 ed.), 110-55, 236, 243-47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 236-41, 251-53, 272-73.

proved unable or unwilling to tackle the problems. Progressivism in North Dakota, for instance, represented towns and urban areas and did not offer any type of agricultural reform agenda. State reformers focused on destroying political corruption, and in the prewar era of general agricultural prosperity, the problems of wheat farmers were not priorities. North Dakota progressivism began when state Republican Progressives helped elect Democrat John Burke governor for three terms between 1906 and 1912. Burke's legislative achievements included no reforms in the grain trade or to railroad practices. Instead, Progressive measures comprised the direct primary, the initiative, the referendum, the recall, the creation of a commission form of government, a pure food and drug act, and a revised child labor law.⁶⁰

North Dakota farmers thus turned to a familiar forms of organization, business cooperation, in attempts to pool limited capital and resources, break the grip of grain trade monopolies, buy more cheaply and market more efficiently, and exercise a greater degree of control over their commercial affairs. Though technically stock companies owned by members, the earlier Dakota Farmers' Alliance businesses did follow cooperative principles such as limiting stock ownership by individual members. Most sought discounted prices through cooperative buying strategies, rather than following the patronage refund system. The cooperative Alliance Hail Association still existed and thrived and by 1910 represented by far the largest hail insurance company in North Dakota. By then this hail insurance co-op had twenty years' experience and success and had "courageously won prestige among the farmers." A potent

⁶⁰ Charles Glaab, "The Failure of North Dakota Progressivism," *Mid-America* 39 (Oct., 1957): 195-209.

reminder of the benefits of cooperation, the Alliance Hail Association helped spur the spread of other farmer co-ops.⁶¹

The collapse of Populism in the 1890s left an agrarian organizational vacuum in North Dakota, one filled steadily by the rise of farmers' cooperative grain elevators. Operating on Rochdale principles and numbering a dozen or so in the 1890s to over 450 in 1915, co-op elevators peppered the Dakota countryside in the pre-World War I period. Similar to their counterparts in the Canadian prairies, wheat farmers south of the line placed emphasis on the need for local marketing access and options for their grain, and the ability to bypass line elevators and other monopolistic entities in the grain marketing system. Cooperative elevators, as handlers of grain, served this purpose and returned profits to subscribers, of which the average North Dakota co-op had seventy-five. Many farmers' elevators also sold a myriad of farm necessities, from coal to twine and oil to farm machinery and implements. The heavy European immigrant element of the Second Dakota Boom infused further the cooperative spirit among Dakota farmers, as by the first decade of the twentieth century Europeans were far ahead of New World agriculturalists with regard to the development of cooperatives. By 1915 an estimated 20,000 North Dakota farmers subscribed to or patronized regularly cooperative farmers' grain elevators.⁶²

⁶¹ Joseph G. Knapp, "Farm Cooperatives Benefit Local Communities," in eds. Martin A. Abrahamsen and Claud L. Scroggs, *Agricultural Cooperation: Selected Readings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), 537-41; James E. Boyle, "Cooperation in North Dakota: The Alliance Hail Association of North Dakota," *The Quarterly Journal of the University of North Dakota* 1 (Oct., 1910): 45-53; Karl Limvere, *Economic Democracy for the Northern Plains: Cooperative and North Dakota* (Jamestown: The North Dakota Farmers Union, 1980), 15-16.

⁶² Scott Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1982), 91-97.

Despite the spread of cooperative elevators and the widespread belief among farmers that such co-ops offered marketing salvation, numerous challenges faced the cooperative movement. Line elevator companies undercut the co-ops, pulling farmers' business away from the cooperatives. The line elevators also falsely advertised themselves as farmers' cooperatives, often by simply putting the word "co-op" in the name painted on the side of the elevator silo. Commission firms sometimes boycotted grain handled by cooperatives, railroads discriminated against them, banks refused to extend credit lines, and farmers often simply lacked the capital necessary to start or operate an elevator business. Nor did there exist a central organization of cooperatives akin to the Canadians' Grain Growers' Grain Company. Farmers' elevators often found it difficult to find a profitable niche in the grain trade, and a big part of this involved the co-ops' exclusion from the terminal market.⁶³

Northern plains' farmers had long focused on gaining a foothold in the terminal market. Access to the terminal market promised to bypass the dishonest measures practiced by grain dealers at all levels of the marketing process and allow farmers complete control of their grain from field to miller. Control by farmers of the terminal market meant the highest possible price for their wheat; it meant the elimination of all middlemen; it meant holding on to one's grain until it was shipped to overseas buyers. Above all, farmer control of the terminal market represented economic independence, and the end of reliance on elements of the private grain trade that might swindle the wheat grower at every turn. Unfortunately, farmer efforts to this end did not succeed. The Dakota and Minnesota Farmers' Alliances collaborated to form in the late 1880s the Scandinavian Elevator Company (SEC), the first attempt in the region to establish a

⁶³ Limvere, *Economic Democracy*, 16-17; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 97-100.

cooperative terminal elevator. To ship members' grain directly to Liverpool, the SEC aimed to convince local farmers' elevators to ship their grain to a cooperative terminal at Minneapolis or Duluth, with profits distributed to subscribers. This failed due to the lack of participating local cooperative elevators, hostility and boycotts from established grain companies, and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce's refusal to allow the SEC a seat on its grain exchange. The same problems presaged the failure of the Alliance Elevator Company and the Minnesota Farmers' Exchange, two other efforts at cooperative terminal marketing.⁶⁴

The lack of a robust system of local farmers' elevators represented one of the biggest problems facing these efforts at accessing the terminal market. This was the "chicken and egg" problem: local elevator co-ops lacked terminal market access, and their efforts to establish terminal market access could not succeed without the existence and constant patronage of a large number of local elevator cooperatives. In other words, local marketing control, in the form of co-op elevators, did not help much unless the farmers had control of terminal marketing—but farmers could not garner control of terminal marketing without a robust local cooperative elevator system. Even Minnesota farmers, with 270 cooperative elevators serving 35,000 members and marketing 30% of the state's grain, could not break into the terminal field in a significant way. Many farmers' elevators in Minnesota garnered non-farmer investors and dropped the patronage dividend aspect of cooperation in order to more competitively market members' grain, to no avail. They faced the same types of opposition and thus remained peripheral in grain marketing and in the grain trade of the northern plains.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Limvere, *Economic Democracy*, 16; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 50-52.

⁶⁵ *Cooperators' Herald*, 27 Mar. 1914, n.p.; Keillor, *Cooperative Commonwealth*, 194-211; Limvere, *Economic Democracy*, 16.

A new national organization filled the vacuum left by the failure of Populism in the northern plains. The American Society of Equity (ASE), founded in Indianapolis in 1902, focused on all major agricultural commodities, not just wheat, and thus did not have the laser-like focus on terminal market reform of farmer co-ops in North Dakota and western Minnesota. Founder and president James Everitt envisioned the Society as a huge crop holding operation designed to keep farmers' commodities off the market until prices increased to a predetermined level. Equity was highly centralized with a seven-member Board of Directors that set price goals. At its height, the membership was likely under 100,000 and centered in Kentucky, Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the states of the Great Plains.⁶⁶

The ASE attempted the crop-holding strategy various times between 1903 and 1907. Success eluded the organization because farmers could never hold their crops off the market for long—they lacked capital, and needed money from the sale of crops to pay bills and expenses incurred during the lead-up to harvest. This represented the same challenge that vexed proponents of such strategies since the nineteenth century. The North Dakota Union of the ASE had just officially formed in February 1907 when a few months later it joined a huge Equity crop-holding operation stretching across the plains from Oklahoma to the Canadian border. Theodore Nelson, North Dakota state Equity organizer and wheat farmer from Mayville, helped form the North Dakota chapter of the ASE and became president of the Equity's Grain Growers Department. Under Nelson's direction, Equity in the wheat belt continued the crop-holding strategy through 1909, but without success.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), 113-17, 135.

⁶⁷ Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 117-28.

As a marketing strategy, crop-holding proved a failure, and anyway the North Dakota Union of Equity came to be dominated by terminal elevator hardliners, who began successfully framing terminal marketing as the most important issue for farmers. In addition to Nelson, North Dakota Equity had in its secretary-treasurer a fierce advocate for terminal marketing, John Miller Anderson. By 1910, under their leadership, the organization decided that to access terminal marketing it needed to have as members, supporters, and participants the farmers' cooperative elevators of North Dakota and western Minnesota. To this end Nelson used the Grain Growers Department of the ASE to focus solely on terminal marketing, and began an organizing campaign, led by farmers' elevator operators, to bring cooperative elevators into the Department. For example, O.G. Major, former Dakota Alliance organizer and Minnesota Farmers' Exchange president from Hope, North Dakota, helped form Equity Grain Growers' locals beginning in 1907. "I went about it," he said, "the same as I would organize an elevator company...I didn't see much difference between this and elevator companies."⁶⁸

That year the North Dakota branch of the Grain Growers Department created a cooperative marketing organization specifically focused on erecting or obtaining a farmers' terminal elevator and selling members' wheat on the terminal market. Based on Rochdale cooperative principles, the Equity Cooperative Exchange (ECE) sold capital stock at \$50 per share, limited all shareholders to one vote, paid eight percent interest annually on stock, and returned to members the prorated earnings. Between the genesis of the idea in 1907 and its

⁶⁸ *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the North Dakota State Union of the American Society of Equity* (25 Oct. 1909), p. 5, Folder 2, Box 1; *Programme: Big Grain Growers' Rally* (June, 1909), Folder 6, Box 1; Theodore Nelson to Charles Pierson, 2 Aug. 1907, and Charles Pierson to Theodore Nelson, 6 Oct. 1907, Folder 2, Box 1, all in Theodore G. Nelson Papers, NDSU Archives, Fargo; *Fargo Forum*, 25 Jan. 1907, p. 15; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 119-20.

incorporation under North Dakota law in 1911, ECE canvassers travelled the state and attended farmers' elevator meetings to solicit stock subscriptions with the goal of raising an initial \$50,000 towards the erection of a terminal elevator in Minnesota or Wisconsin. While it raised money for the terminal elevator, the organization handled and sold members' grain through standard marketing procedures. Grain from Equity country stations, individual farmers, and on consignment from country elevators went to Minneapolis commission merchant and ECE sales manager Pliny E. Cooper. Though not a member of the terminal grain exchange in Minnesota, the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, Cooper still had to sell Equity grain at the terminal market through a Chamber member. Unfortunately, this meant the ECE farmer paid double commission—Cooper's commission and the Chamber of Commerce's commission. Cooperative-minded and loyal Equity farmers accepted this imperfect situation with the understanding it would change with the inauguration in the near future of an Equity cooperative terminal elevator.⁶⁹

The ECE built upon the deep cooperative tradition among Norwegian immigrant farmers across North Dakota. In North Dakota, Scandinavians in general, and Norwegians in particular, harbored progressive political views and had by the early twentieth century created a robust cooperative movement. More than any other identifiable group in the northern plains, Norwegians created an abundance of various co-op stores, creameries, and grain elevators, including several founded as early as the 1890s, such as the Scandinavian Mutual Fire Insurance

⁶⁹ *The Equity Cooperative Exchange*, p. 1-9, Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, Jan.-May, 1913," Box 1, Equity Cooperative Exchange Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul; *What is the ECE?* (1919), Folder 1, Box 10, Ole H. Olson Papers, NDSU Archives; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 133-34.

Company, the Farmers Mutual Telephone Company, the Farmers Co-op Mercantile Company, and several cooperative elevators.⁷⁰

Norwegian farmers also felt drawn to the ECE because its leadership represented North Dakota's Scandinavian heritage. Two influential ECE directors were Norwegian immigrants. J.C. Leum, an incorporator of the ECE and a member of the North Dakota Society of Equity since inception, homesteaded in Dakota Territory after arriving in the U.S. from Tiering, Norway in 1873. Leum's farm near Mayville, North Dakota, grew to over two thousand acres, and he became director of a cooperative packing plant in Fargo as well as a member of three farmer elevator co-ops. Neils Magnuson, an early ECE stockholder, left Froyso, Norway in 1885 and settled near Bottineau, North Dakota. He organized a Farmers' Alliance local, and in 1894 helped found the Scandinavian Farmers' Mutual Insurance Company, where he remained secretary for almost twenty years. Magnuson also served in leadership positions in the Farmers' Mutual Telephone Company and in two cooperative elevator associations, and was elected to two terms in the state legislature.⁷¹

The force behind the ECE was president and general manager John M. Anderson. A thin man in his mid-thirties, Anderson ran a wheat threshing outfit as a teenager in Minnesota. He became proficient at steam engineering and binding, and eventually earned a law degree at the University of North Dakota and served in the state legislature between 1907 and 1909. His operation of a wheat farm of several hundred acres near Tokio, North Dakota, led to his involvement with Equity, and due to the respect he garnered and his agricultural and

⁷⁰ Kathleen Moum, "Harvest of Discontent: The Social Origins of the Nonpartisan League, 1880-1922" (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Irvine, 1986), 99-102; Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 133-34.

⁷¹ *Equity Cooperative Exchange*, n.p., Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, 1918-1920," Box 1, ECE Papers.

organizational knowledge Anderson led the ECE for over fifteen years. He brought his determination to erect a farmer-owned terminal elevator to the organization, and worked to convince members that the most important issue was terminal marketing.⁷²

Equity leaders recognized there must be federal regulation in the terminal market. The lack of progress at the federal level, and politicians' pandering to Equity in North Dakota, mark an important distinction between the relationship of politics and organized farmers in the U.S. and prairie Canada. By 1910 in Canada, a cluster of federal laws regarding grading, inspection, and transportation was in place, and politicians at both the federal and provincial levels offered organized farmers across Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba more than speeches. The Grain Growers' in the prairies were able to couple organization techniques with both political pressure and legal action. This cannot be said for their counterparts across the international border.

No wonder Equity in North Dakota demanded federal inspection and grading, which they believed would do away with the abusive system controlled by terminal elevator companies and state Boards of Trade under the pretense of state inspection. Federal oversight of the grain trade could also, Equity farmers believed, protect the operation of a farmers' terminal elevator. For example, the New Rockford Equity Local 4772 petitioned Congress in 1908 to create uniformity in interstate inspection and grading via federal legislation. Thomas Nelson, head of the Grain Growers Department of Equity, ECE president John Anderson, and many other North Dakota Equity officials repeated this demand, without which they argued control of terminal marketing could not meaningfully move forward.⁷³

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ New Rockford Equity Local 4772 Petition to Congress, 1908, Folder 9, Box 10, Ole H. Olson Papers, NDSU Archives; *Proceedings of the Third Annual Meeting of the North Dakota State Union of the American Society of Equity* (25 Oct. 1909), p. 5-6, Folder 2, Box 1, Nelson

As Saskatchewan and Canadian politicians turned promises into laws, those representing North Dakota did little more than make false promises at Equity meetings and in correspondence with leaders. The senior U.S. Senator from North Dakota, H.C. Hansbrough, promised at the 1908 Grain Growers Department Equity meeting in Fargo to enact federal grain inspection legislation. Junior Senator Porter J. McCumber made similar promises, praised the Equity organization, and spoke against the injustices in the grain trade. At the state level, North Dakota House Speaker Treadwell Twichell did the same. For many years U.S. farmers waited for federal grain legislation. But nothing happened until 1916 when the United States Grain Standards Act set federal standards relating to the licensing and supervision of grain inspectors and allowed farmers to appeal contested grades. North Dakota farmers had neither the political clout nor legal expertise to push for legislative protections.⁷⁴

Equity then attempted directly to garner a position on the terminal market. The Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce again refused the ECE's application for a seat on the grain exchange on the familiar grounds that no company trading as a member of the Chamber of Commerce could rebate commissions. This meant no patronage refunds, the cornerstone of Rochdale cooperation. Even if this by-law did not exist, the ECE likely could not afford the price of a seat on the Chamber, up to \$25,000, or obtain a satisfactory credit rating approved by the

Papers, NDSU; 1912 Scrapbook (13th Annual Convention), Folder 4, Tri-State Grain and Stock Growers Association Papers, NDSU Archives; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 274.

⁷⁴ Proceedings of the Second Annual Convention of the Department of Grain Growers, American Society of Equity, Fargo (28 Oct. 1908), 23, Folder 6 Box 1, and Untitled Pamphlet (n.d.), Folder 7, Box 1, Nelson Papers, NDSU; Report of the 11th Annual Convention of the Tri-State Grain and Stock Growers' Association, Fargo (Jan., 1910), Folder 2, and Report of the 14th Annual Convention of the Tri-State Grain and Stock Growers' Association, (Jan., 1913), Folder 5, Tri-State Grain and Stock Growers Association Papers, NDSU; James S. Schonberg, *The Grain Trade: How It Works* (New York: Exposition Press, 1956), 158; Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 175.

Chamber. As such, circumstances converged in 1912 and created new conditions for contention between the organized farmers and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce.⁷⁵

Farmers across Borders: Equity and the Canadian Organized Farmers versus the Chamber of Commerce

In 1912, under new aggressive and uncompromising sales manager George Loftus, Equity inaugurated a campaign of direct attack against the Chamber of Commerce and framed the grain exchange as the embodiment of all the abuses at the terminal market. From 1912 to 1915 the ECE and the Chamber of Commerce fought each other in a publicity battle but also to win farmers' elevators over to their respective sides. Unfortunately for the ECE, this involved more of an effort to generate among members and potential members contempt for the Chamber, rather than moves to strengthen its business position in the grain trade. In other words, during this period ECE leaders leaned more toward confrontation and agitation against the Chamber of Commerce rather than the solid operation of a large-scale business enterprise.⁷⁶

Cross-border connections between the organized farmers in prairie Canada and Equity formed another part of this focus on the Chamber of Commerce as the farmers' primary enemy. President John Anderson and other leaders praised the Grain Growers' Grain Company as a successful farmers' business entity that defeated the Canadian counterpart to the Chamber of Commerce—the Winnipeg Grain Exchange—and became a thriving and financially successful terminal marketing business. The Canadian agrarian movement became Equity's model, guide,

⁷⁵ Limvere, *Economic Democracy*, 20.

⁷⁶ *Co-Operation in Marketing of Grain* (1912), 1-48, Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, 1906-1912," Box 1, ECE Papers, Minnesota Historical Society; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 134-35; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 278.

and inspiration, and having a common enemy brought the American and Canadian wheat farmers together. John G. McHugh, as a Councilor of the Winnipeg Exchange, had fought the GGGC, and now he worked for the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce and planned to shut down the ECE. McHugh headed the McHugh-Christensen Company, a grain commission firm that joined the Winnipeg Exchange in 1902.⁷⁷ In 1903 McHugh rose up through the ranks to become a member of the Exchange's Committee on Appeals⁷⁸ and in 1905 he became a Councilor.⁷⁹ McHugh also played a role in the grain business of the United States. By 1906 he was a member of the Milwaukee Chamber of Commerce⁸⁰ as well as the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce.⁸¹ Well before 1912 McHugh had a history of working against agrarian organizations in the United States and Canada, and against labor organizations in Minnesota. By 1912, as secretary of the Chamber of Commerce, McHugh spearheaded the confrontation with Equity.⁸²

McHugh's role in expulsion of the GGGC from the Winnipeg Exchange in 1906 explicitly linked organized farmers in North Dakota and prairie Canada. McHugh had been one of the three members of the Exchange and of the North West Grain Dealers' Association investigated by the Manitoba provincial government in 1907 for illegal practices in the grain trade. McHugh personally brought to light the GGGC's violation of the Exchange by-law

⁷⁷ *Fifteenth Annual Report of the Winnipeg Grain and Produce Exchange* (Winnipeg: The Telegram Printing Co., Ltd., 1903), 8.

⁷⁸ *Sixteenth Annual Report of the Winnipeg Grain and Produce Exchange* (Winnipeg: The Manitoba Free Press Co., 1904), 2.

⁷⁹ *Eighteenth Annual Report of the Winnipeg Grain and Produce Exchange* (Winnipeg: Press of Winnipeg Telegram, 1906), n.p.

⁸⁰ *Forty-Eighth Annual Report of the Trade and Commerce of Milwaukee* (Milwaukee: The Evening Wisconsin Co., 1906), 14.

⁸¹ *Twentieth Annual Report of the Trade and Commerce of Minneapolis* (Minneapolis: Daily Market Record, 1903), lxxv.

⁸² On McHugh's activities against organized labor in Minnesota, see William Millikan, *A Union Against Unions: The Minneapolis Citizens Alliance and Its Fight Against Organized Labor, 1903-1947* (St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press, 2001).

prohibiting the practice of patronage refunds. Having come out on the losing end of the Winnipeg Exchange's fight against the GGGC, the Chamber secretary feared the ECE might become its "Canadian equivalent," and grow in stature, power, and ability, thereby threatening the Chamber's monopoly position at the terminal market. By 1912, as secretary and spokesman for the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, McHugh also worried about Equity's new, fiery sales manager, George Loftus, who seemed on a mission to attack the Chamber.⁸³

Even before his appointment as ECE sales manager, George Loftus already had a reputation as an ardent defender of producers' rights. He had seventeen years' experience in the railroad business in Minnesota, so he could speak from experience and with unquestionable conviction about what the farmer was up against. In the few years before the turn of the century Loftus worked through his small grain merchant company, Loftus-Hubbard Company, to address the discriminatory practices of railroads. Largely through his personal complaints and actions, along with assistance from his business partner, former Minnesota reform governor L.F. Hubbard, Loftus forced the lowering of freight rates of several Minnesota railroad companies. In 1905 he pressed the Minnesota legislature to investigate freight rates in the state, and in 1907 he petitioned political candidates in Minnesota to support his list of railroad reforms. By the time Loftus became sales manager of the ECE he had become closely associated with James A.

⁸³ "The Chamber of Commerce of Minneapolis," *The Co-operative Manager and Farmer*, 35-66, Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, 1915," Box 1, ECE Papers, Minnesota Historical Society; Pliny E. Cooper to Theodore Nelson, 15 Apr. 1910, Folder 2, Box 1, Nelson Papers, NDSU Archives; Paul R. Fossum, *The Agrarian Movement in North Dakota* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1925), 83; Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt*, 29-30; Saloutos and Hicks, *Agricultural Discontent*, 138; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 141-42; Levine, "The Voice of the Canadian Grain Trade," 126-27.

Manahan, lawyer and Democratic congressman from Minnesota, who used his professional and political expertise to help Loftus continue his crusade.⁸⁴

Beginning in 1912, the Chamber of Commerce, with McHugh at the forefront, passed a resolution that forbade its members from selling Equity's consigned grain, pressed Minneapolis banks to refuse credit to the ECE, and colluded with railroads to discriminate in shipping against the farmers' company. McHugh and the Chamber also initiated numerous frivolous lawsuits aimed at draining Equity resources and finances. Years later, in 1923, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) found that the Chamber used its newspaper, *Co-operative Manager and Farmer*, to conspire in the destruction of the ECE. The FTC accused the Chamber of Commerce of slander and found that it did in fact initiate an illegal boycott against Equity grain. The government's report showed that the ECE sustained heavy financial losses due to Chamber lawsuits purposefully aimed to bankrupt the farmers' organization. By the time the FTC issued this ruling in 1923, Equity was on the verge of bankruptcy, and the fight with the Chamber of Commerce seemed a distant memory. At the time, however, Equity publicists documented the Chamber's attacks on the farmers' company and used them to turn farmers against the grain exchange and to provide Loftus with verbal ammunition during debates.⁸⁵

Not content to sit by idly as the Chamber of Commerce targeted the ECE, Loftus pushed back. In 1913, at the urging of James Manahan, now legal counsel for the ECE, the Minnesota House of Representatives launched an inquiry into the grain trade of the state. The House commission quickly focused on the workings of the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber and

⁸⁴ Theodore Saloutos, "The Rise of the Equity Cooperative Exchange," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 32 (June, 1945): 48-50.

⁸⁵ *Federal Trade Commission Decisions, Vol. VII, Nov. 5, 1923 to July 20, 1924* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1926), 115-16, 124; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 277; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 143-44.

other powerful entities of the Minnesota grain trade pressed the Minnesota Senate to create its own commission with the same objective. Neither commission followed an objective approach. The House committee's report indicted Chamber practices and generally sided with the views of farmers and the ECE. The Senate commission refuted the House report. Nothing substantial came of this episode except further publicity for the ECE in its battle against the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. This legislative confrontation did provide further evidence for Equity farmers that the Chamber of Commerce posed a dangerous and powerful threat to their interests.⁸⁶

These legislative investigations, though not as impactful as those of the Grain Growers in the prairies, did work together with aggressive Equity publicity tactics. Unfortunately for the farmers, the Chamber of Commerce responded in kind. The Chamber established a public relations bureau, headed by McHugh, to continue attacks on the ECE, and *The Cooperative Manager and Farmer* reprinted dozens of McHugh's speeches and pamphlets. The ECE responded by founding their own periodical, the *Cooperators' Herald*, in 1914, and also by sending Loftus and others out on the lecture circuit to argue the case against the Chamber, and especially against McHugh for his history of attacks against organized farmers on both sides of the U.S.-Canadian border.⁸⁷

By the summer of 1913, the Equity Cooperative Exchange began to define itself and its mission as identical to that of the Canadian Grain Growers' Grain Company, with McHugh as a common enemy and the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce standing in for the Winnipeg Exchange. The fact that by 1913 the GGGC was financially successful, had won a battle against

⁸⁶ Saloutos, "The Rise of the Equity Cooperative Exchange," 53-54.

⁸⁷ Robert H. Bahmer, "The Economic and Political Background of the Nonpartisan League" (Ph. D. diss. University of Minnesota, 1941), 335-43.

the Winnipeg Exchange and John McHugh, and had pressured provincial governments to aid them in the fight, led Loftus and the ECE to explicitly connect the farmers' struggle in North Dakota and Minnesota with the farmers' victories in Canada. In early 1913, the ECE began distributing informative pamphlets that stated unambiguously how Equity is "following the lead" of the GGGC and the ways in which Canadian organized farmers "paved the way for our success," against a common, transnational enemy, John McHugh.⁸⁸

In doing so, Equity in North Dakota was not plowing new ground, but building upon several years' development of transnational ties between organized farmers in North Dakota and Western Canada. For instance, soon after it was organized the American Society of Equity entered Western Canada. In Alberta, the injustices of the Edmonton grain market, including unfair grading, weighing, and dockage, pressed farmers in the Poplar Lake region to form a branch of the American Society of Equity in late 1904 or early 1905. Some of its members, including W.J. Keen, had subscribed to *Up-to-Date Farming and Gardening*, the Equity newspaper. Others, recently settled in Alberta from Nebraska, had been exposed to the ASE there.⁸⁹

The order changed its name from the Society of Equity to the Canadian Society of Equity (CSE) to remove any indication of a link to the American organization, which had been hampering its recruiting efforts. The CSE, like the ASE, pursued controlled marketing, but also promoted a more radical ideology of government ownership and government control of grain elevators and terminals, along with other key industries. The CSE was not the only farmers'

⁸⁸ *The Equity Co-Operative Exchange* (1913), 4-5, Folder: "Correspondence and Related Material, Jan.-May, 1913," Box 1, ECE Papers, Minnesota Historical Society; *Co-operators' Herald*, 30 Oct. 1913, n.p.; 5 March 1915, p. 1.

⁸⁹ Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909-1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 21.

organization in Alberta and had to compete with the influential Alberta Farmers' Association (AFA). In the years leading up to 1909, the AFA became dominant in the province due to the perceived CSE connections to the United States, the AFA's positive legislative record, and an aborted CSE project of cooperatives that languished in 1907 due to insufficient membership and finances. ASE president James Everitt spoke out against the CSE cooperative plan and accused it of abandoning and opposing the controlled marketing approach of the parent organization.⁹⁰

The CSE's radical vision of government ownership and its lack of real accomplishment isolated it from much of the Alberta farm population. Furthermore, the order suffered an internal split between late 1907 and 1909. The conflict between the more radical elements in the CSE, which focused on socialistic remedies, and those more inclined towards less drastic farm solutions, split the order along ideological lines. In 1909 the Canadian Society of Equity merged with the Alberta Farmers' Association to form the United Farmers' of Alberta (UFA). The UFA would prove to be a powerful, popular, and influential farmers' organization in the province and across the prairies during the next decade.⁹¹

The spread of farmers' organizations from the U.S. to prairie Canada represents one element that tied together wheat-belt agrarianism in the early twentieth century. A focus on agricultural co-ops and rural credit in Europe also fostered binational wheat belt awareness and closer ties among farmers and farm organizations in the northern plains. By the 1910s, compared to Europe, co-ops in the U.S. lagged behind. Though Canadian prairie co-ops enjoyed success, the grain growers also believed their European counterparts well ahead developmentally. Cooperatives of all stripes blanketed Britain and the Continent and they contributed significantly

⁹⁰ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 18 Mar. 1914, p. 14; 11 Apr. 1917, p. 8; Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 27-33.

⁹¹ Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 30-34.

to Europe's prewar economic prosperity. The Country Life Movement promoted the further development of agricultural cooperatives, especially through President Teddy Roosevelt's informal advisor Sir Horace Plunkett, who organized and headed the Irish Agricultural Organization Society. Internationally known and respected, Plunkett promoted European cooperatives during several U.S. and Canadian tours and in doing so the Irish Society became a potent symbol for North American cooperators, including those in North Dakota Equity. Plunkett visited the ECE offices and corresponded with its leaders. The Canadian grain growers agreed with Equity's assertions that North American farmers "must put aside the conceit we have so carefully nurtured for a century and assume the attitude of learning" from Europe."⁹²

Plunkett and other European agrarian reformers popularized among North American wheat farmers Old World developments in rural credits. High interest rates and short-term loans characterized farm mortgage credit across the northern plains in the decades before World War I. The failure of loan renewal in the short-term payment period often led to farm foreclosure, and burdensome interest rates of 10-15% shackled farmers' finances. The Country Life Commission rightly emphasized the lack of adequate capitalization and sufficient oversight of rural credit facilities. As settlers poured into prairie Canada and the Dakotas and land values increased, calls intensified for more affordable and accessible agricultural credit accompanied by long-term amortized mortgage loans.⁹³

⁹² *Cooperators' Herald*, 27 Mar. 1914, n.p.; 23 Apr. 1915, n.p.; 23 July 1915, p. 8; 5 Nov. 1915, p.8; 7 Jan. 1916, p.1; 30 June 1916, p.3; 7 July 1916, p.3; *Grain Growers' Guide*, Jan. 1909, p. 20; Mar. 1909, p. 24; 12 Jan. 1910, p.18; 14 Dec. 1910, p.8; 6 Dec. 1911, p.10; 10 Sept. 1913, p.7; 24 Sept. 1913, p.5, 7; Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 110-16; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 327-35.

⁹³ Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of Their Origins and Development* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 131.

Along with Horace Plunkett, California co-op promoter David Lubin held up European rural credit systems as a model for North America. Lubin toured Europe and subsequently established the International Institute of Agriculture in which U.S. and Canadian rural reformers participated. Lubin found the Raiffeisen rural cooperative credit system of Germany most applicable for cotton and tobacco producers, but promoted heavily the Prussian *Landschaften* system for other agricultural commodities such as wheat. Operating as mortgage security pools whereby landowners combined the value of their holdings as collective collateral for loans, the *Landschaften* banks increased farmers' bargaining power vis-à-vis lenders. This cooperative credit approach enamored farm leaders in North Dakota and the Canadian prairies, and even provided the impetus for a public debate between the Agricultural Colleges of North Dakota and Manitoba regarding the need for cooperative rural credit banks. Both Equity and the Grain Growers' Associations understood that cooperatives succeeded only when farmers owned their land, and to do so farmers needed an affordable rural credit system.⁹⁴

A series of international conferences on rural co-ops and agricultural credit, led by Plunkett and Lubin and attended by agrarian leaders from both North Dakota and the Canadian West, popularized the European lead in these arenas and spurred reformers to inaugurate a study visit across the Atlantic. Under the direction of David Lubin, U.S. and Canadian farm representatives traveled across Europe in mid-1913 under the auspices of the American Commission on Agricultural Cooperation and Rural Credit in Europe, where they studied the *Landschaften* and other rural credit systems in Germany, as well as a myriad of additional

⁹⁴ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 12 Apr. 1911, p.11; 18 June 1913, p.7; 31 Aug. 1910, p.17; 6 Mar. 1912, p.12; 12 Apr. 1912, p.7; 24 Apr. 1912, p.5; 14 Aug. 1912, p.8; 2 Oct. 1912, p. 6, 15; *Cooperators' Herald*, 27 Feb. 1914, n.p.; 27 Mar. 1914, n.p.; 23 July 1915, p.8; 5 Nov. 1915, p.8; 7 Jan. 1916, p.1; Joseph G. Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise: 1620-1920* (Danville, IL: Interstate Printers & Publishers, 1969), 122; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 335-36.

agricultural cooperatives across the Continent. Saskatchewan sent a separate investigation, headed by the general manager of the SCEC Charles Dunning and John H. Haslam, who had also been a member of the American Commission. The Agricultural Credit Commission of Saskatchewan focused only on European types of rural credit systems.⁹⁵

The findings of the commissions resulted in major rural credit developments in both the U.S. and Canada. The reports highlighted how co-ops undergirded agricultural prosperity in Europe, but also questioned the utility of copying to North America the high level of European state involvement in cooperatives. Clearly, however, successful rural credit systems demanded features of long-term amortization and lower interest rates made possible by the collective security of farmers' lands in a localized area. From this *Landschaften*-type proposal came the Woodrow Wilson administration's 1916 Farm Loan Act, under which farmers could form loan cooperatives thereby becoming eligible for long-term, amortized European-style mortgages. The ECE found the federal Farm Loan legislation too skewed in favor of bankers, and created the more cooperative and farmer-friendly Equity Rural Credit Association.⁹⁶

The Agricultural Credit Commission of Saskatchewan's report recognized the problems of rural credit in the province and as a result of studying the *Landschaften* banks pressed the Legislative Assembly for action. Formed in 1913, the Saskatchewan Co-operative Farm

⁹⁵ *Proceedings of the First National Conference on Marketing and Farm Credits* (Chicago: Cooperating Farm Papers, 1913), iv-xii, 228; *Rural Credit, Cooperation and Agricultural Organization in Europe* (Olympia: Frank M. Lamborn Public Printer, 1915); Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 116-20; Brennan, "Politics in Saskatchewan," 205-206.

⁹⁶ *Agricultural Cooperation and Rural Credit in Europe*, Senate Report, Doc. 214, 63rd Congress, 1st Session; *Nonpartisan Leader*, 21 Oct. 1915, p.4; 28 Oct. 1915, p.6; 7 Dec. 1916, p.16; *Cooperators' Herald*, 8 May 1914, n.p.; 29 Sept. 1916, p.3; 20 Oct. 1916, p.1; 8 Dec. 1916, p.8; 22 Dec. 1916, p.3; Knapp, *The Rise of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 128-30; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 338-340.

Mortgage Association assisted farmers in combining their mortgage securities whereby local branches then loaned money to members, with transactions guaranteed by the provincial government. The SGGa supported this organization and argued it brought competition into the financial and lending fields and reduced interest rates.⁹⁷

Closer to home, the post-1912 ECE relationship with Canadian organized farmers developed from the efforts of North Dakota Equity Grain Grower head Theodore G. Nelson, who had been following closely the successes of the Canadian organized farmers. Nelson invited Roderick McKenzie, secretary-treasurer of the Manitoba Grain Growers Association, to speak to a May 1910 joint meeting in St. Louis of the national Farmers Union and the ASE. Nelson asked McKenzie to inspire the Americans with the impressive progress of their Canadian counterparts. McKenzie did so, and traced the turbulent history of the GGGC from the expulsion from the Winnipeg Exchange, to its recent financial successes, and finally to its gaining control over a significant portion of the terminal market at Winnipeg. McKenzie told the Americans that the farmers' organizations in both countries aimed for the same goals and harbored identical aspirations.⁹⁸

From this instance of cross-border interaction, Nelson moved to create a grand organization of the major farmers' bodies in the U.S. and Canada. In 1911, at the ASE national convention, Nelson headed the formation of a committee to explore the creation of the Federation of Farmers' Organizations in the United States and Canada, composed of the ASE,

⁹⁷ *Report of the Agricultural Credit Commission* (Regina: Government Printer, 1913); *Grain Growers' Guide*, 12 Jan. 1910, p. 18; 25 May 1910, p. 8, 12; 6 Dec. 1911, p.10; 19 Oct. 1913, p.5; *Cooperators' Herald*, 15 May 1914, n.p.; Brennan, "Politics in Saskatchewan," 205-208.

⁹⁸ *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, 7 May 1910, p. 11; *Grain Growers' Guide*, 11 Apr. 1917, p. 8.

the Farmers Union, the Grange, the Alberta Farmers Union, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, the Manitoba Grain Growers Association, the Canadian Council of Agriculture, the California Fruit Growers, the National Livestock Association, and the National Wool Growers Association.⁹⁹

When President William Howard Taft showed support for a free trade treaty between the U.S. and Canada, and when Congress approved the measure in July 1911, Nelson decided the time was right to make public the idea for the Federation, which by this time had the support of the Grange and the national Farmers Union. Supported by farmers in the U.S. and Canada, the free trade proposal eliminated the duty on natural products and lowered custom rates on agricultural implements. If and when Ottawa ratified the agreement, with the atmosphere of goodwill between the U.S. and Canada at its pinnacle, Nelson and the Canadians could announce the new binational organization to great fanfare. Or so they anticipated.¹⁰⁰

However, powerful forces and sentiments swept the anti-free trade Conservatives to power later during the 1911 federal elections. Eastern manufacturers opposed the agreement, and the Tories successfully played on long-standing Canadian fears of annexation by the Americans and increased economic dependence on their southern neighbor, and claimed that if free-trade Liberals had their way, Canadian ties with Britain and the Commonwealth would suffer. The Conservative victory in the federal elections also released a fierce Canadian nationalism and “Made in Canada” campaign. In such circumstances, Nelson abandoned his idea of a broad

⁹⁹ T.G. Nelson to American Society of Equity Committee on Consolidation of Farmers’ Organizations, 8 July 1911, p. 1-2; and “To the Farmers of the United States and Canada,” Address to the 8th Annual Convention of the American Society of Equity, n.p., n.d., Folder 2, Box 1, Nelson Papers, NDSU.

¹⁰⁰ Nelson to D.O. Mahoney and T.T. Barrett, 24 July 1911; Mahoney to Nelson, 26 July 1911; and Barrett to Nelson, 27 July 1911, Folder 2, Box 1, Nelson Papers, NDSU.

binational agricultural organization. It seemed the Canadians were in no mood after the failure of reciprocity in 1911.¹⁰¹

If a grand and all-encompassing North American farmers' organization represented unrealistic ambition, plenty of goodwill remained between the wheat farmers of the northern plains. When Equity and the Canadian organized farmers reinvigorated their relationship after 1912, they built upon years of interaction, cooperation, and mutual respect. John McHugh's war on farm organizations in the U.S. and Canada was a major stimulus for cooperation. In various speeches and publications George Loftus reminded listeners and readers that McHugh had been beaten once by organized farmers in Canada, and would be defeated again in North Dakota and Minneapolis. Loftus famously called the Chamber secretary the "\$10,000 beauty" who fled indictment in Canada to scheme against Equity farmers, and who received payments from the Chamber to continue his work in the U.S. The ECE sales manager never failed to mention how the GGGC defeated McHugh and the Winnipeg Exchange.¹⁰²

Equity's use of the conspicuous successes of the GGGC did not go unnoticed by the Chamber, which began spreading rumors that the financial gains of the Canadian organization were overblown and that in fact the marketing body was losing money. In reply over a series of months the ECE newspaper reprinted the annual financial reports of the GGGC. To counter Chamber misinformation, Loftus and the ECE made it a priority to inform members over and over again of how the Canadian farmers' successes presaged Equity's own victory against a common enemy. Even Charles Edward Russell, famous journalist and co-founder of the

¹⁰¹ Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt*, 33-35; Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 137-39.

¹⁰² *Co-operators' Herald*, 28 Nov. 1913, n.p.; 19 Dec. 1913, n.p.; 12 June 1914, n.p.; 20 Nov. 1914, p. 7.

NAACP, wrote a sympathetic portrait of Equity's fight against the Chamber, and noted the success of the GGGC was "making its due impression."¹⁰³

Beginning in earnest in 1913, the Equity-Chamber battleground shifted to a fight over cooperative elevator associations. ECE officers urged existing farmer elevators to consign wheat to the marketing organization, and advised the creation of additional elevator co-ops. The lack of a unified cooperative elevator system had stymied previous farmer efforts at terminal marketing and the creation of a cooperative terminal elevator. The ECE desperately needed farmers' elevators and elevator associations as members, and relied on their stock subscriptions and their grain in order to make control of terminal marketing a reality. The Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce absolutely had to keep that from happening.¹⁰⁴

By the summer of 1913, a conglomeration of co-op elevators formed the North Dakota Farmers' Grain Dealers' Association and openly supported the Chamber of Commerce. In response, Equity supporters organized the North Dakota Farmers' Elevator Association. Despite the Elevator Association's tacit backing of the ECE, the organization invited Loftus, McHugh, other representatives, and John Kennedy of the Canadian GGGC to debate and attempt to convince the organization to market members' grain through Equity or the Chamber of Commerce. Kennedy's transnational support of the ECE, at a time of great struggle for the

¹⁰³ Loftus to Benjamin Drake, 4 Mar. 1914, Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, Jan.-Aug., 1914," Box 1, ECE Papers, Minnesota Historical Society; *Co-operators' Herald*, 20 Nov. 1914, p. 7; Charles Edward Russell, "The Revolt of the Farmers: A Lesson in Constructive Radicalism," *Pearson's Magazine* (1915), Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, 1915," Box 1, ECE Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

¹⁰⁴ 1911 Scrapbook (12th Annual Convention), Folder 3, Tri-State Grain and Stock Growers Association, NDSU Archives; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 275-77.

farmers' marketing cooperative, led to increased and sustained interaction between the organized farmers of North Dakota, Saskatchewan, and prairie Canada.¹⁰⁵

John McHugh made the Chamber of Commerce's case to the Elevator Association members during the July 1913 meeting in North Dakota. He accentuated the general functions and volume of business handled through the Chamber, though he admitted that the grain exchange, according to its by-laws, could not accept organizations which returned profits to members. McHugh and the Chamber were, however, happy to have any farmers come visit the Chamber of Commerce for a personal tour and meeting. The Chamber secretary closed with the promise that any farmer who became a member of the body would be fairly treated.¹⁰⁶

When McHugh returned to his seat, George Loftus bounded to the stage, pointed a finger at the Chamber secretary, and immediately went on the attack. In characteristic bombastic style, Loftus mocked McHugh's claim that farmers would be treated fairly at the Chamber. "See what he did in Canada," Loftus thundered. "We are receiving the same treatment as our Canadian brethren." To punctuate this line of reasoning, Loftus invited John Kennedy, vice president of the Grain Growers Grain Company, to speak of the farmers' challenges against the Winnipeg Exchange. Kennedy traced the GGGC struggles against the Winnipeg Exchange, and noted McHugh's role in spreading misinformation, pressing banks to refuse credit, and slandering the farmers' company. Kennedy allowed McHugh the opportunity to respond the charges, but he refused. "I wish to say to this great country to the South of us," Kennedy concluded, "you will

¹⁰⁵ Ellsworth, "The Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 154-55.

¹⁰⁶ Farmers' Elevator Association of North Dakota, *Proceedings of the Meeting Held at Fargo, July 2, 3, and 4, 1913*, p. 3, Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, June-Dec., 1913," Box 1, ECE Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

have success as we've had, in the near future." He hoped his remarks "may help to guide you and protect you."¹⁰⁷

To the surprise of few, the North Dakota Farmers' Elevator Association chose to ship their grain through the ECE. The public announcement of the decision noted that Kennedy's speech was a "great inspiration," and that it remained obvious how North Dakota farmer co-ops were "up against the same fight...as the Canadian farmers' organization had with the Winnipeg Exchange." Equity latched on to this comparison because the GGGC demonstrated the fight could be won and a farmers' cooperative marketing organization could develop into a successful and integral component of the terminal grain market.¹⁰⁸

Similar confrontational meetings ensued. Earlier in 1913 Loftus and McHugh squared off at a meeting in Minneapolis of the Minnesota Farmers' Grain Dealers' Association. Due to the tendency of such meetings to devolve in mayhem, the Minnesota association barred Loftus from speaking at future meetings, but allowed McHugh to attend. Apparently the Minnesota Farmers' Grain Dealers' Association chose the Chamber's side. Other speech-making venues witnessed chaos. A late 1913 meeting of the South Dakota Farmers' Cooperative Association in Sioux Falls hosted another McHugh-Loftus debate, and around one o'clock in the morning listeners spilled into the cold night "amid the scenes of the wildest disorder." By this time bitter enemies, McHugh and Loftus did not hesitate to stoop to ad hominem attacks and threats of physical violence. The Sioux Falls debacle, after which delegates voted to support the Chamber of Commerce, paled in comparison to the "Fargo Riot" during the Tri-State Grain and Stock

¹⁰⁷ *Co-operators' Herald*, 17 Oct. 1913, n.p., 12 Dec. 1913, n.p.; Farmers' Elevator Association of North Dakota, *Proceedings*, 3, 7-11.

¹⁰⁸ *The Facts About the Farmers Elevator Meeting at Fargo* (1914), n.p., Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, June-Oct., 1914," Box 1, ECE Papers, Minnesota Historical Society.

Growers annual convention in early 1914. Here, ECE speakers had spent hours attacking the Chamber of Commerce when the Fargo chief of police arrived and with the assistance of Chamber representatives attempted to shut down the auditorium. Packed by that time with about 2,000 Equity farmers, a bloody brawl eventually forced the Equity men out of the hall.¹⁰⁹

The battle over the cooperative elevators also illustrates the ways in which the Chamber attempted to stretch thin Equity's finances. At the height of the Equity-Chamber struggle over the farmers' elevators, the Farmers' Elevator Company of Voltaire, North Dakota, publicly accused the ECE with unfair trading, business fraud, and financial instability. In July 1913 Equity president John Anderson and an Equity attorney debated representatives from the Voltaire elevator company and a Chamber attorney. The debate illustrated the animosity growing between the ECE and the grain exchange: "Each speaker gave a little sketch of his life when it appeared that they were all 'Sunday School boys'; but ye gods! [T]he way they tore each other's characters to pieces until they seemed as black as Hell itself was enough to make the very devil go 'way back and sit down. They cussed each other until they were red in the face; they called each other liar until lack of breath caused them to halt, and they shook their fists in each other's faces until we sure thought there was going to be a general mix-up."¹¹⁰

From this point, McHugh met in Minneapolis with the Voltaire elevator officials, urged them to bring legal action against Equity, and provided counsel and financial support to do so. At district court in Fargo in the summer of 1914 the case went to trial and the judge eventually ordered the Equity financial records made public. The public release of Equity finances showed no illegal business activities, only sporadic instances of sloppy record-keeping. George Loftus,

¹⁰⁹ Saloutos, "The Rise of the Equity Cooperative Exchange," 57; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 154-162.

¹¹⁰ Quoted in Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 152.

however, did manage to get into a fistfight outside the courthouse with one of the plaintiff's attorneys. Such efforts took a financial toll on the farmers' company. Equity claimed a \$10,000 deficit at the end of 1913, though its grain business had doubled since 1911. The frivolous lawsuits initiated by the Chamber of Commerce, combined with the expenses of the promotional campaign featuring Loftus and the Canadian farm representatives, left the ECE in the red. It also put Equity on the defensive. Instead of proactive legal challenges coupled with political pressure, the ECE was on its heels, unable to take the initiative in the legal arena.¹¹¹

Though most of Equity's members and leaders were based in North Dakota, its offices and its operation were situated at the terminal market in Minneapolis. Under pressure from the Chamber of Commerce, Minneapolis banks refused to extend credit to the farmers' organization, businesses shunned it, and misinformation about the ECE saturated the city. Talks with leaders in St. Paul, however, revealed to president Anderson businesses willing to make available bank credit, and municipal departments offered a site for a terminal grain elevator and up to \$30,000 in stock subscriptions. City leaders hoped to divert a significant portion of the terminal grain market from Minneapolis to St. Paul. The agreement moved forward, and in late 1914 president Anderson and George Loftus extended invitations to Canadian farm organization leaders to help celebrate Equity's headquarters' move from Minneapolis to St. Paul and to inaugurate the St. Paul "Farmers'" Grain Exchange.¹¹²

In addition to the preparations for Equity's move to St. Paul in December, 1914, president Anderson attended the annual GGGC convention at Winnipeg to address delegates and ask Canadian farm leaders to attend the celebration of the relocation. At the convention in Winnipeg, both the leaders of the GGGC and the ECE characterized their histories as identical.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 151-54.

¹¹² Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 277.

Anderson traced Equity's fight against McHugh and the Chamber of Commerce, and GGGC delegates remarked this "brought them back a few years" in their own history and essentially told them the same story of the Grain Growers' Company. Roderick McKenzie eagerly agreed to speak at the ECE's rally inaugurating the St. Paul Grain Exchange. In response to Anderson's invitation, J.B. Musselman, secretary of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, sent regrets that he would not be able to attend. Musselman did offer warm support for the opening of the ECE's St. Paul office: "On behalf of the [SGGA] I extend to you fraternal greetings and heartfelt wishes from our organized farmers in your effort to better conditions."¹¹³

Most farmers traveled from locales in North Dakota to attend the joint ECE-ASE rally at St. Paul in December 1914. The Equity farmers recognized that a new bond had been forged with their more successful counterparts in Canada. When Roderick McKenzie of the MGGA and GGGC stood at the podium and told the large crowd how the Canadian farmers had beaten the same enemy, and urged the ECE to keep fighting the Chamber monopoly, H.H. Freir, head of a North Dakota cooperative elevator, wrote, "When we load [grain] to the Equity there's a feeling that we are a part of a great movement...to bring better days for our farmers." The city of St. Paul had embraced the farmers, and in the exuberance of the moment many attendees felt that the new Grain Exchange could become akin to a farmer-owned Chamber of Commerce. First, however, the farmers needed a terminal elevator.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ *Co-operators' Herald*, 13 Nov. 1914, n.p., 8 Jan. 1915, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ *Proposed Farmers Terminal Elevator, St. Paul, Minnesota* (1915), Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, 1915," Box 1, ECE Papers, Minnesota Historical Society; *Co-operators Herald*, 11 Dec. 1914, p. 1, 4.

The Terminal Grain Elevator

Without a terminal elevator of its own, the St. Paul “Farmers” Grain Exchange could not achieve complete reform of the terminal market. Leaders and farmer members of the Equity Cooperative Exchange understood that a terminal elevator represented the final element that could begin to break completely the Chamber’s monopoly over the grain trade. It meant economic independence, the elimination of all speculative middlemen, and the pride of controlling farmers’ grain from the ground to international purchasers. The example of the Canadian organized farmers also demonstrated a key to success in the terminal market involved state ownership of terminal elevators. Correspondence between ECE officials and GGGC leaders reinforced this crucial component of marketing reform. John Kennedy, vice president of the GGGC, told ECE secretary G.A. Thiel as much, and other Canadian farm leaders reiterated the importance of one or more government grain elevators at the terminal market.¹¹⁵

In the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the broad sentiment for government intervention in the economy composed part of the thinking of the “new liberals,” whom Doug Rossinow calls an American version of British Fabianism. Faced with the new industrial economy and society, new liberals believed state intervention and action, not collectivism, could protect individualism under attack from the aggrandizing powers of monopolies and other industrial powerhouses. The Populists forced into public discussion this line of reasoning, with their platforms of public ownership of transportation and communication and state action into the realm of finance. Like Fabians, the new liberals rested on assumption of their own abilities and leadership to guide Americans towards a new society.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ *Co-operators Herald*, 5 June 1914, n.p.

The movement to establish a terminal elevator for North Dakota farmers moved forward, with the support of the majority of voters, within the state government between 1909 and 1915. The 1909 legislative session passed a proposed state constitutional amendment allowing the state government to purchase, lease, or operate one or more terminal grain elevators in Minnesota or Wisconsin. As required by law, the proposed amendment was supported by a second consecutive legislative session in 1911 and passed by a large majority in a popular vote in 1914. Therefore, no question remained that the measure to establish a state terminal elevator represented a legal and popular reform. Most observers expected it to go forward after the 1914 vote. Equity leaders expressed confidence that with the establishment of the St. Paul Grain Exchange the North Dakota state elevator would be located in the city. ECE leaders commenced discussions with business leaders and city officials in St. Paul to have the organization play a large role in the operation of the state terminal once it was built. Not surprisingly, Equity president John Anderson and others made a case to the North Dakota legislature for a state terminal elevator by citing the positive outcomes of the Canadian federal government's role in establishing and operating public terminal elevators at Port Arthur, at the head of the Great Lakes.¹¹⁷

A house of representative's report by the Board of Control—tasked with the assessment of potential locations and cost estimates, and the submission of building plans for the elevator—remained the final step in making the proposed state elevator a reality. The Board submitted its report on the first day of the 1915 legislative session, 5 January. Instead of addressing these

¹¹⁶ Doug Rossinow, *Visions of Progress: The Left-Liberal Tradition in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 14-41. Rossinow distinguishes carefully between the common, broader descriptor of “progressivism” and its specific constituent elements, such as the new liberals.

¹¹⁷ Untitled Address (1914), Folder, “Correspondence and Related Materials, Jan.-Aug., 1914,” ECE Papers, MHS, n.p.; *Journal of the House of Representatives of North Dakota for the Fourteenth Legislative Assembly, 1915* (Fargo: Knight Printing Co., 1915), 920-35; Ellsworth, “Origins of the Nonpartisan League,” 225-31.

elements, to the surprise and chagrin of farmers and Equity leaders across the state, the Board attacked the plan and its premise as a “waste of the people’s money as well as a humiliating disappointment to the people of the state.”¹¹⁸

The report did, as requested by president Anderson and other ECE leaders, visit the federal terminal elevators at Port Arthur, Ontario, on the north shore of Lake Superior. The BOC report praised the quality construction and operation of the Dominion terminals, which were authorized and constructed under the Canadian Grain Act of 1912. However, the Board argued a similar system of public elevators would not work for North Dakota due to the lack of federal grain standards, which meant that the state terminal would operate under the laws of Minnesota or Wisconsin, not under those of North Dakota or under uniform national guidelines.¹¹⁹

The Board rejected the claims of those farmers who based their case for a state terminal upon the Canadian example. The report claimed those farmers had a weak understanding of the differences between grain marketing in Canada and the U.S., and thus did not appreciate the reasons why a state terminal, though successful in Canada, would not be so in the United States. The report cited differences in shipping distances from wheat field to terminal market, the lack of a samples market at Winnipeg, and the incongruities in grading standards between the Canadian and U.S. grain markets. Furthermore, the Board found in its analysis of the failed provincial system of elevators in Manitoba an example that could “hardly be cited to the taxpayers of North Dakota as an object of successful ownership and operation of state or provincial owned elevators.”¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ *Journal of the House* (1915), 188-89; Ellsworth, “Origins of the Nonpartisan League,” 227-28.

¹¹⁹ *Journal of the House* (1915), 169-71; Fowke, *The National Policy*, 162.

In the place of a state terminal elevator the Board concluded that a system of cooperative interior elevators, similar to that of the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company (SCEC) represented a more realistic and financially feasible option for the farmers of North Dakota. In an interview with the general manager of the SCEC, the Board found a more practical and successful system of grain marketing than the public option. The Board of Control report thus ignored its legislative mandate to provide construction and operational plans for a North Dakota state grain elevator and instead ridiculed the idea and proposed a cooperative system of interior elevators to be located not at the terminal market but within the state. North Dakota political “boss” Alexander McKenzie still held sway over the state GOP, which controlled the legislature and executive branch. With ties to powerful interests in the grain trade, the state Republicans had every incentive to quash plans for a state elevator and maintain the status quo.¹²¹

When the Board of Control submitted to the house and made public the report on 5 January 1915, it sent “shock waves” across the ECE leadership and membership. Equity proclaimed the “1915 Legislature’s Motto: The voice of the people is a joke.” For all intents and purposes, the focus on the Chamber of Commerce as the epitome of the evils in the grain trade diminished. Now, Equity mobilized its supporters to put political pressure upon the state legislature. The public terminal elevator, not local farmers’ elevators, represented the most important goal now. Within one month Equity convened a mass meeting of farmers to confront the legislators at Bismarck. Several hundred arrived in February “thoroughly aroused” and marched to the statehouse with a petition signed by thousands of farmers. President Anderson respectfully delivered the document in the house chamber, and speaker Tweadwell Twichell

¹²⁰ *Journal of the House* (1915), 175; Fowke, *The National Policy*, 104-105; Patton, *Grain Growers’ Cooperation*, 132; Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt*, 22-23.

¹²¹ *Journal of the House* (1915), 177-88.

respectfully referred the farmers back to the Board's report. For the first time, North Dakota farmers engaged together as a political pressure group, a tactic made successful years before by agrarians in prairie Canada. Soon, Equity would couple this pressure with new organization techniques. Many farmers could not believe the state elevator proposal had been turned down in the face of convincing evidence of the successes of public grain elevators across prairie Canada. On 20 February 1915 the North Dakota state legislature officially killed the state terminal elevator bill.¹²²

Governor Louis B. Hanna presided over the rejection of the bill. Hanna had a long history connected to North Dakota political boss Alexander McKenzie, a former land agent for the Northern Pacific who built a state political machine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries backed by railroads, Twin City grain dealers and financiers, and local businessmen and editors. Behind the scenes McKenzie controlled the GOP nominating conventions and legislative committee assignments. Though by 1915 McKenzie's power waned relative to years' past, he helped Hanna become a political fixture in North Dakota. Backed by the McKenzie machine, Hanna served as U.S. Representative from 1909-1913, and governor from 1913-1917. His election in 1914 is telling in explaining the defeat of the state terminal elevators bill. That year Hanna won, with the support of the Varsity Bachelor Club of the University of North Dakota, a close race against a more progressive opponent. William Lemke, ironically a soon-to-be agrarian political leader, spearheaded the Club's support of Hanna because Hanna had provided money to build the Varsity Club's ostentatious new house. Hanna's opposition to the state elevator and his control of the legislature represents a significant reason for the defeat of the bill. Equity leaders

¹²² *Proposed Farmers Terminal Elevator, St. Paul, Minnesota* (1915), p. 11, Folder: "Correspondence and Related Materials, 1915," Box 1, ECE Papers, MHS; *Co-operators' Herald*, 19 Feb. 1915, p. 7; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 231-38.

recognized as much when in the months following they continually denounced the “Hanna-McKenzie” machine.¹²³

Governor Hanna’s agricultural outlook and paternalism towards the state’s farmers comes clear in a report sent to the federal Agricultural Cooperation and Rural Credit Commission in 1913. On the eve of departure, the commission requested from each state a summary of rural and farming conditions. Hanna repeated the mantra of the Country Life Commission and argued rural struggles could be reduced when country homes have the amenities of the city. Farmers needed education and training in agricultural colleges and from demonstration farms. The wheat farmer in North Dakota needed to be assured “that he is not being made part of an industrial system that is aiming to force production without due measure of profit,” and in doing so should develop a “cordial relationship” with his “brethren” banker, railroad manager, and businessman. These things the farmer needed, not a state terminal elevator.¹²⁴

Conclusion

When Roderick McKenzie of the GGGC spoke at the Equity Cooperative Exchange’s annual convention in December, 1915, he once again regaled the audience with the successes of the Canadian farmers’ company. By this time, however, the North Dakota state elevator lay in its grave, and the ECE, though marketing a respectable amount of grain through the modest St. Paul Exchange, had not acquired a terminal elevator and continued to control only a small share of the terminal market. State politicians showed themselves no friend of the farmer. Confrontations between Equity and Chamber speakers became more vitriolic, and the farmers frustrated and

¹²³ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 256-70; Bahmer, “The Economic and Political Background of the Nonpartisan League,” 401-23.

¹²⁴ *Agricultural Cooperation and Rural Credit in Europe*, 54-55.

angry. Thus the year 1914 was the last, until the 1920s, in which economic and cooperative solutions to farmers' problems prevailed. Beginning in 1916, farmers revolted against the political establishment and blazed a new political path towards agricultural salvation.¹²⁵

Meanwhile, in Saskatchewan the SGGA continued to support the provincial Liberal Party. The "Farmers' Party" in all but name proved itself responsive to the farmers' needs, and its membership and that of the SGGA overlapped. Ottawa demonstrated its willingness to engage with the farmers. This amenable political situation complemented the economic and cooperative successes of not only Saskatchewan's organized farmers but those across the prairie provinces. Several factors help explain the comparatively different organizational and political outcomes in Saskatchewan and Western Canada, and in North Dakota.

First, a cursory glance at agrarian organization in Canada reveals its interprovincial and national characteristics, which gave farmers real clout in grain marketing, provincial and federal politics, and overall influence across agricultural areas. The interprovincial Grain Growers' Grain Company, focused solely on wheat marketing, provided financial benefits to member organizations in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba. Such broad clout, enhanced by a rapidly growing population and thus increasing electoral strength, allowed the prairie organizations to utilize the repertoire of political pressure. The Interprovincial Council and later the Canadian Council of Agriculture mobilized existing sites—not only the GGGC, but the Grain Growers' Associations of Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and the United Farmers of Alberta. When the organized farmers backed legislative demands with tens of thousands of grain growers, Edmonton, Regina, Winnipeg, and Ottawa listened.

¹²⁵ *Co-operators' Herald*, 12 Dec. 1915, p. 1; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 176-79.

Though the American Society of Equity was an interstate organization, it never succeeded with a crop-holding strategy. The ASE also had to reconcile diverse agricultural producers, from tobacco to cotton to hard spring wheat. That wheat farmers in North Dakota took marketing reform into their own hands demonstrates the weak hold the national ASE had upon commodity producers. As a strictly wheat farmers' marketing organization, the GGGC maximized the power of the mono-crop Canadian prairies and carved out an influential place for itself in the terminal grain market. The Canadian Council of Agriculture also stitched the wheat producing prairies together with the mixed agricultural regions in Ontario and across Canada to the Maritimes. No commensurately successful interstate or national agrarian organization existed in the United States. Thus the repertoire of the political pressure group could not succeed nationally for North Dakota Equity. Instead, the ECE strategy of attacking the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce stressed propaganda over operating performance.¹²⁶

Correspondence between ECE president John Anderson and SGGA secretary J.B. Musselman reveals another explanation for the relative successes of the Canadian farmers' organizations compared to their American counterparts. Anderson considered the SGGA the "greatest farmers' organization in Canada" and asked Musselman to explain the secret of its success. The SGGA secretary replied simply that Equity lacked the grassroots mobilization that propelled the SGGA towards member enthusiasm. An examination of the social components of the ECE and the SGGA supports Musselman's assertion. While the SGGA included a robust role for women, held "Nights with Shakespeare," and convened large rallies that encompassed entire

¹²⁶ Equity did enter neighboring Montana in 1915, but at that time the state's economy only began to transition from cattle to wheat. Not strong enough to contribute to interstate solidarity, Montana Equity played no role in these events in the pre-World War I period. Theodore Saloutos, "The Montana Society of Equity," *Pacific Historical Review* 14 (Dec., 1945): 393-408.

villages, the ECE's idea of an extracurricular activity was a winter class on marketing and rural credits. Equity thrived when it attacked a clear enemy, the Chamber of Commerce, and managed to maintain member focus toward marketing reform, but largely ignored social or community activities. This is not surprising, given that the ECE marketed wheat as a business entity, as did the GGGC. But in the prairies, other organizations existed to provide social and religious fulfillment, namely the provincial Grain Growers' Associations and the United Farmers in Alberta.¹²⁷

Without such social, educational, and religious organizations, the few Social Gospel proponents in the northern Great Plains found little stimulus in the business side of grain marketing. For example, Ray McKaig, indoctrinated in the Social Gospel of the Methodist Church in the Gilded Age and early twentieth century, left the church to promote "better conditions for the farmer, and the mass of people in general" in the wheat country of the Dakotas. McKaig soon found he needed more than the cooperative ethos of Equity, and in 1917 left North Dakota for Idaho to work for the politically radical Nonpartisan League. When the SGGGA inaugurated its Grain Growers' Sunday, ECE leaders lamented that such religious underpinning remained absent from the farmers' movement in North Dakota.¹²⁸

The unresponsive political environment in North Dakota drove organized farmers toward a political solution in 1916. Though cooperatives and market reform remained important, farmers came to believe that those represented futile measures in a hostile political environment. When this "political prairie fire" spread across the international boundary into Saskatchewan, it shook,

¹²⁷ "Information on Farmers Rural Credit Association," Undated Folder, Box 1, ECE Papers, MHS; *Co-operators' Herald*, 13 Mar. 1914, n.p.; 1 Jan. 1915, p. 1; 19 Feb. 1915, p. 7.

¹²⁸ *Cooperators' Herald*, 9 Mar. 1917, p.1, 8; Hugh T. Lovin, "Ray McKaig: Nonpartisan League Intellectual and Raconteur," *North Dakota History* 47 (Summer, 1980): 12-19; William C. Pratt, "Introduction to the 1997 Reprint of Paul F. Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: An American Perspective*," in Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt*, xv.

but did not break, the placid provincial political system and the connections it had formed with the organized farmers.

Chapter Three

The Politics of Prairie Socialism, 1915-1918: The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota and Saskatchewan

In July, 1917, the *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada* published an interview with Arthur C. Townley, founder of the Nonpartisan League of North Dakota, a farmers' political organization with socialist tendencies that took control of the state in dramatic fashion in 1916. The interview was published a week after the Saskatchewan version of the Nonpartisan League had taken a brutal drubbing in provincial elections. The interviewer explained the interesting characterizations he had heard about the man he sought to question. A resident of Bismarck, North Dakota claimed Townley came "from where they raise the big-headed cattle; he's a long-hair and a flesh-eater." Others called him a "Socialist Wild-Eye; Crazy Radical; Reckless Agitator; Crafty Get-Rich-Quick Artist Who's Swindling the Farmer... [a] Half-Baked Dreamer." He is "cold as ice; as hard as flint; as rough as a mule-skinner; profane, illiterate, shifty, cunning." Townley's acolytes and colleagues, however, painted a different picture. He is "A Human Dynamo; A Master Organizer; An Evangelist in the Farmer's Cause; A Tireless Worker; A Steadfast Friend; A Fearless Champion; A Man Who Couldn't be Bluffed or Bought; A Real Farmer Who'd Come up from the Rough; A Big Farmer Who Had Learned with Sixteen Tractors; A Clear Thinker Who Hit the Bull's-Eye Every Time."¹

Such a polarizing figure piqued the curiosity of a reporter eager for a story. The victory of North Dakota wheat farmers resonated and led to the emergence of an identical movement in Saskatchewan and Western Canada. The interviewer asked Mr. Townley, whom he described as harboring supreme confidence, if when starting the League he expected to take control of the

¹ *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 4 July 1917, p. 379.

legislature of North Dakota. “We certainly did,” Townley replied boldly. “That was the whole idea... That was the promise we made to the farmer.”²

A charismatic and self-assured movement leader can polarize, to be sure, but he or she also represents a significant reason why social and political movements succeed. Arthur Townley’s vision of a farmer government in North Dakota and his leadership abilities certainly provided a major impetus for the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota. A favorable conjunction of political opportunities, interorganizational networks, utilization of effective and familiar repertoires of collective action, as well as strong and effective leadership, provided the setting for the one of the most dramatic political takeovers in twentieth-century America.

But an identical political movement in a different political and social setting failed. The Nonpartisan League in Saskatchewan lacked able leadership and only meekly took advantage of existing sites and networks for mobilization. Though the League in Saskatchewan adopted repertoires of action identical to its namesake in North Dakota, these did not work the same way in a different political environment. Political constraints, not opportunities, marked the League’s brief efflorescence in Western Canada. Though Saskatchewan League leaders, like Arthur Townley, made promises to the farmer, as a political operation in an inimical context it could not deliver.

Socialism and Agrarian Politics in North Dakota

The emergence in North Dakota of organized socialism represented the perennial challenge of adapting an ideology oriented towards industrial problems to those of agriculture. The North Dakota Socialist Party (NDSP), formed in 1902, did not effectively meet this

² Ibid., 382.

challenge. Though vying for support in a predominately rural and agricultural state, the NDSP for a decade after its founding placed little emphasis upon the farmer. The career of the most well-known and successful socialist in the state, Arthur LeSueur, helps explain this anomaly. LeSueur, a flamboyant courtroom lawyer and assistant state attorney general in 1902, was elected on the socialist ticket as President (essentially the mayor) of the City Commission in Minot, in 1908. LeSueuer was not a farmer, and represented the faction of the NDSP which espoused the urban and proletariat outlook of the party. Several other socialist candidates in Ward County, of which Minot was the center, ran unsuccessfully between 1902 and 1912.³

By 1912 some in the NDSP understood that to be successful in agricultural North Dakota, the party must moderate its platform and orient itself towards the farmer. The party called for reforms popular with the grain grower: a state terminal elevator and flour mills, rural credit banks, and state insurance programs. The NDSP cut from its platform collectivization of land. Despite this reorientation, the party managed to alienate a large portion of the ethnic population, namely Catholic Germans in the “German-Russian Triangle” of central and north-central North Dakota. The *Iconoclast*, the NDSP official organ out of Minot, disparaged religion in general and Catholicism in particular, calling the pope an “old macaroni stuffed, wine soaked geezer,” and proclaiming the party had no desire to “please...foreign followers of the dago pope.” When the radical International Workers of the World (IWW) organized in Minot in 1913 and joined local socialists in a violent confrontation with police, it reinforced most farmers’ antipathy towards anything “red.”⁴

³ Scott Ellsworth, “Origins of the Nonpartisan League” (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1982), 185-92.

⁴ Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 329; Ellsworth, “Origins of the Nonpartisan League,” 191.

Despite misgivings about socialism, many wheat farmers in the state certainly agreed with the NDSP platform. Many farmers supportive of state-owned and –operated enterprises resided in northwest North Dakota. Here, the land, in comparison to the rich Red River Valley in the east, was poorest, the climate drier and more unpredictable, the expenses of transportation more burdensome, and availability and affordability of credit the lowest. As well, the region harbored a large population of Norwegian settlers and their kin. Prior to settlement in the area, rural Norwegians in the Old World had as early as the 1860s formed a variety of cooperatives and organized soon after the Norwegian Farmers Union, which represented the interests of farmers and rural folk. These bodies served farmers well through economic downturns. So effective were local and regional cooperatives that by the end of the nineteenth century they comprised a significant aspect of the Norwegian national economy. Rural Norwegians were also politically active—in 1814 they played an important role in the political union of Norway and Sweden, and in ushering in a parliamentary system for the country in 1884. Thus Norwegian immigrants settled in North Dakota with a faith in the efficacy of both collective economic cooperation and political action. It is no surprise that Norwegians in the north-central and north-west counties of North Dakota pioneered various forms of cooperative insurance and elevator organizations. By the opening of the second decade of the twentieth century, many of these Norwegians had been in the state for ten to twenty years and were enmeshed in the wheat marketing system of the northern plains with all its attendant challenges.⁵

As the agrarian-oriented socialist movement in North Dakota aimed for a political solution to farmers' problems, it intersected with the Equity movement. As discussed in the

⁵ Kathleen Moum, "Harvest of Discontent: The Social Origins of the Nonpartisan League, 1880-1922" (Ph.D. diss., University of California-Irvine, 1986), 20-25, 99-104; Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 24, 349.

previous chapter, the cooperative movement by 1915, largely led by the Equity Cooperative Exchange (ECE), had reached a fever pitch. Economic solutions had not yielded fruit, so Equity leaders pushed the state terminal elevator bill through the legislature, only to have the Board of Control kill the popular measure early that year. Thus Equity and its thousands of members had already implicitly shifted from purely economic action towards political solutions. By 1915 the moment was ripe for the merger of the cooperative economic ethos, manifest in the ECE, with leftist political sentiments shared by a majority of the state's wheat farmers. In analyzing the rise of a new social and political movement in this context, the failure of the seeds of a state terminal elevator to bear fruit ushered in a new cycle of contention. This means that the North Dakota legislature's political decision in 1915 broadened support for a new movement with new strategies and approaches, created the context for the spread of new political information and heightened organizational cooperation and conflict, and intensified the interaction between challengers (the organized farmers) and authorities (the ruling political class).⁶

Much as Martin Luther enunciated widespread and well-known grievances with the Roman Catholic Church and spearheaded a new movement, a charismatic and dynamic organizer threaded together the economic and political sentiments of the agrarian movement in North Dakota. New social and political movements are often associated with charisma, personified in a distinctive leader.⁷ Born in western Minnesota in 1880, Arthur Townley even as a youngster was indefatigable, mentally sharp, broad-thinking, and inclined to organize and lead. He spent time as

⁶ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998 ed.), 23-24; Larry Remele hints at this intersection of the economic and the political in "Power to the People: The Nonpartisan League," in ed. Thomas Howard, *The North Dakota Political Tradition* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 68-69.

⁷ Mildred A. Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada: Strategies of Persistence* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 33.

a youth with those older than he, and was introduced to the study of philosophy. After stints teaching at rural schools, Townley sought action over study and went to western North Dakota, where he worked as a farm hand and soon began farming on his own in the Golden Valley, a region with the town of Beach in the south and the Little Missouri River in the north, and abutting the Badlands in the east and stretching west to the Montana border. Here Townley tried his luck at wheat, and in 1908 organized his neighbors into a cooperative threshing outfit. Beginning in 1909 Arthur Townley joined his brothers in raising what they believed to be the next big cash crop, flax. The Townley brothers created an immense, 7,000-acre bonanza flax farm, and Arthur earned the moniker the “flax king” of Golden Valley. In 1912 the Townley flax venture failed spectacularly, a victim of capricious weather and abnormally low prices. Deep in debt, Arthur’s farming career abruptly ended, though the experience left a lasting impression. Townley blamed his agricultural misfortunes not upon his questionable business decisions in creating such a vast flax enterprise, and not upon the vicissitudes of the weather in western North Dakota. Arthur Townley placed the responsibility of his farming failures squarely at the feet of the speculators and grain gamblers, whom he, and most farmers, believed controlled the prices farmers received.⁸

Soon after the flax failure Townley joined the NDSP, drawn in by the apparent sincerity of the party’s message and the potential, lacking in the old parties, for actual political change. His disenchantment with capitalism after the flax fiasco also drew him into the socialist fold. Within a year Townley had sharpened his oratorical and argumentative skills, winning a series of public debates on the merits of socialism. NDSP leaders noted this and Arthur’s high energy and

⁸ Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism: Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951), 153; Ellsworth, “Origins of the Nonpartisan League,” 210-14.

laser focus, and hired him as an organizer in the summer of 1913. The next year Townley ran unsuccessfully as a state legislative candidate on the socialist ticket. This convinced him of the ineffectiveness of the third-party approach and of the unpopularity of the term “socialism.” He also evinced frustration with the socialists’ emphasis on theory at the expense of proactively producing change.⁹

In 1914 Townley helped create and then headed the NDSP Organization Department, which aimed to scrub mentions of socialism and attempt to convince farmers to back only the platform of the party. In this Townley succeeded. He brought hundreds of farmers into the Organization Department and by the end of the year boasted \$8,000 in pledges. Arthur pioneered the use of automobiles to canvass townships and counties, and utilized experienced socialist speakers to hold meetings, sell literature, and organize farmers behind the platform. All this he accomplished without mentioning socialism. Of course this bothered NDSP leaders, who viewed the new members as insufficiently ideological, and who believed Townley merely an opportunist, not a bona fide socialist. For his part, Townley proved the socialist platform much more popular than the socialist party. The NDSP fired Townley and shut down the Organization Department in early 1915.¹⁰

Townley’s experience in the Organizational Department allowed him to test novel canvassing techniques. The use of automobiles for organizing represented the modification and extension of a familiar technique. For example, agrarian organization is not new—it had been done on foot or horseback for many generations. The increased availability of the affordable Ford automobile created a new way to bring together large numbers of farmers under one

⁹ Herbert E. Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Howe, 1920), 50; Ellsworth, “Origins of the Nonpartisan League,” 215-18.

¹⁰ Henry Richardson, “Scientific Organizing and the Farmer,” *The International Socialist Review* 15 (March, 1915) 554-58; Ellsworth, “Origins of the Nonpartisan League,” 220-24.

organizational banner. The use of the automobile became for the new political movement an effective canvassing approach.¹¹

At this moment, the Equity cooperative movement converged with the increasingly popular socialist program. Townley, and many in the NDSP, recognized the Equity program for a state terminal elevator as a good vehicle for enacting the socialist program. Townley joined with two men in an effort to mobilize the Equity organization behind the socialist platform. One, Albert Bowen, NDSP candidate for governor in 1912 and a reservoir of campaign and election experience, had also followed closely the terminal elevator bill spearheaded by the ECE. Soon after the Board of Control killed the bill, Bowen spoke on stage with ECE president John M. Anderson and state Equity president Magnus P. Johnson at a district convention of Equity locals in Minot, in January 1915. Bowen urged Equity members to take political action to enact a series of state industries. An enthusiastic response by the Equity locals led Anderson and Johnson to bring Bowen to the massive Equity rally at Bismarck, in early February, where the organization confronted the legislature regarding the failed terminal elevator bill. Here Bowen suggested the formation of a new nonpartisan farmers' political body aimed at securing the socialist platform.¹²

The second man responsible for forming the new farmers' party with Townley was a respected Equity leader who helped consummate the union between that organization and what would become the Nonpartisan League. Fred B. Wood came to Deering, North Dakota from Minnesota in 1902, became a successful wheat farmer, formed a cooperative elevator society, and by 1915 was a leader in both the North Dakota state Equity chapter and the Equity

¹¹ Doug McAdam, Sidney Tarrow, and Charles Tilly, *Dynamics of Contention* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 49; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 30. These works emphasize the uses of new movement techniques, and the ability of social movements to build upon, extend, and reformulate previous tactics and approaches.

¹² Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 155-56; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 217-18, 238-41.

Cooperative Exchange. He was also a socialist, and ran on the NDSP ticket for auditor in Ward County in 1914. As a respected farmer and member of the Board of Directors of the both the state Equity chapter and the ECE, Wood and Townley devised a strategy to tap into Equity membership via locals, ECE farmers, and local farmer elevator co-ops affiliated with Equity. The strategy began to bear fruit when in March 1915 Wood had Townley present the political platform of the Farmers' Nonpartisan Political League of North Dakota at the regular Equity chapter meeting in Deering. The positive response led Townley, Wood, and Bowen to conclude the new party needed to tap into the networks of the already highly organized Equity farmers and local elevator co-ops.¹³

The men reasoned they could enter Equity territory with the support of a “booster”—a local Equity, ECE, or farmers' elevator member. After joining, the new member would become a booster himself, introducing the League to others through the Equity networks. This approach made eminent organizational sense. Equity farmers had for many years seen the need for terminal marketing reform. Equity had pushed the legislature for the terminal elevator bill and thus tacitly acknowledged the need for a political solution. ECE members were already aroused as a result of the confrontation with the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, and farmers of co-op elevators knew well the need for a state terminal elevator. Finally, the Equity state organization and the ECE had long urged members to practice nonpartisanship in politics. For Townley, the psychological moment of early 1915, coupled with the existing Equity membership structure, presented an opportunity for mass agrarian political mobilization.¹⁴

The League's appropriation of existing Equity structures demonstrates how Townley and other leaders utilized interorganizational networks to build a new political movement. In this

¹³ Ellsworth, “Origins of the Nonpartisan League,” 244-46.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 249-50.

way, creating networks within the Equity structure in North Dakota made Equity a “mobilizing structure,” a “host” setting in which the League could develop, grow, and spread. As a network partner, Equity provided resources and allowed the League to become embedded within the existing multiorganization field in North Dakota. These networks are crucial for recruiting members and creating opportunities for the new movement’s influence.¹⁵

Organization commenced in early 1915 in northeast Ward County, a center of Equity strength in western North Dakota. From there canvassers spread east across the state, collecting six-dollar annual dues as they went, which gave the new members a stake in the movement and paid the salaries of the organizers. Townley pioneered the practice of accepting post-dated checks, most of which came due in October, after harvest. This represents another novel and successful organizational element. The money also went to the purchase of Ford automobiles, which Townley had used to great effect while working for the NDSP Organizational Department.¹⁶

Townley also utilized another effective organizational technique, applied psychology, or, high-pressure salesmanship. Townley’s description of these tactics, as recalled by ECE lawyer and League counsel James Manahan, is worth reprinting: “‘Make the rubes pay their god-damn money to join and they’ll stick—stick ‘til hell freezes over,’ [Townley] said to his organizers with many picturesque and even more profane variations. He drilled his men [on] how to ‘organize’ the farmer in his barn yard; how to ‘surround the rube,’ one man in front and one on each side, facing him, and all urging him to join the farmers’ non-partisan league, at the same time agreeing with him, good naturedly, on everything else. ‘Find out the damn fool’s hobby,’

¹⁵ Schwartz, *Party Movements*, 35-36; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 22-23, 123-24; McAdam, et. al., *Dynamics of Contention*, 314.

¹⁶ Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, chapter 2.

taught Townley, ‘and then talk it. If he likes religion, talk Jesus Christ; if he is against the government, damn the democrats; if he is afraid of whiskey, preach prohibition; if he wants to talk hogs, talk hogs—talk anything he’ll listen to, but talk, talk, until you get his god-damn John Hancock to a check for six dollars.’” Townley approached these tactics methodically, and frequently led training sessions for organizers called “schools of salesmanship” where canvassers learned various organizational techniques, such as applied psychological methods.¹⁷

The League’s organizational structure also took advantage of the community networks of the Norwegian population in north-central, north-west, and the Red River Valley region of North Dakota. *Bygdelags*, social organizations based on Norwegian regional identifications, and the Sons of Norway, a series of ethnic lodges, served as avenues for the NPL message. In Bottineau County, in north-west North Dakota, Norwegian Farmers Clubs served as conduits for political information and Equity affiliations, and were thus breeding grounds for League leaders in the Norwegian community. Members of the Farmers Club became NPL legislators and stockholders in League enterprises.¹⁸

Whatever the ethnicity, the canvassers sold the farmers on the NPL with a platform of state terminal elevators, packing houses, stock yards, cold storage plants, flour mills, and rural credit banks, all of which would not be operated for private profit. These measures neutralized, NPL organizers argued, the combinations and monopolization of the grain trade, as represented by the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce. This line of reasoning indicates ways in which Townley and other leaders framed the platform’s appeal to Equity and ECE members. Before the

¹⁷ James Manahan, *Trials of a Lawyer* (Minneapolis, 1933), 219-20; Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 62-63. For an analysis of Townley’s speeches and communication methods as League leader, see Orley I. Holtan, “A.C. Townley, Political Firebrand of North Dakota,” *Western Speech* 35 (Winter, 1971): 30-41.

¹⁸ *Nonpartisan Leader* (Fargo), 18 May 1916, p. 10; Moum, “Harvest of Discontent,” 6-9, 89-122, 141-56.

legislature's rejection of the terminal elevator bill, many of these planks did not seem to many farmers as an immediate necessity. But afterwards, the League was able to shape grievances into a coherent platform that resonated strongly with farmers.¹⁹

In fact, the League continued Equity's use of framing the Chamber of Commerce's depredations as an ongoing threat to the farmer. League literature repeated the evils of the institution's monopolization of the terminal market and the myriad of ways it fleeced the wheat farmer. The NPL freely held up John McHugh as an international henchman who crossed from Manitoba into Minnesota and North Dakota to fight agrarian reform. "The farmers of North Dakota knew well the course of these combats and the finish thereof," writes League chronicler Charles Edward Russell, "and did not fail to appraise rightly the lesson of colossal and absolute power."²⁰

Like Equity, the League framed Canadian examples and precedents as measures similar to League reforms that had already been put into practice. By 1915, Townley had been for many years familiar with Canadian agrarian organizations such as the Grain Growers' Grain Company and the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, which influenced government policy. Especially regarding taxation, the League argued that the prairie provinces provided a model to follow. Instead of taxes on property, livestock, farm tools or farm improvements, Manitoba, Alberta, and Saskatchewan derived revenue from taxes on public service corporations, the sale of public lands, and from the provincially-owned and -operated telegraph and telephone system.

¹⁹ The *Nonpartisan Leader*, 23 Dec. 1915, p. 2; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 21-22, 106-110; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 26.

²⁰ Charles Edward Russell, *The Story of the Nonpartisan League* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 138-40. The League also learned practical organizational techniques from the Equity's struggles. As an incorporated body, the Chamber had filed numerous frivolous legal suits against the farmers' company in attempts to have it bankrupt. The League recognized this and thus never became an incorporated entity. See John M. Gillette, "The North Dakota Harvest of the Nonpartisan League," *Survey* 41 (March, 1919): 756.

The NPL system of public hail insurance was drawn specifically from that in Saskatchewan. In the summer of 1916, soon-to-be NPL Tax Commissioner George E. Wallace toured the prairie provinces in preparation to craft League tax policy on the model of the prairie tax systems. “North Dakota can,” Wallace explained, “by properly amending its laws, follow in a large measure the Canadian system.”²¹

Other areas of Equity influence include the promotion of Antipodean models for state ownership and the justification for a more publicly-oriented political economy. The Nonpartisan *Leader*, the NPL official organ, went so far as to state the League was the American version of the Australian Labor Party, which by 1915 had already put into successful practice most of the NPL platform. After Australian federation in 1901, the Labor Party ruled the country through the World War I period and created a social welfare state. In several states, Labor passed legislation establishing public enterprises designed to provide competition for private monopolies. State ventures include coal mines, quarries, brick works, saw mills, hotels, butcheries, woolen mills, dockyards, railroads, telegraphs, and other urban services. In 1908 Labor pushed through a federal old-age pension plan, and in 1912 federal maternity allowance. For suffering farmers, in 1914 the Labor government provided feed, seed, and water for drought-stricken areas, and pressed bankers and merchants to extend credit more liberally. The League in North Dakota claimed its government could do the same for the dry counties in the western part of the state.

²¹ *Facts for the Farmer: On Conditions Vitally Important to Him as a Producer and to the Wage Worker as Consumer* (The National Nonpartisan League, 1919), 20-22; *Nonpartisan Leader*, 14 Oct. 1915, p. 6; 22 Feb. 1917, p. 11, 18; 22 April 1918, p. 9-10; Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 51; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 26-27.

With these examples, the NPL sought to frame its platform of state industries as practical, not radical, approaches that had already been tested elsewhere and found effective.²²

Explanations of the NPL platform also emphasized the role of successful government intervention in private business in New Zealand. Drawing from New Zealand MP Hugh M. Lusk's book *Social Welfare in New Zealand*, the NPL suggested that government railroads in the island proved government could operate business as efficiently and honestly as private capitalists. League literature argued the party was akin to Labor in New Zealand, which had since the late nineteenth century pursued policies that supported farmers directly, including generous programs to help agricultural settlers acquire land and access affordable credit. Just as Labor in New Zealand had put a halt to industrial autocracy, the Nonpartisan League too would promote the interest of the common citizen. The European *Raiffeisen* system of cooperative credit banking and the German *Landschaften* land credit societies popularized by David Lubin and introduced to American and Canadian farmers during the 1913 tour of Europe, linked the basics of agricultural credit systems in the Antipodes and Western Canada, and the proposals of the Nonpartisan League.²³

The League platform excited a vibrant and growing organizational base, but most remembered the failure of the Populist Party and wondered how the farmers could take control of the state government outside the third-party route. Changes in American politics in the early twentieth century created the conditions for new avenues to power. The old political parties,

²² *Leader*, 28 Jan. 1918, p. 8; 10 June 1918, p. 21; 8 July 1918, p. 9-10; 16 Sept. 1918, p. 13; 21 Oct. 1918, p. 8, 14; 18 Nov. 1918, p. 9; Stuart Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia, Vol. 4: The Succeeding Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 102-108; Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 95-99, 137, 151-54; Gillette, "The North Dakota Harvest of the Nonpartisan League," 758.

²³ *Leader*, 21 Oct. 1915, p. 4; 6 Jan. 1916, p. 3; 23 Dec. 1918, p. 9, 14; 30 Dec. 1918, p. 5, 14; Phillippa Mein Smith, *A Concise History of New Zealand*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 100-10.

especially in areas of the more recently settled West, had become weakened as traditional party elites became alienated from party politics. New immigrant voters undermined their control over party organizations, individual actors rather than party figured more proximately in the system, and voters in larger numbers began to deviate from the partisan status quo. These changes engendered new forms of political participation, nurtured by the Progressive Era belief of bringing democracy closer to the people. Direct democracy, especially the initiative, referendum, and recall, weakened party control over politics at the state level.²⁴

Townley recognized that one particular Progressive idea, the direct primary, offered the NPL an opportunity to influence the existing party structure. When new political opportunities provide an opening in institutional access, political challengers utilize new repertoires of collective action to advance their claims. Townley recognized this opportunity and used it to mobilize a movement. The state primary allowed the voters, not the party, to choose party candidates in primary elections. The winners in the primaries went on to compete in the general election. The direct primary, thus, weakened party elites' control of parties, and made possible popular intervention, such as through the NPL, in the nomination process. To do so, an influential organization had to develop new methods for shaping the outcomes of primary elections. Under Townley's political leadership, the Nonpartisan League aimed to capture the North Dakota state Republican Party by nominating and electing League candidates in the GOP

²⁴ Elisabeth S. Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 26-28.

state primary in June 1916. In doing so, the NPL transformed the party system in North Dakota, leaving parties “not what they once were.”²⁵

Since North Dakota was a Republican state, the central battle would be in the GOP primary. To participate in the the primary election, the North Dakota direct primary law stipulated that voters’ petitions would nominate candidates. League headquarters used its vast list of precinct and district officers, chosen by League members at a series of local meetings in early 1916, to organize and send to voters the direct primary petitions for state and local legislative NPL candidates. Organizers made it a point to exceed by large margins the minimum requirement for signatures. By late winter of 1916, the enthusiasm and high turnout to the precinct and district meetings, and the overflowing pages of voter petitions for the GOP primary, represented strong grassroots support for the League program and its candidates. Farmers across the state experienced the democratic process first-hand, and many for the first time.²⁶

The nominations for the Republican primaries provide strong evidence of the League’s use of Equity networks to embed the organization in politics and identify leadership. M.P. Johnson, the president of the North Dakota state chapter of the American Society of Equity, ran on the League ticket for one of the Commissioners of Railroads; P.M. Casey, vice president of North Dakota Equity, campaigned for State Treasurer. Sam Aandahl (the other candidate for the Commissioners of Railroads), John N. Hagan (candidate for Commissioner of Agriculture and

²⁵ Elizabeth Sanders, *Roots of Reform: Farmers, Workers, and the American State, 1877-1917* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 153-54; Clemens, *The People’s Lobby*, 26-28; Schwartz, *Party Movements*, 15, 95-96; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 19-20; McAdam, et. al., *Dynamics of Contention*.

²⁶ *Nonpartisan Leader*, 30 Mar. 1916, p. 5; Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 116-18; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 47-51.

Labor), and S.A. Olsness (candidate for Commissioner of Insurance), were also respected Society of Equity members.²⁷

Townley and the other members of the League executive board vetted dozens of candidates for governor. The party needed a gubernatorial candidate that epitomized the movement as one for the people, one that broke free of political and partisan traps of the past while also neutralizing the opposition's claim that the League represented radical socialism. League council William Lemke offered the name of a respected farmer from Pembina County, a forty-one-year-old former classmate of his from the University of North Dakota. Townley did some digging and uncovered a perfect candidate: a respected and successful farmer known for honesty and generosity; a teetotaler; a life-long Republican with no previous political record, thus depriving the opposition ammunition to attack him as an office-seeker; and a director in the Equity Cooperative Exchange. League headquarters sent a messenger to the farm of Lynn J. Frazier to invite him to Fargo. The messenger found the potential gubernatorial candidate "clad in overalls...he was steering a load of fence-posts over the bleak prairie, and wound his reins around the handle of the break."²⁸

Lynn Frazier moved as a young man from Minnesota to Dakota Territory in 1881 and after his father's death took over the family farm with the help of his brother. He taught rural school for two years, and then entered the University of North Dakota, where he met William Lemke and captained the football team. After graduating in 1901, Frazier returned to his farm, where he remained until early 1916 when the NPL messenger arrived unannounced. Frazier's unpolished public speaking became an asset. During a series of massive outdoor rallies and

²⁷ *The Nonpartisan Leader*, 2 Mar. 1916, pp. 3-4; 30 Mar. 1916, pp. 5-6; 6 Apr. 1916, pp. 3-4; Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 269-70.

²⁸ Russell, *The Story of the Nonpartisan League*, 210-11; Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 104-105.

picnics leading up to the June GOP primaries, Frazier addressed throngs of farmers, “sunburned and baldheaded. His voice was firm and persuasive. He spoke briefly and the tired farmers loved him.” League propagandists framed Lynn Frazier as the farmers’ “Cincinnatus”—beyond reproach and unassailable as a true farmer candidate.²⁹

In the primaries, despite a massive thunderstorm that made travel to polling places difficult, Lynn Frazier won handily, as did most every other League candidate. Primary wins equaled November victories in the general election. The summer of 1916 witnessed NPL picnics across the state, with thousands of League farmers showing up to hear Townley or Frazier speak on the importance of having farmers capture the government. After November, balance of power in state government boded well for the League, as its members controlled the lower house and held a majority in the state supreme court and the governorship. Holdovers in the upper house, however, blocked a League majority there.³⁰

Looking back, the Nonpartisan League victories in the GOP primaries and the November 1916 general election in North Dakota are remarkable. In two short years, Townley, Bowen, and Wood managed to channel farmer frustration toward a political solution, mobilize and organize, and create a new political culture. They achieved organizational success by utilizing the existing networks of Society of Equity locals, ECE members and marketing channels, and farmers’ cooperative elevator associations. Though successful among Norwegian farmers, the appeal to ethnic communities did not fare as well in German areas of the state. The League did employ German-speaking boosters at picnics and meetings in the German-Russian Triangle, but to no avail. Though some Germans undoubtedly joined the NPL at this point, most did not. One explanation centers on the Catholic leaders’ opposition to the League, perhaps stemming from

²⁹ Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 165-66.

³⁰ Russell, *The Story of the Nonpartisan League*, 219-21.

the North Dakota Socialist Party's attack on the Church and pope. The Bishop of Bismarck, for example, characterized League candidates as unscrupulous and demanded Germans and Catholics to withhold support for the party. Thus, in addition to taking advantage of existing networks and new opportunities for collective action, Townley and the League had to deal with constraints in their strategies for collective action. Nevertheless, the League's organizational strategy of following veins of Equity support and exploiting Norwegian community institutions proved more than sufficient to sweep its candidates into office in November 1916.³¹

As the 1917 North Dakota legislative session opened, the Equity Cooperative Exchange and the Nonpartisan League presented a united front of interorganizational networks. "The membership of both organizations," the Equity press noted, "is made up very largely of the same people." The view of League and ECE officials and members framed the NPL as the political side of the farmers' struggle, working towards state-owned industries, while the ECE was the business branch, with cooperatively owned enterprises. As ECE president John M. Anderson explained, "each attends to its own knitting." Anderson and the ECE did take credit for creating the conditions that made possible the NPL's success, namely Equity's push for a state terminal elevator and the North Dakota legislature's subsequent refusal to pursue that project. Anyone who expected rancor between the farmers' marketing agency and the farmers' political arm were left disappointed when they witnessed governor-elect Frazier and ECE president J.M. Anderson share the stage at the groundbreaking of the Equity terminal elevator at St. Paul at the end of 1916. The NPL also brought ECE attorney James Manahan onto the payroll during the summer of 1916 as spokesman in neighboring Minnesota. As the movement picked up steam coming out of the June primaries, Manahan handled interviews with St. Paul newspapers, helped organize

³¹ Ellsworth, "Origins of the Nonpartisan League," 272; Moum, "Harvest of Discontent," 144-45.

additional counties in North Dakota, and wrote for the *Nonpartisan Leader*. In addition to forging even closer ties between Equity and the League, Manahan spearheaded the beginnings of League expansion beyond North Dakota and into the wheat-growing regions of western Minnesota.³²

There is no doubting the significant influence and power of the ECE in North Dakota throughout the latter half of the 1910s. It held two seats on the St. Paul Grain Exchange, organized a livestock-marketing arm, and opened an Equity branch in neighboring Montana. The half-a-million-bushel capacity Equity terminal elevator opened for business in St. Paul in 1917. The following year the ECE handled fifteen million bushels of wheat through its terminal elevator and over twenty line elevators across North Dakota and Minnesota. An estimated 11,000 stockholders and over \$600,000 in capital stock undergirded the entire business structure. In 1920 all these numbers had increased. The Equity Cooperative Exchange represented an important, respected, and powerful business agency alongside the Nonpartisan League. It was the organizational vehicle by which the party came to power. By 1916 it was one of the largest, if not the largest cooperative wheat marketing agency in the entire United States.³³

³² *Cooperators' Herald*, 25 Aug. 1916, p. 8; 27 Oct. 1916, p. 17; 3 Nov. 1916, p. 12; 1 Dec. 1916, pp. 1-2; 15 Dec. 1916, p. 8; *Nonpartisan Leader*, 14 Sept. 1916, p. 15; J.M. Anderson to Waldemar Westergaard, 29 May 1919 and 1 Aug. 1919, folder 2, John Miller Anderson Papers, University of North Dakota Special Collections, Grand Forks; Arthur Townley to James Manahan, 1 July 1916 and 3 July 1916, B.W. Moore to James Manahan, 14 Sept. 1916, and William Lemke to James Manahan, 26 April 1916, Correspondence and Misc. Papers, Jan. 1916-Dec. 1917, Box 2, Manahan Papers, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul.

³³ Theodore Saloutos, "The Decline of the Equity Cooperative Exchange," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 34 (Dec., 1947): 405-26.

Socialism, Agrarian Politics, and War in Saskatchewan

By the time of the Nonpartisan League's 1916 general election victory in North Dakota, Canada had already experienced over two years of the European war. Britain's declaration of war on 4 August 1914 committed Canada to the conflict. The Canadian West needed little prodding to support the Allies and the broader war effort. Until 1917 the Dominion government called for the continuation of an open market in wheat to fill the Allied demand. Prairie farmers substantially increased wheat acreage and enjoyed a favorable market with high prices. However, prices in other realms of production increased. It became more expensive to pay farm help and purchase machinery, for example. Though the wartime high price for wheat made acreage expansion or machinery purchases available to the farmer, it also left him deep in debt, especially when the bottom fell out of the wheat economy in the early 1920s.³⁴

Western Canadians of British extraction, the majority of the prairie population, strongly supported the war, citing ties to Great Britain and the protection of democracy. In churches across the prairies, pastors preached support for the Allies, and public schools presented to students pro-war propaganda. Economically, by 1915, wheat sales to fill the overseas market led to an impressive rise in prices and overall economic stimulus. Consequently, most productive wheat farmers found little to criticize.³⁵

The same Anglo-Protestant prairie Canadians who offered unqualified support for war also spearheaded widespread discrimination against enemy and non-enemy immigrant groups. Such attacks were most prevalent in the West due to the region's high percentage of non-English

³⁴ John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 12-44, 45-72; C.F. Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), 58.

³⁵ Thompson, *The Harvests of War*, ch. 2.

ethnic settlers. Such public pressure and perceived threats from immigrants pressed the federal government to track and circumscribe the mobility of alien groups, create internment camps for perceived domestic enemies, suppress foreign-language periodicals, and disfranchise alien voters. German Canadians, highly regarded before the war, came under heavy attack. Ethnic groups associated with the Austro-Hungarian Empire, such as Ukrainians and Ruthenians, had never been accepted as upstanding settlers and suffered increasing repression after 1914.³⁶

In Saskatchewan, wartime suspicion of foreigners and a desire to impose Anglo-Protestant morality led to the passage in 1915 of prohibition. Germans and Austro-Hungarians were not inconspicuous groups in the province: they comprised about twenty-five percent of the population and represented the largest immigrant groups behind the British. Beginning in 1915 and intensifying in 1916, prominent Anglo-Protestants pressured the Liberal provincial government to make schools instruct in the English language only. The provincial Tories backed the measure as well. In early 1916, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA) officially demanded an end to bilingual or non-English instruction in public schools. The SGGA had, since its inception a decade before, accepted only Anglo-Protestant members and shunned the province's ethnic groups. By the provincial election year of 1917, the Liberals were in a tight spot. The party had courted non-Anglos and developed a support base among them but now faced mounting pressure to publicly discriminate against non-English-speakers. In addition to the SGGA, most other prominent Anglo-Protestant organizations backed the English-only measure.³⁷

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 73-74, 79-80.

³⁷ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 23 Feb. 1916, p. 5; James William Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan, 1905-1929" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1976), 283-86, 337.

The English-only sentiment did not threaten to disrupt the Liberals' long-standing position as the majority government of Saskatchewan. For a decade, the party had carefully cultivated ties with the farmers, through the SGGA. By 1916, the party had brought into the Liberal cabinet the most well-known and respected SGGA leaders: W.R. Motherwell, the organization's first president; J.A. Maharg, the second president; and Board of Directors members George Langley and Charles Dunning (future Liberal Premier). This meant that the Liberals could influence SGGA policy and stem the tide of any potential independent or third-party agrarian revolt within its ranks. In fairness, the Liberals did in fact put into law most SGGA resolutions, none of which were unduly radical. Liberal refusal to sanction a provincial government grain elevator represented the only source of friction between the party and the SGGA. The same clash between organized farmers and state Republicans in North Dakota resulted in a heightened cycle of contention, which opened opportunities to challenge the dominant political culture. In Saskatchewan, however, the framing of the Liberals as the "farmers' party" overshadowed such disagreement.³⁸

Despite the mostly amicable relationship between the government and the organized farmers, there were reasons for the provincial Liberals to avoid political complacency. They remained part of a federal party which enjoyed little agrarian support. As a national party, federal Liberals fared poorly among Western farmers, who still resented the failure of reciprocity in 1911, the protective tariff, high freight rates, and other policies believed beneficial to eastern manufacturers at the expense of farmers. As wartime prices for goods and services increased, many prairie farmers believed the federal Liberals to be little different from the Tories. Both

³⁸ S.M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan: A Study in Political Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), 55-56.

Liberal and Conservative parties recognized that the growing population of the West represented increased political clout in Parliament, and, until the war interrupted, they attempted to alleviate prairie farmers' dissatisfaction.³⁹

Criticism of the provincial Liberals did emerge in southwestern Saskatchewan, an area which by 1916 had been devastated by drought and racked by almost complete crop failure. The provincial government did not robustly address the crisis, and Premier Scott refused calls for a moratorium on farmers' debts. New Liberal measures put into law, such as the creation of the Saskatchewan Farm Loan Board, were not aimed at tackling the agricultural crisis in the province's southwest. The Farm Loan Board offered low-interest loans for productive purposes with farmers' mortgages as security—hardly helpful to a grain grower facing foreclosure due to successive failed harvests. Drought led to despair, as “crop prospects are poor and people feel too poor to start anything in a good many places.” Thus many suffering farmers in southwestern Saskatchewan characterized Liberals and Conservatives alike, provincial and federal, as “party tricksters” who did anything for votes. Something drastic was needed to break “party chains.”⁴⁰

This deteriorating agricultural and economic situation around Swift Current in southwestern Saskatchewan offered an opportunity for political challengers to emerge. In mid-1916, S.E. Haight, a Canadian who had worked⁴¹ with the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota

³⁹ Ibid., 56; Thompson, *Harvests of War*, 12-17.

⁴⁰ Ida A. Sifton to Zoa Haight, 16 July 1917, file 5: “Provincial Equal Franchise Board, 1915-1917,” and *Grain Growers' Guide* clipping, file 13H, “Newspaper Clippings, Misc., 1916-1918,” Zoa Haight Papers, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon; *Grain Growers' Guide*, 9 Dec. 1914, p. 13; 13 Jan. 1915, p. 15; 15 Sept. 1915, p. 8; 12 July 1916, p. 8; Brennan, “A Political History of Saskatchewan,” 215, 351-52.

⁴¹ Haight's specific role or type of employment in the League in North Dakota is not precisely clear. Haight is referred to as “one of the promoters” of the NPL in North Dakota. It is not clear if this means he was an organizer or perhaps a local leader. Oliver S. Morris, Publicity Manager for the North Dakota NPL and editor of the organization's official publication the *Nonpartisan Leader* (Minneapolis), doubted Haight's connection to the American political body.

brought back to Swift Current the major aspects of the organization, and pitched it to the large number of American immigrants there. North Dakota farmers were “in the vanguard” of the movement of almost one million American migrants to Western Canada between the turn of the century and 1914. The majority of the North Dakotans moving into the Canadian prairies settled in Saskatchewan, lured by cheaper land, geographical contiguity, and rising mortgage and tenancy rates in North Dakota.⁴²

By 1916, the American-born in Saskatchewan represented almost thirty percent of the population, and most Americans settled in southwest Saskatchewan. Among the American-born, a significant number had lived in North Dakota in the past. Most Canadians returning from American to Saskatchewan had also resided in North Dakota along the international border. To these Americans, Haight aggressively preached the North Dakota NPL platform. It appealed as an “American and independent organization to American farmers, of whom there were many.” Many of the Americans in Saskatchewan harbored elements of agrarian radicalism and swore no allegiance to the Liberals or Conservatives, provincial or federal. The League’s association with the United States hampered immediately its attractiveness to Canadian farmers. Some viewed it as a “new and extreme political organization with the ideals and forms of faith of another country.”⁴³

Morris, an original NPL member since its inception in 1915, had “never heard of him before,” though he admitted he “may have been” one of the thousands who joined the order or who were interested in it. As well, the secretary of the Independent Voters’ Association, which would come to forcefully oppose the NPL in North Dakota, knew nothing of Haight or his previous interaction with the NPL. See *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1917* (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review, Lmt., 1918), 781, and *The Globe* (Toronto), 18 April 1917.

⁴² Karel Denis Bicha, “The North Dakota Farmer and the Canadian West,” *North Dakota History* 29 (Oct., 1962): 297-301.

⁴³ *The Canadian Annual Review, 1917*, 384, 773, 781; *The Globe* (Toronto), 18 April 1917; Randy William Widdis, *With Scarcely a Ripple: Anglo-Canadian Migration into the United States and Western Canada, 1880-1920* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press,

The ideas and institutional structures of the North Dakota League were therefore diffused into prairie Canada during 1916. Individuals, like Haight, can act as the “transmitter.” Diffusion also requires “channels,” persons or media with an adopter across national boundaries. The channels in the League’s diffusion into Canada include several. First, “heterogeneous populations may come to regard their counterparts in other countries as salient reference groups.” In other words, the large American population in southwest Saskatchewan represents a channel of diffusion. Second, a channel can have an institutional equivalent. Equity in North Dakota already had firm connections with the Grain Growers’ Grain Company and the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association. As a member of the SGGA, Haight was already part of these institutional links.⁴⁴

If agricultural collapse in southwestern Saskatchewan offered an opportunity for a party challenge to the government, Liberal provincial dominance constrained the new movement’s political strategy. These constraints are clearly identified in the League’s appeal, at this early juncture, to mostly American, rather than Canadian farmers. The Canadians, steeped in the effective Liberal framing as the farmers’ friend and of the party’s close connection to the founding of Saskatchewan as a province in 1905, were more inclined to see the League as an intruder, a non-indigenous political manifestation of a more radical American agrarianism. So Haight sought to tap into an already existing mobilizing structure, a Canadian organizational “host” by which the young League could develop interorganizational networks and thus energize recruitment and legitimacy.

1998), 297-302; Roger Gibbins, *Prairie Politics and Society: Regionalism in Decline* (Toronto: Butterworths, 1980), 21-22; Thompson, *Harvests of War*, 83.

⁴⁴ Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht, “The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July, 1993): 56-74.

Haight was a leader in the SGGA local at Swift Current. When crop failure hit the region, he, along with future NPL candidate D.J. Sykes, hosted meetings for suffering farmers and demanded provincial government assistance with drought conditions and credit and debt problems. But Haight and others became frustrated with the provincial Liberals' indifference to the agricultural and economic straits of those in southwestern Saskatchewan, and by 1915 Haight believed the provincial Liberals incapable or unwilling to assist struggling farmers with weather and environmental conditions beyond their control. It is not surprising that the League in North Dakota appealed to him, with its message of government intervention and state industries designed to help the wheat farmer.⁴⁵

Under Haight's leadership, party literature envisioned the province of Saskatchewan as a "corporation," with hundreds of millions of dollars in assets in the form of agricultural lands and products. Farmer "shareholders" should organize just like United States Steel Corporation to take advantage of these assets. Only an "ignoramus or a knave" could argue that this would be accomplished without farmers involvement in politics. Once elected, said Haight, farmer MLA's would use the authority of the provincial government to borrow against these assets and pass legislation providing for provincial grain terminals, flour mills, stock yards, packing houses, and cold storage plants. In addition, the province could provide farmers with machinery, government inspection of dockage and grading, and rural banks operated at cost. To ensure this political revolution continued to wield power, NPL legislators aimed to create various means of direct legislation, including the recall. These elements composed the Saskatchewan NPL's provincial

⁴⁵ Swift Current *Sun*, 17 Aug. 1915, p. 1; 25 Aug. 1915, p.2.

platform. Essentially the NPL desired to leverage the province's agricultural wealth, borrow against it, and enact these various government-owned and -operated schemes.⁴⁶

Haight also copied the North Dakota League's framing of Antipodean state activism. The *Leader of Western Canada* argued that if the Premier was serious about helping farmers in southwest Saskatchewan, he should urge the government to look to New Zealand and the Australian states of Western Australia and Victoria. There, government provided affordable credit through long-term loans at low interest rates. "If they can do it in the land of the Southern Cross," boasted the *Leader*, "they surely can do it in this land of snows and sunshine."⁴⁷

The difficulties in gaining sufficient political power to realize these radical plans represented the prime constraint facing the Saskatchewan Farmers' Nonpartisan Political League—the direct primary did not exist in the Canadian parliamentary system. Absent the political means by which the North Dakota League came to power, its Saskatchewan counterpart confronted a serious challenge in the enactment of its goals. The League represented the first organized political challenge to the party system in Saskatchewan. Prior to this, those opposed to hyper-partisanship and self-aggrandizing politicians thought various methods of direct legislation, such as the initiative, referendum, and recall, to be sufficient alternatives to the party system. Proponents of the reforms argued that direct legislation could return to the people the disproportionate political power held by a minority of the privileged elite. Backed by farm, labor, and temperance groups, in 1912 the newly formed Direct Legislation League in Saskatchewan pressed the Liberal government for a popular vote on direct legislation measures. Though it passed in 1913, the voter turnout was so insignificant that Premier Scott refused to enact the

⁴⁶ Frederick W. Laidley, *The Why of the Farmers Nonpartisan League of Canada* (Swift Current: League Headquarters, n.d.), 5, 8.

⁴⁷ *Leader of Western Canada*, 18 Nov. 1916, p. 45.

measures, and reminded them of Liberal support for farmers and favorable Liberal agrarian legislation.⁴⁸

Premier Scott highlighted the incompatibility of American-style federalism's direct legislation and Canadian parliamentarianism. In the parliamentary system, the defeat of a public measure in the legislature meant the defeat of the government. "Now suppose a Bill of this class which is introduced by the Government and carried by a majority in the Legislature meets defeat when voted upon by the people in a referendum," the Premier pointed out. "If the Cabinet is not obliged to resign, what becomes of Cabinet responsibility? On the other hand, if the Cabinet is obliged to resign, the fact will be that in practically every referendum the main question will be the maintenance or defeat of the Government and every referendum will be a purely political election just as much as is a general election." He concluded with the observation that direct legislation was not in use anywhere within the British Empire.⁴⁹

Apart from efforts to enact forms of direct legislation, the only additional method of combating the party system in the province involved the running of independent candidates. In no way had this political strategy borne fruit. Excepting one, every independent candidate who ran before 1914 received the lowest number of votes among the candidates in his respective electoral district. Thus by the time the NPL came onto the political scene in Saskatchewan in 1916, both direct legislation and independent politics proved ineffectual in altering the party system. It seemed unlikely as well that an insurgent political force could capture the Liberal Party, and the provincial Conservatives were simply too weak to effect any type of change.

⁴⁸ Duff Spafford, "Independent Politics in Saskatchewan before the Nonpartisan League," *Saskatchewan History* 18 (Winter, 1965): 1-4.

⁴⁹ Quoted Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 228-34.

Without a direct primary, running as a third party represented the only path for a political challenge.⁵⁰

The Saskatchewan Nonpartisan League began its third-party revolt in the summer of 1916. On 12 July at Swift Current, president Haight put together a meeting in which he, the vice president, and five other prominent local farmers decided to initiate a political insurgency. The fact they had over one hundred farmers pledged to their program convinced the leaders to charge \$15 (rather than the \$9 in North Dakota) to cover the costs of canvassing around Swift Current and southwest Saskatchewan. Haight had organizers the canvassing methods of the League in North Dakota. In the summer and fall of 1916, canvassers used their own vehicles but soon the organization purchased some Fords. Clandestinely, “so that the opposition would not materialize until the league was strong enough to fight back,” the Saskatchewan League went about organizing during the harvest season of 1916.⁵¹

After the League’s general election victory in North Dakota in November 1916, the organization sent a telegram to its counterpart in Saskatchewan, proclaiming a “great and complete victory for the league and its legislature program.” Saskatchewan Leaguers framed this as an irrefutable justification for their organization, because “it shows how [the farmers in North Dakota] STUCK [and] the farmers of Saskatchewan can do the same.” Part of convincing the farmers to “stick” with the party meant the creation of a cohesive organization tied to existing cooperative, community, and educational networks. The League in North Dakota had used as an effective organizational approach the networks of Equity and Equity Cooperative Exchange locals and memberships. The League in Saskatchewan attempted the same approach through the locals and membership of the SGGA. Like the League in North Dakota, the NPL in

⁵⁰ Spafford, “Independent Politics in Saskatchewan,” 4-9.

⁵¹ *Grain Growers’ Guide*, 4 Oct. 1916, p. 19.

Saskatchewan used alleged affiliation with the SGGA as an “in” towards potential recruits. Unlike the warm reception given to the NPL by Equity in North Dakota, SGGA leaders immediately distanced the organization from the third party. Central Secretary J.B. Musselman urged local members not to follow those who wanted to lead the farmers into politics. The solution to farmers’ problems is not political, he argued. More alarming to the SGGA executive were false claims supposedly made by NPL canvassers that the SGGA backed the League. The executive board received reports that organizers used alleged affiliation with the SGGA to gain an “in” with potential recruits. For the Grain Growers, the NPL platform represented nothing less than a threat to the unification of the province’s farmers that the SGGA had worked so hard and long to achieve. Secretary Musselman urged a campaign to remind farmers the SGGA was in no way affiliated with this new farmers’ political organization.⁵²

Unlike the interorganizational network between the League and Equity in North Dakota, that of the League and the SGGA in Saskatchewan remained regionally marginal and weak. Haight used his connections to SGGA locals around Swift Current to garner recruits, but he could not create the type of broader and deeper networks with the Grain Growers that provided resources and opportunities for movement influence.⁵³

The NPL-SGGA conflict was yet another example of a long-apparent breach among Saskatchewan’s organized farmers between those who believed farmers must move into independent politics, beyond the Liberal Party, and those who suggested politics would rend the

⁵² Musselman to SGGA members, 16 Nov. 1916, file E.62, folder 1; Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association, Farmers’ Union of Canada, and United Farmers of Canada-Saskatchewan Section Records (SGGA, FUC, UFC-SS Records), Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Saskatoon; Minutes of the Executive of the SGGA, 1916, file I.2., pp. 108-109; SGGA, FUC, UFC-SS Records, SAB, Saskatoon; *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 18 Nov. 1916, p. 44, 47.

⁵³ Schwartz, *Party Movements*, 35-36; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 22-23, 123-24; McAdam, et. al., *Dynamics of Contention*, 314.

farmers' movement. On one side, Musselman led those who admonished the organized farmers to remain separate from politics. On the other side some SGGGA members were on record supporting an independent party. For example, James Morton, secretary of the Two Creeks SGGGA local, argued the usefulness of a temporary farmers' party, independent of and separate from the SGGGA, to assert "the farmer's right and power." Most of this sentiment, however, was concentrated in drought-stricken southwestern Saskatchewan.⁵⁴

In and around Swift Current, the membership of the SGGGA and NPL did overlap substantially. NPL informational literature claimed 70% of Leaguers were also Saskatchewan Grain Growers. League propaganda urged SGGGA members "to think further than a single carload." Thus beginning in early 1917 the NPL continued its attempt to organize the third party through networks of SGGGA locals. The party utilized canvassers from North Dakota, such as Gunnar Johnson, who drove a League Ford—with NPL pennants on top streaming in the wind—across the southwestern portion of the province. Such organizational efforts did little good because SGGGA leaders pushed back against any affiliation with the Nonpartisan League.⁵⁵

Sidney Godwin, editor of the Swift Current-based *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, offered a resolution at the February 1917 SGGGA annual convention whereby the SGGGA would pledge support for the NPL and its platform, but it met defeat by a large majority. At the convention, a disenchanted Saskatchewan Leaguer became the director of SGGGA district fifteen at Vanguard, a town just southeast of Swift Current, demonstrating the complexity of coexistence. P.L. Craigen began as an ardent Grain Grower in southwest Saskatchewan, first as a local organizer and then a recognized leader of the Vanguard local. Due to the deteriorating

⁵⁴ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 5 Aug. 1914, p. 13.

⁵⁵ *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 30 May 1917, p. 292; Laidley, *The Why of the Farmers Nonpartisan League of Canada*, 14-15.

weather and economic situation in the region, he became a canvasser for the NPL in 1916. However, his criticism of the heavy-handed rule of League leadership, their less than transparent use of membership fees, and the lack of clarity with regard to the organization's goals, resulted in his expulsion from the NPL in 1917. Craigen openly declared, "If this is the kind of democracy the Non-Partisan League is going to usher in, I think it is time the farmer on these prairies knew about it." He accused NPL leaders of being "selfish," and suggested they might be swindling the members.⁵⁶

Even at this early juncture it was clear that the NPL in Saskatchewan lacked characteristics of party movements exploited so successfully in North Dakota. Charismatic leaders represent one element of persistent party movements. Unfortunately, Haight was no Canadian Townley. Townley used his centralized power to control factionalism, something at which Haight obviously had no skill. Party leaders also harbor the significant responsibility of selecting the forms of collective action, the repertoires. In this, again, Townley identified openings and opportunities, and exploited them with political innovation—the direct primary. Though this tool was absent in the Canadian parliamentary system, Haight needed to be more creative in choosing a form for collective action. Fashioning the Nonpartisan League as a third party was neither creative nor effective. In fact, it had in the past proved a failure. Without a charismatic and effective leader, party movements can become stale and static.⁵⁷

Apart from suffering farmers in drought areas of the prairies, even more conservative Canadian agrarian leaders sought to know more about the remarkable League victories in North Dakota. Roderick McKenzie, secretary of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, a director of the

⁵⁶ Convention Minutes, SGGA 16th Annual Convention, file I.1., pp. 58-59, SGGA, FUC, UFC-SS Records, SAB, Saskatoon; *Grain Growers' Guide*, 4 Feb. 1914, p. 9; 16 Dec. 1914, p. 14; 21 Mar. 1917, p. 19; 5 Sept. 1917, p. 8; 10 Oct. 1917, p. 16.

⁵⁷ Schwartz, *Party Movements*, 33, 37; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 20.

Grain Growers' Grain Company, and secretary of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association, visited the NPL headquarters at Fargo in September 1916 to learn about this new farmers' political organization "whose fame has spread through Canada." McKenzie's discussions with leaders and the press demonstrate the close organizational connection between the ECE and the League. He emphasized GGGC's history of struggle with the Winnipeg Exchange and paralleled that history with Equity's fight with the Chamber of Commerce, and suggested this was one part of the farmers' struggle.⁵⁸

The political element of the agrarian movement, McKenzie argued, could be duplicated by the "progressive element" in the prairies, because the agricultural conditions that gave rise to the North Dakota NPL were identical to those in Western Canada. Can we not, McKenzie asked rhetorically, get progressive farmers together, craft a political platform, canvass rural constituencies, and nominate good candidates in the federal field? The fact that McKenzie highlighted the farmers' political role in federal politics, not provincial, points to the hold in the prairies of the two-party provincial system, as well as farmers' willingness to challenge the federal party system. It also explains why the Saskatchewan League failed to gain a significant foothold outside of the Swift Current area.⁵⁹

The War and the League in North Dakota

Before America's entry into World War I in April 1917 disrupted the plans of the Nonpartisan League, a contentious legislative issue threatened to expose a dangerous breach between the party and its cooperative corollary, the Equity Cooperative Exchange. North

⁵⁸ *Nonpartisan Leader*, 14 Sept. 1916, p. 9.

⁵⁹ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 6 Sept. 1916, p. 18.

Dakota's constitution made no provisions for the types of state industries embodied in the League program. State constitutional amendments could take years to enact. Moreover, due to senate holdovers, the League did not control the upper house of the legislature, though the party did control the executive and judicial branches, as well as the lower house. NPL lawyers devised an unprecedented approach to this conundrum.

House Bill 44, introduced at the beginning of the 1917 legislative session, would have allowed the people of North Dakota to vote on a newly written state constitution. As proposed in the house bill, the new constitution would have raised the state's debt limit and permitted the state to own and operate agricultural industries. Equity stockholders and members endorsed resolutions in support of the bill, and sent a telegram to president Townley reaffirming the cooperative organization's support for the NPL's work in the legislature. The bill, however, stalled in the upper house, blocked by an anti-League caucus of holdover senators.⁶⁰

The senate did pass an elevator bill of its own. Some Leaguers felt this measure, though not as far-reaching as they desired, was a good start towards fulfilling the overwhelming public sentiment for a state terminal elevator. Senate Bill 84 provided \$300,000 from the terminal elevator fund for construction, with the remainder financed by general taxation. The ECE urged League legislatures to vote for the bill. The measure narrowly passed the house, with a divided League vote.⁶¹

In early 1917, Governor Frazier vetoed the bill. He argued that financing via direct taxation increased the tax burden to unacceptable levels. He favored instead the issuance of

⁶⁰ *Nonpartisan Leader*, 18 Jan. 1917, p. 3; 25 Jan. 1917, p. 19; and 15 Feb. 1917, p. 19; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 100-104; *Cooperators' Herald*, 2 Feb. 1917, p. 7 and 16 Feb. 1917, p. 8.

⁶¹ J.G. Crees to Ole H. Olson, 21 Feb. 1917, folder 16, Box 9, Ole H. Olson Papers, North Dakota State University Archives, Fargo; Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 147-48.

bonds to pay for construction and operation. Without the construction of an accompanying state flour mill, as called for in the League platform, this small elevator could do little good in remedying the farmers' marketing problems. The entire bill and the entire scheme, the governor concluded, allowed the "Old Guard" senators to either pass a bill providing for an elevator destined to fail, to criticize the NPL for renegeing on an age-old promise to North Dakota farmers, or to discredit completely the idea of state ownership.⁶²

Governor Frazier's veto of the terminal elevator bill exposed the first potential serious breach between the state's preeminent cooperative marketing agency, the ECE, and the farmers' political arm, the NPL. Both North Dakota American Society of Equity president M.P. Johnson (in public) and Equity Cooperative Exchange leaders (in private) denounced the League's failure to redeem their campaign promises of a state terminal elevator. However, much of the grassroots, including several ECE locals, many members of which were also Leaguers, bombarded the Equity and NPL newspapers with letters endorsing Frazier's veto. They protested Equity's criticism of the governor and reminded both organizations that they were working towards the same purpose. One Equity member urged patience with regard to a state terminal elevator, just as Equity members waited patiently for the first Equity terminal to be opened at St. Paul. This minor spat between the two bodies, of which the same members composed, disappeared relatively quickly.⁶³

League enemies, however, recognized the combined power of the interorganizational link between Equity and the NPL, and attempted to use the veto issue as a wedge between the two

⁶² *Nonpartisan Leader*, 8 Mar. 1917, p. 5; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 107-108.

⁶³ J.M. Anderson to Olson, 28 Feb., 13 Mar., 20 Mar. 1917; Crees to Olson, 28 Feb. 1917, folder 16, Box 9, Olson Papers; *Cooperators' Herald*, 16 Mar. 1917, p. 1; 4 May 1917, p. 7; *Nonpartisan Leader*, 19 Apr. 1917, p. 16; 26 Apr. 1917, p. 14; 24 May 1917, p. 16.

bodies. Jerry D. Bacon, a Grand Forks newspaper mogul and early foe of the League movement, published an anti-League tract, which reprinted some Equity criticisms of Frazier's veto and characterized the two organizations as inherently different and incompatible. "The Equity's idea was born in England. The League's idea is the product of Germany," Bacon wrote. Equity represents "ancient, independent American idea of self-help," while the League represents the "paternalistic idea of state help and state absolutism."⁶⁴

In the end, the strong interorganizational links between Equity and the League could not be severed by such a superficial issue. If this mild conflict had spiraled outward, it could have begun a new cycle of contention, one that pitted the party movement, the NPL, against its "host." However, the League had appropriated the existing Equity networks so fully, and embedded itself so securely within the Equity organizational structure, that this minor spat over the veto never erupted into a an uncontrollable and new cycle of contention.⁶⁵

A state mill and elevator system would have to wait until the League could unseat the senate holdovers and take complete legislative control beginning in 1919. Nonetheless, the 1917 legislative session produced a slate of progressive laws. For farmers, Leaguers pushed through laws providing for a state grain grading system, prohibiting railroad freight rate discrimination, a reduced rate of assessment on farm machinery and improvements, and a proposed constitutional amendment for an exemption of farm improvements from taxation. More general legislation included a state bank deposit guarantee, the establishment of a State Highway Commission, aid for education, a nine-hour day for women workers, and a proposed constitutional amendment for complete women suffrage. Even without control of the state senate the active League

⁶⁴ Jerry D. Bacon, *A Warning to the Farmer Against Townleyism as Exploited in North Dakota* (Grand Forks, 1918), 45-48.

⁶⁵ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 23-24.

government produced a list of favorable measures, remained popular across the state, and looked towards expansion beyond North Dakota.⁶⁶

Some of these measures directly helped farmers' wives and other rural women. Townley and other League strategists viewed women's support as a key element in sustaining and growing League political power. Part of this, as evidenced by Governor Frazier's support for women suffrage (which was enacted in North Dakota in 1919), was to garner female votes. To do so, League organizers tapped into the networks of women's church groups and mobilize their members. Building upon such interorganizational ties, the NPL in 1919 created a women's auxiliary to the party, which aimed to lessen rural isolation and provide communication between female League members, and, most importantly, to mobilize female voters. By 1920 there existed 62 auxiliaries with over 1,200 female members.⁶⁷

Women in North Dakota were drawn into the auxiliaries because the League championed relevant legislation. The League-led lower house helped create a welfare commission tasked with the investigation of working conditions of women and children. Governor Frazier appointed League member Aldyth Ward to the commission. Ward, along with the state Attorney General and the Agriculture and Labor Commissioner, observed working conditions and spoke with female and child laborers. Appalled by what she learned, Ward urged the governor and legislature to pass a minimum wage law and stipulate an eight-hour day, both of which became law in 1919. Ward explained additional reasons why women supported the League. Governor Frazier, she explained, always spoke of supporting rural schools, and during his tenure increased

⁶⁶ Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 106.

⁶⁷ Karen Starr, "Fighting for a Future: Farm Women of the Nonpartisan League," *Minnesota History* 48 (Summer, 1983): 255-62; Schwartz, *Party Movements*, 93.

education funding fourfold. These measures brought more and more farm women into the League women's auxiliaries.⁶⁸

Then, after only a few months of League control, war intervened, and brought with it a new cycle of contention, unexpected opportunities and constraints, novel means of collective action, and robust institutional responses. Before April 1917, the League's view towards the war reflected the prevailing sentiment in North Dakota and the Upper Midwest, which called for the U.S. to avoid engagement in the conflict. After America's entry, the League and Equity supported President Woodrow Wilson and the war effort, though with qualifications. Both organizations presented identical war resolutions, which called for the conscription of wealth to finance the war, federal food and price controls, and government ownership and operation of basic industries, such as railroads, communications, utilities, and natural resources. Generally supportive of federal government policy, the League had a good relationship with the Wilson administration, whose liberal philosophy appealed to North Dakotans. Wilson carried North Dakota both in 1912 and 1916.⁶⁹

When it became clear that the U.S. needed to increase the supply of basic foodstuffs to the Allies, the federal government moved to control significant aspects of agricultural production and distribution. During the spring of 1917 Herbert Hoover, as head of the U.S. Food Administration, moved to increase domestic wheat production and deal with steadily rising

⁶⁸ Aldyth Ward, "What One State Had Done For Women," in ed. Pearl Andre, *Women on the Move* (Bismarck: North Dakota Democratic-Nonpartisan League Women, 1975), 57-59.

⁶⁹ *Nonpartisan Leader*, 14 June 1917, p. 9; 16 Aug. 1917, p. 11. *Cooperators' Herald*, 27 Apr. 1917, p. 9; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 353-63; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 110.

prices. Hoover and the Department of Agriculture began to talk of price fixing and government control of essential marketing mechanisms, especially with regard to wheat.⁷⁰

Due to Equity's position as the largest and most influential cooperative wheat marketing institution in the United States, government leaders, including President Wilson and Hoover, agreed to meet with ECE representatives to hear their opinions on the wheat production and marketing situation in the northern plains. ECE president John M. Anderson led a contingent of seven delegates that met with government leaders in early June 1917. Anderson, Howard R. Wood (former speaker of the North Dakota house), Benjamin Drake (attorney for the ECE), J.E. Kelly (former Senator from South Dakota), C.F. Lowrie (president of the Montana Society of Equity), Thomas Pendray, and the president of the University of North Dakota sat down with Herbert Hoover in his hotel suite in Washington where he "smoked in silence" and listened to the delegates' suggestions. They also spent several hours with President Wilson, the Secretary of Agriculture, and the Chairmen of both the Senate and House Committees on Agriculture.⁷¹

The delegates' requests included government price guarantees for wheat, government assistance to cooperative marketing organizations, government control of grain exchanges, and the end of futures trading in wheat. They also argued that the Canadian establishment of government interior and terminal elevators should be duplicated in the United States. The government men listened intently, and the Secretary of Agriculture urged the delegates to put their resolutions in writing.⁷²

⁷⁰ Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950*, 159-63.

⁷¹ *Nonpartisan Leader*, 31 May 1917, p. 7; 7 June 1917, p. 12. *Cooperators' Herald*, 8 June 1917, p. 5.

⁷² *Cooperators' Herald*, 8 June 1917, p. 5.

The Equity representatives influenced Hoover and the U.S. Food Administration to some degree. The Food and Fuel Control Act passed Congress on 10 August 1917 and guaranteed a minimum price for wheat and allowed for government purchases of wheat and other commodities. The federal government, however, did not elect to own or control interior or terminal elevators. Instead the Food Administration's Grain Corporation empowered the government to purchase wheat at terminal markets at a government-determined price, and to ensure that farmers received a similar price at local marketing points. At the end of August President Wilson set the government price for wheat at \$2.20 for No. 1 Northern at Chicago for the 1917 crop. The act also discontinued futures trading at grain exchanges.⁷³

Equity in North Dakota praised these moves, and proclaimed that the Food Control bill represented Equity principles finally realized in government policy. Both Equity and the League argued that these measures, implemented in wartime, should become standard in peacetime. The NPL dryly noted, "when it comes to a time of war and necessity people will consent to some very 'SOCIALISTIC' things. When you propose to use the power of the state to do these things [during peacetime] it is called 'visionary' and 'impractical.'" The League, then, attempted to frame expansive powers of government as necessary for wartime, but also as a legitimate answer to peacetime problems as well.⁷⁴

The Wilson administration viewed Equity and the Nonpartisan League as legitimate and respected spokesmen for the wheat farmer of Upper Midwest. Arthur Townley, too, had traveled to the capital to meet with the President and also with George Creel, chairman of the federal government's propaganda arm, the Committee on Public Information. Both men made public

⁷³ Benedict, *Farm Policies of the U.S.*, 162-66.

⁷⁴ *Cooperators' Herald*, 29 June 1917, p. 1; *Nonpartisan Leader*, 26 Apr. 1917, p. 4.

assurances of League support for America's role in the war. Creel especially spoke in support of the Townley and the League. The League, in other words, operated within a favorable framework of federal institutional politics. At the local and state level, however, the League came under attack during the war. In North Dakota, the Lincoln Republican League became an umbrella organization for all anti-League factions. The organization unceasingly framed every League measure and every utterance by Arthur Townley as unpatriotic or disloyal. Thus the League's work with the radical Industrial Workers of the World to provide harvest labor or its refusal to crackdown on an antiwar meeting in Fargo became, to the Lincoln Republicans, examples of pro-Germanism and an effort to isolate NPL members from the leadership.⁷⁵

In general this was not as effective in League-controlled North Dakota as it was in other Midwestern locales. The League in North Dakota was able to maneuver effectively within the constraints of wartime nativism. The NPL was more accepting of hyphenated Americans for a practical reason—the party could not have come to power without the support of the state's Norwegian population. Norwegian-American organizations consistently supported the war effort, and most in North Dakota did not associate Norwegians with pro-Germanism or disloyalty. While Minnesota and Iowa, for example, passed laws providing for English-only language in schools, the League government in North Dakota continued Norwegian school programs, without any notable opposition. Due to the League's reliance on ethnic voters, the government discouraged the patriotic frenzy common elsewhere.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 243-46; Remele, "Power to the People," 82-83.

⁷⁶ Carl H. Chrislock, *Ethnicity Challenged: The Upper Midwest Norwegian-American Experience in World War I* (Northfield, MN: The Norwegian-American Historical Association, 1981), 59-93.

As another example of effective political strategies within the constrained strategic atmosphere of World War I, the North Dakota League maintained connections to the Norwegian community. In February 1918 the government hired popular Norwegian-American writer Sigvard Rodvik to act as a liaison with the regional Norwegian-language press. In less than a year twenty-six Norwegian papers in North Dakota and Minnesota printed weekly Rodvik's columns. In essence, the loyalty issue in North Dakota, instead of weakening bonds between the NPL and Norwegian-Americans, strengthened it. There is no evidence that Norwegian ethnic support for the NPL waned during the war. In fact, even after the war the League government spearheaded a successful effort to defeat a bill that banned foreign-language instruction in state schools.⁷⁷

When the Norwegian-language press did express doubts about the League, they centered on the autocratic and centralizing power of Arthur Townley, not on the merits of the League's state program. For example, the Grand Forks *Normanden* in March 1916 turned against League leadership, but maintained unqualified support for state industries and an active government. However, even the *Normanden* spoke out against the excesses of the loyalty and nativist campaign of the war years, and supported as patriots Norwegian-American Nonpartisan League members. Even when the pro-NPL Norwegian periodical *Fram* merged with the *Normanden* in late 1917, leaving the League without a friendly Norwegian-language periodical, Norwegian support for the party did not waver. Simply put, the loyalty issue in North Dakota, bound up with hostility towards hyphenated Americans, did not succeed. Even when the North Dakota council of defense, along with the state board of education, sought to ban German curriculum from

⁷⁷ Ibid., 110-26.

schools, League Attorney General William Langer, himself of German heritage, worked to ameliorate the impact of the measure.⁷⁸

The League outside of North Dakota did not so adroitly maneuvered within this constrained strategic political environment, thanks to ill-timed comments at a League-sponsored conference. When the Food Administration fixed the wheat price at \$2.20 in September 1917, the cash price on the open market topped three dollars. League officials viewed this situation as a fleecing of the producer to finance the war while providing no government mandated ceiling for the profits of large milling companies. They noted as well the prices of flour and bread would not be fixed. The League organized a massive meeting at St. Paul in September 1917 to address this discrepancy and to demand government control of essential industries and higher taxes on war profits. The results of the so-called Producers and Consumers Conference gave League enemies the fodder needed to brand as disloyal the farmers' movement.⁷⁹

The conference welcomed individual farmers, farm organization representatives, and labor representatives from sixteen states. President John M. Anderson and James Manahan of the ECE, Arthur Townley, League Governor Lynn J. Frazier of North Dakota, Wisconsin firebrand Senator Robert LaFollette, progressive Senator William Borah of Idaho, the entire North Dakota NPL congressional delegation, and other prominent speakers addressed thousands of attendees. Representatives from ten state federations of labor and almost 2,000 union men as well made a pilgrimage to St. Paul. From the outset, the meeting halls were draped in patriotic garb, including two massive American flags behind the platform, and a plethora of red, white, and blue bunting. Bands played patriotic songs outside the hall, and each session began with delegates' rendition of "Our Country 'Tis of Thee." These measures, along with repeated assurances that the NPL

⁷⁸ Ibid., 65, 95-98.

⁷⁹ Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 204-207.

backed the government and the war, sought to confirm the loyalty of what to many was a suspect organization.⁸⁰

Most of the conference speeches espoused League war sentiments already well known and well publicized: higher taxes on the wealthy, a higher government price mandate for agricultural products, and government takeover of major industries during wartime. Senator LaFollette's extemporaneous antiwar remarks, however, came to overshadow the entire proceedings. He defended his antiwar vote in Congress, and came unhinged when heckled by a belligerent attendee. LaFollette claimed Germany had done nothing to the United States (though he later retracted this statement) and issued harsh criticism of President Wilson's conduct regarding America's role in the European conflict. His "seditious" speech, as framed by most every news outlet, came to overshadow the actual goals and proceedings of the Producers and Consumers Conference, and unleashed a wave of abuse against the NPL outside of North Dakota. Townley admitted later LaFollette had said things "we didn't invite him to discuss."⁸¹

In North Dakota, League supporters, including those of Scandinavian and German heritage, strengthened support for the party for its tacit opposition to the hysterical patriotism of wartime. Outside its home state, the League suffered from charges of opposing the war and disloyalty. Beginning in the fall of 1916 and continuing through 1917, League organizers entered Montana, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Colorado, and even ventured as far as the states of the Pacific Northwest. As the League had organized through the networks of the Equity bodies in North Dakota, League proponents elsewhere attempted to foster the support of farmer groups. In

⁸⁰ *Nonpartisan Leader*, 5 Sept. 1917, p. 4; 27 Sept. 1917, p. 4, 17; Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 206; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 179-81.

⁸¹ *Nonpartisan Leader*, 27 Sept. 1917, p. 4, 11, 17; 5 Sept. 1917, p. 4; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 179-81; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 144-45; Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League*, 208-210.

Iowa, League organizers garnered the support of the Iowa State Federation of Agriculture, and in Montana Leaguers courted the state Farmers' Federation, for instance. Ray McKaig, a prominent Leaguer in North Dakota and master of the North Dakota State Grange, used his national contacts in the Grange to organize meetings and identify from among local respected farm leaders potential League candidates or canvassers. McKaig branded himself the "John [the] Baptist of the farmers' movement."⁸²

After LaFollette's unscripted outburst at the Producers and Consumers Conference, and his well-known ties to the League, the NPL outside of North Dakota did not fare well. In Nebraska, League organizers were physically assaulted, and in Kansas and Wisconsin the organization suffered at the hands of similar vigilantes. In other states, such as South Dakota, progressive governor Peter Norbeck appropriated closely the League platform and thus neutralized the extension of the movement there. During the 1918 elections, a few League candidates won state office in places like Idaho and Minnesota, but nothing matched the political prairie fire in North Dakota.⁸³

League leaders in North Dakota were most hopeful about the movement's prospects in neighboring Minnesota. Long before, Equity had revealed to the farmers that the Twin Cities housed the powerful, monopolistic grain trade, and many leading Leaguers, such as legal counsel James Manahan, had political ties to the state. Farmers in western Minnesota were akin in to their Red River brethren through geography, economics, and demography. Two elements stunted League growth in Minnesota and eventually killed the movement. The Twin Cities made Minnesota an industrial and labor state as well as an agricultural one. Thus the League needed to

⁸² Chrislock, *Ethnicity Challenged*, 90-91; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 122-25.

⁸³ Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 188-89; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 124-25.

develop close alliances with labor organizations and reorient itself towards urban organization and politics. The NPL did this only half-heartedly. Secondly, and more significantly, charges of disloyalty harmed the NPL irreparably in the state. The Minnesota Public Safety Commission, composed of the governor and attorney general and charged with enforcing public support for the war, directly and successfully attacked the League as unpatriotic, especially after the Producers and Consumers Conference. Moreover, after witnessing the subjugation of the North Dakota GOP to the NPL, Minnesota Republicans closed ranks to beat back the political challenge in their state.⁸⁴

As the 1918 North Dakota state elections drew near, the NPL there looked sanguinely towards retaining its control over the executive and judicial branches and capturing the upper house in the state legislature. The party managed to temper significantly the war hysteria that affected other states, and League candidates swept the Republican primaries and prepared confidently for the general election in November. League Candidates ran on the party's legislative accomplishments and promised to deliver a state mill and grain elevator, a state bank, and other government industries, and usher in "A New Day for North Dakota."⁸⁵

An American Party in Canada: The Failure of the Nonpartisan League in Saskatchewan

Canadian farmers outside southwestern Saskatchewan were more interested in the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota than they were in its potentially politically disruptive counterpart in Western Canada. The League's organizational methods in Saskatchewan created opposition. With the direct primary route closed, the NPL, forced to function as a third party,

⁸⁴ Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 186; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 126-29.

⁸⁵ For "The New Day in North Dakota," see Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, chapter 10.

attempted to organize through the networks of SGGA locals. In this they succeeded only in and around Swift Current, where almost total crop failure had destroyed hopes and livelihoods. Farmers were so desperate there that the League's platform of state industries and government assistance resonated. However, additional efforts failed to bring other SGGA locals and its leadership to support the party. The SGGA represented by 1917 the most respected and the most dominant agrarian organization in the province. Its authority in matters of farming, reform, and avoidance of political participation had never been successfully challenged. Most farmers looked to its leadership for guidance and to its resolutions for frameworks for reasonable reform. Since its inception in 1901 the organization had to great effect put forth convincing arguments against direct political involvement. Politics would rend the farmers' organization asunder, successive spokesmen admonished, and divide the membership upon partisan fault lines. Essentially, leaders successfully characterized politics as self-destruction for the SGGA.⁸⁶

League leaders countered these arguments by accentuating the party's nonpartisanship—nominating the proper candidate without regard to party. The NPL also presented itself as willing to play a role the SGGA refused to play, which seemed reasonable in a region of economic and agricultural distress. Soon after its organization, though, the SGGA took an uncompromising stance against the Nonpartisan League. In February 1917 the SGGA officially defeated a motion to offer the League any manner of support. The vote by the SGGA executive council was overwhelmingly against the party. From this point, moving towards the League's first electoral test, the party went on the attack against the SGGA, branding it a "Liberal puppet." This hostile attitude actually drove the SGGA closer to the provincial Liberals.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ David E. Smith, *Prairie Liberalism: The Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, 1905-71* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 67-69, 74.

Due in part to the League's challenge, the Liberal machine did all it could to tighten the bonds with the SGGGA. Beginning in 1916, just as the League made its presence known around Swift Current, the Grits inaugurated a more aggressive policy of co-opting prominent farm leaders. That year, Premier William Martin brought former SGGGA vice president and current Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company general manager Charles A. Dunning into his cabinet. Dunning, who himself became Liberal Premier in the early 1920s, marked the third prominent Grain Grower-turned-Liberal. Instead of the League-SGGGA networks, the Liberals created and strengthened their own with the Grain Growers.⁸⁸

The Canadian Council of Agriculture's updated "Farmers' Platform" represented another issue that neutralized the League's insistence on agrarian political activism and constrained the party's strategic options. At the end of 1916, the CCA, a national conglomeration of the SGGGA, the MGGGA, the United Farmers of Alberta, and the Dominion Grange of Ontario, called for reciprocity with the U.S., inclusion of agricultural implements on the free trade list, a direct tax on unimproved lands, a graduated income tax, government control of railroads and telegraphs, direct legislation, the abolition of political patronage, and women suffrage. It is important to note that this was a federal platform. Furthermore, it did not call for the formation of third party, but merely enunciated a program for organized farmers designed to influence existing federal government policy and federal party platforms. The SGGGA came out in support of the Farmers' Platform, as did the farmers' organizations in Alberta and Manitoba. Predictably, the NPL attacked the SGGGA for its support of the Farmers' Platform at the expense of the League platform. For those farmers politically inclined, the Farmers' Platform represented a reasoned

⁸⁷ Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 223; Brennan, "Politics in Saskatchewan," 366-67; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 73.

⁸⁸ Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 54-55; Brennan, "Politics in Saskatchewan," 333-34.

and familiar list of federal political demands that promised not to upset the mostly symbiotic relationship between provincial farmers' organizations and provincial governments.⁸⁹

Despite the SGGA's unambiguous rejection of the League and its platform and the party's limited electoral base, the NPL directly nominated candidates as a third party for the June 1917 provincial elections. At a closed-door convention in late February, Leaguers unanimously nominated D.J. Sykes for MLA from the Swift Current constituency. Sykes was such a respected and well-known candidate that he also received the formal nomination from the Liberal and Conservative parties as well. The League ultimately nominated eight legislative candidates including the first female candidate in the province (women gained the franchise in 1916 in Saskatchewan). All the candidates pledged that they could be recalled if their constituents found their performance lacking once elected to the legislature. The candidates included William S. Simpson (Notukeu constituency), Nicol McVean (Happy Land), Edward W. Grainger (Morse), J. Julian Cameron (Last Mountain), John F. Burns (Turtleford), Donald J. Haight (Wilkie), Zoa Haight (Thunder Creek), as well as D.J. Sykes⁹⁰

Unfortunately for the League, the most widely discussed election issues in no way spoke to the dramatic expansion of the state suggested in their program. The NPL political platform called for provincial elevators, flour mills, stock yards, packing houses, and cold storage plants; the implementation of several aspects of direct legislation; provincial purchasing of machinery; provincial inspection, dockage, and grading; and rural banks operated at cost. In North Dakota, the League took advantage of the political opening created by the failure of the terminal elevator

⁸⁹ *Leader of Western Canada*, 25 July 1917, p. 422; Harald S. Patton, *Grain Growers Cooperation in Western Canada* (New York: AMS Press, 1969 ed.), 137, n. 2; Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 45-46; "Grain Growers Sunday" pamphlet, 22 May 1917, file 22, John Maharg fonds, SAB, Regina.

⁹⁰ *Swift Current Sun*, 27 Feb. 1917, p. 1-2; *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 20 June 1917, p. 355; 30 May 1917, p. 292, 300.

bill to push its platform. The Saskatchewan provincial election offered no political openings, and instead centered upon the right of bilingual education in public schools. In addition to the League challenge, the retention of ethnic voters in this atmosphere represented another task for the provincial Liberals. Non-Anglo ethnic groups such as Germans and Ukrainians supported the Liberals because the party respected their cultural and ethnic heritage, and because the Tories acted ambivalent towards them at best, and scapegoated them at worst. As the provincial Conservatives called loudly for English-only instruction in public schools, the Liberals maintained their position supporting the constitutionality of separate schools and bilingualism in the classroom. During the election, the Grits highlighted the wild and hateful speech of the Tories and portrayed their own position as anathema to intolerance and bigotry.⁹¹

Though these election issues overshadowed the League's call for radical reforms, NPL candidate Zoa Haight garnered attention because she represented the first female legislative candidate in the history of Saskatchewan. Mrs. Haight's candidacy also represented a political opening for the League—if turned off by the platform, voters could be drawn by the novelty of a woman candidate. Haight had an active history in both the Women's Section of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association and the Provincial Equal Franchise Board (PEFB). As vice president of both organizations she fought for years for women's social issues. When her father-in-law, S.E. Haight, founded and became president of the Saskatchewan NPL, her husband Samuel Valentine Haight convinced her to run as a candidate for the legislative assembly.⁹²

⁹¹ "Six Reasons Why You Should Vote for Mrs. S.V. Haight," election postcard, Zoa Haight Papers, file 6, SAB, Saskatoon; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 57-62.

⁹² *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 20 June 1917, p. 347; 25 July 1917, p. 429; "Abolition of Party Politics," file 13C, Zoa Haight Papers, SAB, Saskatoon; J. Castell Hopkins,

Haight's concerns as a leader in PEFB illuminates her attraction to the NPL's radical program. The PEFB stood for independence in politics, called for English-only instruction in schools, the disfranchisement of disloyal or pro-German voters, and the end of political patronage. Another PEFB leader, Ida Sifton, represented the radical wing of the organization, with which Haight identified. In a March 1917 speech entitled "Abolition of Party Politics," Sifton characterized the Saskatchewan government as "an autocratic political machine, operated by grafters, corrupt politicians, strong corporations, and financial institutions." Her call to do away with the party system led members of the audience to recoil from her radical message, calling it "destructive" and "unfair." As such, the interorganizational linkage between the League's most visible candidate and the radical PEFB represented a liability rather than a symbiotic partnership.⁹³

Like the NPL in North Dakota, the Saskatchewan League mildly criticized some aspects of the government's conduct of the war. Haight, however, went further and strongly opposed "this awful war." She argued the war only benefitted armament manufactures in their selfish desire for wealth. Only the poor farmers' sons fought and died, she lamented, and to have Canadian Expeditionary Force soldiers march through town singing Christian hymns represented "blasphemy." With such views, Haight made an acceptably radical candidate for the Nonpartisan League, but a candidate with controversial positions that made her election unlikely. She became the NPL's nominee, and thus the province's first female candidate, at an NPL constituency meeting on 16 June 1917. Her nomination was unanimous.⁹⁴

The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1917 (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review, Lmt., 1918), 780.

⁹³ *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 13 June 1917, p. 329; "Abolition of Party Politics," file 13C, Zoa Haight Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

Taking advantage of Haight's unprecedented candidacy, the League in Saskatchewan appealed to women voters by suggesting that women had seen all the perils of party politics from the sidelines, and now enfranchised they should be more inclined to vote independently. The *Leader* put out the call for women give their first vote to the first ever female candidate, Zoa Haight of the Nonpartisan League.⁹⁵

In the Thunder Creek constituency, Haight faced Liberal candidate Alex Beaudreau and Tory candidate A.D. Gallagher. In Thunder Creek, and all the other constituencies fielding a League candidate, Liberals doubled their efforts to defeat the NPL candidate. Beaudreau was personally very popular with and backed by the formidable Liberal organization. One NPL organizer in Thunder Creek lamented that "we stand no chance" because League resources in the constituency were "taxed to the utmost."⁹⁶

Harsh words aimed at the Liberals and the SGGA emanated from the NPL camp. Liberals Charles Dunning and George Langley, also former prominent Grain Growers and members of the SCEC, represented nothing more than political opportunists. Dunning might be "a very pretty talker," but his leadership of the farmers was "unsatisfactory," the NPL contended. To emphasize that the Liberals were nothing more than a mouthpiece for the SGGA, Ida Sifton of the PEFB claimed Beaudreau "swallowed the whole Grain Grower's platform." This type of belligerent attack on the SGGA destroyed any chance of organizing support through Grain Grower locals.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Clipping, file 13H, Zoa Haight Papers, SAB, Saskatoon. Minutes of Nonpartisan League meeting, 16 June 1917, folder 1, file E.53, Violet McNaughton Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

⁹⁵ *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 30 May 1917, p. 297; 20 June 1917, p.347.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 20 June 1917, p. 347; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 336-37; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 41; D.A. Mumby to Samuel V. Haight, 12 June 1917, file E.53, folder 1, Violet McNaughton Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

⁹⁷ *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 13 June 1917, p. 324; 20 June 1917, p. 339. Ida Sifton to Zoa Haight, n.d., file 5, Zoa Haight Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

The June 1917 election results revealed disappointment for the Nonpartisan League. D.J. Sykes, the NPL/Liberal/Tory candidate in Swift Current, did win, but he took a seat as MLA with the Liberals when the legislature convened. Liberals earned a province-wide fourth consecutive electoral victory, with 51/59 legislative seats. Though the NPL did not win any seats, they did come in second in the ridings of Turtleford, Notukeu, Happyland, Morse, and Last Mountain. This was not saying much, as the Conservatives were an extremely weak party in Saskatchewan.⁹⁸

The Saskatchewan Nonpartisan League all but fell apart in the months following the brutal electoral losses. Leaders broadly apportioned blame. Most were excuses. The election was called on short notice, giving the NPL too little time to organize, and, of course, the superior Liberal machine brought its full resources to bear upon the fledgling farmers' political order, president Haight argued. The Liberals also used their connections to German communities to disseminate German-language pamphlets that characterized Leaguers as atheists and claimed the NPL, if in power, would confiscate land. As well, other false accusations ruined what little electoral chances remained for the Nonpartisan League.⁹⁹

League candidate Zoa Haight did not sound so defeatist after her loss to Beaudreau, her Liberal opponent. In an all-around dirty and dishonest election, she praised her campaign for taking the high road, keeping it clean with no mudslinging, and holding orderly meetings. As the first female candidate in the province, she seemed satisfied in her ability to present issues from a

⁹⁸ Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 41; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 222-23; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 368-70.

⁹⁹ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 5 Sept. 1917, p. 8; *Nonpartisan Leader of Western Canada*, 4 July 1917, p. 376; 20 June 1917, p. 340.

woman's point of view. She did recognize that the Liberals vastly outspent League candidates, and simply knew better how to canvass, bring out the vote, and win elections.¹⁰⁰

The organization imploded in the month following the election. Active membership declined from several thousand to five hundred. Officers went without salary, and out of over \$70,000 collected, cash on hand was in September a dismal \$392. D.J. Sykes, the League/Liberal/Conservative candidate in Swift Current, severed all ties with the NPL, and the organization expelled several other candidates who had "abandoned" the cause during the election. President Haight and other leaders came under attack for their heavy-handed rule and members branded the constitution anti-democratic, leaving the Farmers' Political Nonpartisan League of Saskatchewan an empty shell with little money, organization, or prospects. The interorganizational links dissolved between the League and SGGG locals around Swift Current.¹⁰¹

In contrast, the Nonpartisan League in Alberta experienced relative success. Several farmers copied the idea from neighboring Saskatchewan, organized a local branch at Calgary in December 1916, and convened the party's first convention in early 1917. Using Ford automobiles, paid canvassers, and postdated checks, the League garnered the support of farmers in southern Alberta, where the weather and harvest was less predictable, and where American settlers, with little ties to Canadian parties, predominated. When the Liberals refused to endorse the CCA's Farmers' Platform and after the League's amazing victory in North Dakota, radicals within the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) began to support the third party, while retaining their membership in UFA. The Alberta League's strengths included able leadership, especially

¹⁰⁰ Unsigned letter, 29 June 1917, file E.53, folder 1, Violet McNaughton Papers, SAB, Saskatoon; Clipping, file 13C, Zoa Haight Papers, SAB, Saskatoon.

¹⁰¹ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 5 Sept. 1917, p. 8.

several prominent Americans,¹⁰² a focus on political reform and independent politics, and an ability to avoid the alienation of the powerful UFA.¹⁰³

In the June 1917 provincial elections, the Alberta League elected two able candidates: James Weir and Louis C. McKinney, the first women to sit as a legislator in the British Empire. Unlike the Liberals' favorable record in Saskatchewan and close ties to the SGGGA, in Alberta the farmers found much to criticize in the provincial Grits' performance. After the war, as the League in Saskatchewan attempted an unlikely and ultimately doomed resurgence, the League in Alberta managed to find sufficient support for its position advocating agrarian political action, and merged with the UFA in mid-1919. In the provincial election of 1921, the UFA fielded its own candidates and elected a majority government in Alberta, which lasted until the beginning of the Great Depression. In Manitoba, the League was of no consequence, as farmers were unwilling to leave the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association for a radical organization and because the Liberals and Conservatives were deeply entrenched in the province.¹⁰⁴

Considering the Nonpartisan League in all of the prairie provinces and in North Dakota, several explanations emerge with regard to the party's failures in Saskatchewan. Outside the suffering of southwestern Saskatchewan, the League's message represented something simply too radical for most farmers accustomed to the reasonable reforms of the provincial Liberals. The aggressive anti-war stance of many candidates, the litany of state industries, and the outspoken

¹⁰² These included the former Populist governor of Kansas, John W. Leedy and former Coxey's Army participant Bert Huffman.

¹⁰³ Paul F. Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1997 edition), 57-58, 61-62; Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909-1921* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 89, 132-33.

¹⁰⁴ Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 58; Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy*, 132-33, 204.

calls for the abolition of the Canadian Senate seemed too much, and resulted in charges of “Red” and Bolshevism against the League. The individual leaders and candidates of the Saskatchewan NPL, in comparison to Arthur Townley and Lynn Frazier in North Dakota, or William Irvine in Alberta, were weak. The League nominating conventions were undisciplined affairs marred by personal attacks and disorder. These are not the characteristics of solid party organization.¹⁰⁵

Organizationally, the League in Saskatchewan could not and did not follow the tested canvassing approach of its counterpart in North Dakota: create a movement by building upon existing networks within a province or a state. The North Dakota NPL used the American Society of Equity and the Equity Cooperative Exchange as mobilizing sites for the new political movement. Its members were one and the same, and the League and Equity worked symbiotically towards common goals. In Saskatchewan, the League never came to terms with the Grain Growers, and, in fact, caused the breach between the two organizations to widen permanently. The provincial Liberals exploited this division and courted more heavily the farmers of the SGGA. Even in Alberta, the League never burned all its bridges with the United Farmers, and eventually merged with the organization.

Finally, structural political conditions indigenous to the United States and Canadian federalism mitigated the potential success of the transplanted party in Saskatchewan. Not only did the NPL in Saskatchewan fail to create a political movement based on existing community and organizational networks, it also could not take advantage of the direct primary, another prerequisite for political victory. Provincial party conventions selected candidates, and parliamentary procedures discouraged legislative maneuvers independent of party. Nonpartisanship, of course, characterized the central political selling point of the League. It is

¹⁰⁵ Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 64-67.

telling that once elected, NPL/Liberal/Tory candidate D.J. Sykes joined the Grits. Finally, the Saskatchewan League loudly proclaimed its opposition to “cabinet domination.” However, to vote independently against a bill one’s governing party has presented meant, essentially, a vote against one’s government and one’s party. In other words, the cabinet role in the parliamentary system is an integral component not easily replaced or done away with.

Such systemic political differences have led to a low level of the adoption of U.S. political practices in Canada. For example, in the U.S., Progressives championed the direct primary with the goal of bringing the democratic process closer to the voters and to the people. Along these lines, in Canada in 1919, the federal Liberals were the first political party in Canada to “democratize” the candidate nominating procedure. This meant not a reform predicated on the direct primary, but on transferring the nominating procedure to representatives of the party’s provincial organizations, rather than continuing the old method by which party politicians selected candidates. The absence in Canada of the direct primary made impossible the transference to Saskatchewan of the political practices of the Nonpartisan League of North Dakota.¹⁰⁶

In the end, the nonpartisan approach of the League proved decisive. In addition to electoral success in North Dakota, the nonpartisan tactic of nomination led to minor electoral victories in Wisconsin in 1920 and 1922 and Oklahoma and Iowa in 1922. In Idaho in 1918 and Montana and Colorado in 1920, the League candidates won in the Democratic primary but lost in the general election. In states where the League was especially weak, it employed the tactic of simply throwing its weight behind any major-party nominee that mostly fit its program. This

¹⁰⁶ Mildred A. Schwartz, “American Influences on the Conduct of Canadian Politics,” in ed. Richard A. Preston, *The Influence of the United States on Canadian Development: Eleven Case Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1972), 99, 107-108.

resulted in minor victories in Kansas and Nebraska in 1918. However, when the League conducted itself in the United States as a political third party it almost always failed.¹⁰⁷

As such, when the Saskatchewan Farmers Political Nonpartisan League attempted to campaign as a third party against the entrenched Liberal Party in the 1917 provincial election, it failed spectacularly. Though the League returned to the scene briefly during Western Canada's agrarian revolt of the postwar period, it was of no consequence. Even Leaguers in North Dakota tended to forget their Canadian brethren. Oliver S. Morris, the North Dakota NPL's publicity manager and editor of the *Leader* claimed the League "never had any [organization] in Canada, is not now trying to promote any organization in Canada, and has no plans for invading the Dominion." The Saskatchewan League in particular "had no connection with the League on this side of the line." Perhaps Morris spoke for both North Dakota and Saskatchewan Leaguers when he claimed, "I do not know what became of this so-called NPL of Western Canada."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Election Tactics of the Nonpartisan League," *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 36 (March, 1950): 613-32.

¹⁰⁸ S. Roy Weaver, *The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota* (Toronto: Canadian Reconstruction Association, 1921), 80.

Chapter Four

The Failure of Agrarian Politics and the Rise of the Wheat Pools, 1919-1929

It is difficult to exaggerate the degree to which the Canadian Wheat Pool of the 1920s generated envy, awe, and appreciation among its counterparts around the world. At a series of international wheat pool conferences, Australian, Russian, and American delegates virtually genuflected in the presence of the Canadians. A South Australian delegate felt “ashamed to get up and admit how far we, in Australia, are from the [Canadian] ideal.” Another exclaimed the delegates “must look on the Canadian lead with absolute jealousy.” An attendee from Minnesota gushed, we “love you [Canadians] better than we like ourselves...I am beginning to love you.”¹

The Canadian Wheat Pool of the 1920s, comprised of the provincial pool associations of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba, was the most successful large-scale cooperative wheat marketing organization, or “pool,” in the world. It led and guided wheat pools in the United States, Australia, and the Soviet Union. Though organizational structure and marketing discipline certainly provided a solid foundation, the social component of the wheat pool movement, especially in Saskatchewan, made it a type of cooperative religion among farmers.

Wheat farmers turned to pooling only after agrarian politics failed to produce solutions to worsening agricultural conditions in the early 1920s. The pooling movement and the divergent outcomes in North Dakota and Saskatchewan reveal structural, political, and organizational differences across the international boundary which in turn contributes to a fuller understanding

¹ *Proceedings of the International Wheat Pool Conference at St. Paul, Minnesota* (Winnipeg: Canadian Co-operative Wheat Producers, Ltd., 1926), 14, 114-16.

of agrarian organization in the United States and Canada during the decade leading to the Great Depression.

The Postwar Failure of Agrarian Politics, 1918-1922

The Nonpartisan League in North Dakota emerged from the 1918 state elections with control of all branches of the state government. The party then moved forward with the enactment of several constitutional amendments designed to bring state socialism to the northern plains, most notably through a state mill and elevator, the Bank of North Dakota, and the Home Building Association. The Industrial Commission, composed of the governor, secretary of agriculture, and attorney general, controlled these and other state-owned entities. The League-dominated legislature in 1919 also passed laws creating state grain grading standards, forbidding railroad boxcar discrimination against farmers' cooperative elevators, and enacting female suffrage.²

However, the postwar mood of North Dakotans, generated by the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, created a hostile political climate for the NPL. As a leftist entity in an immigrant-heavy state, the League came under attack during the Red Scare of 1919-1920. With the party now vulnerable, Attorney General William Langer led the defection from the League of a trio of key leaders, including Secretary of State Thomas Hall and State Auditor Carl Kositzky. Langer quickly moved to fulfill his personal ambitions and announced his intention to challenge Governor Frazier in the 1920 GOP primary. The defectors argued they abandoned the League

² Herbert E. Gaston, *The Nonpartisan League* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Howe, 1920), 284-86; Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977), 143.

due to its socialist leanings and their loss of faith in the leadership of the governor and Arthur Townley. Langer, Hall, and Kositzky traveled the state sowing doubts about the NPL.³

Though no evidence of major fraud was uncovered, mismanagement and poor leadership certainly plagued the League in the postwar period. William Lemke used funds from the Home Building Association to construct a lavish house in Fargo. Townley's overbearing leadership showed hints of vindictiveness when he used his position in the NPL to lash out at critics and perceived enemies. That large amounts of taxpayer money flowed into the party and the state-owned industries created suspicions that the League had become corrupted. These doubts, harbored within the reactionary environment of the Red Scare, threatened the survival of the party once viewed as North Dakota's political savior. Finally, League-backed state industries were too small and lacked the money to influence in a significant way the massive wheat economy of North Dakota and the northern plains. The state mill, for instance, handled at its height in the mid-1920s only six percent of the wheat crop in the state, and the state bank loaned only one tenth of the capital needed to operated North Dakota's farms.⁴

Theodore G. Nelson, former Equity leader and NPL member, exploited this frustration and fear and forged an opposition group, the Independent Voters' Association (IVA). Both Nelson and Edwin W. Everson, a former NPL legislator, originally joined the NPL in 1916 with the hope that it could continue Equity's cooperative movement and use political power to better farmers. By 1919 they abandoned the League and claimed it had become a front for Bolshevism, communism, and socialism, and that Townley, Lemke, and other leaders exploited the party and

³ Robert L. Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire: The Nonpartisan League, 1915-1922* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1955), 241-43; Edward C. Blackorby, *Prairie Rebel: The Public Life of William Lemke* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1963), 89-98.

⁴ Wilkins and Wilkins, *North Dakota*, 148-52.

the farmers for their own personal gain. The IVA forged a coalition of anti-Townley Democrats and Republicans, and its candidates spoke against the League and canvassed legislative districts in an effort to challenge the League in the 1920 GOP primary. NPL constituents began to lose faith in League leadership and Townley privately admitted that the campaign to link the League with labor radicals and outsiders had begun to resonate with farmers.⁵

During the 1920 state election, large crowds diminished and enthusiasm for the NPL waned. In addition to political injuries sustained from the Red Scare, Langer's defection, and questions about leadership, League legislators had records to explain and defend. Many supporters questioned why the crusade needed to continue at all, as NPL-sponsored state industries had commenced operation in Fargo and Grand Forks. The League could claim victory on these terms. The 1920 elections left the NPL with control of the executive and judicial branches while the IVA demonstrated its new political clout and gained a majority in the lower house of the state legislature. The divided legislature brought the state industries to a standstill.⁶

Then the agricultural economy crashed from its wartime heights. Wheat prices plummeted from \$2.35 per bushel in 1919 to \$1.01 in 1921. The loss of overseas markets and increased competition from the wheat producing regions of Australia and Argentina resulted in a 66% decrease in U.S. wheat exports. Drought affected the northern plains throughout the decade.

⁵ Fargo *Forum* clipping, Jan. 1920, Equity Cooperative Exchange Papers, Box 3, Minnesota Historical Society; Townley to Ole Olson, 28 Jan. 1920, Olson Papers, Box 8, folder 4, North Dakota State University; Thomas G. Nelson, *Scrapbook Memoirs* (Salem, OR: Your Town Press, 1957), 62-86; D. Jerome Tweton, "The Anti-League Movement: The IVA," in ed. Thomas W. Howard, *The North Dakota Political Tradition* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 93-98.

⁶ Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), 345-48; Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 292-93.

In North Dakota, the banking system collapsed. The first recall in American history of a sitting governor took place within this hopeless agricultural situation.⁷

Ironically, in 1920 the NPL itself sponsored a constitutional amendment providing for the recall of state officials. The IVA decided early 1921 to use the recall against the League government as “shock tactics to awaken the voters to consciousness of their real situation.” Though the recall of a sitting governor represented an untried and unprecedented political move, IVA candidates suggested the alternative—the continuation of a corrupt government led by dishonest socialists—was worse. IVA polling found a vast majority of voters willing to remove the members of the Industrial Commission: Governor Frazier, Attorney General William Lemke, and Commissioner of Agriculture John N. Hagan.⁸

During the summer and fall of 1921 the recall garnered 74,000 signatures. Former NPL legal counsel Arthur LeSueur defected and stumped for the recall, as did the governor of Minnesota, who had beaten back a League challenge. The recall campaign did not attack the NPL program of state industries but aimed to discredit League leadership. Privately, League executives acknowledged that their organization was being weakened politically and financially. A funds drive to challenge the recall made little progress and NPL coffers substantially diminished.⁹

NPL standard-bearer Lynn Frazier was removed from office by the 29 October 1921 recall vote, the first governor in any state recalled by a popular vote. Lemke and Hagan were also

⁷ David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 186-88; Wilkins and Wilkins, *North Dakota*, 88-89; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 375-77.

⁸ Nelson, *Scrapbook Memoirs*, 85-86.

⁹ Executive Committee chairman A.A. Liederbach to Sen. Ole Olson, 29 Apr. 1921, folder 14, Box 8, Olson Papers, NDSU; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 323-24.

voted out of office. The Industrial Commission, the heart of NPL state socialism, was emasculated as result of the disappearance of its three-man leadership. Nevertheless, the IVA and North Dakota's new governor R.A. Nestos, sought to retain the NPL program, only with better management and more solid financial footing.¹⁰

From 1922 until the Depression years, the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota no longer represented agrarian political radicalism. Voters became apathetic as the conservative Democratic-Republican anti-NPL alliance and the IVA appropriated the party's platform. The NPL still contested some GOP state primaries, but no issue, faction, or party dominated politics or the state government after 1922. Thus North Dakota politics settled into stasis, though voters and the state's U.S. Congressional delegation remained progressive and sought federal aid for agriculture during the farm depression and pushed back against the business orientation of the federal GOP. Only in the depths of the Great Depression did agrarian political radicalism reemerge.¹¹

Between the end of World War I and 1922 organized farmers in Canada and particularly in Saskatchewan turned to political insurgency to address agricultural problems. The postwar situation in Canada and Saskatchewan created a politicized agrarian atmosphere. Two forces pushed them towards political insurgency. The Canadian Council of Agriculture issued an updated Farmers' Platform after the war. This so-called New National Policy (NNP) became a focal point for agrarian political pressure at the federal level. A low-tariff sentiment and a call for reciprocity with the U.S. formed the heart of the NNP, accompanied by calls to ease the economic impact of war demobilization and to increase democratic representation. These demands from a respected federal agrarian organization were intended to influence existing

¹⁰ Morlan, *Political Prairie Fire*, 315-26; Tweton, "The Anti-League Movement," 117.

¹¹ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 388-89.

federal parties. The Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA) adopted the NNP in early 1919. The second impetus for farmers' political action was the breakdown of the wartime Unionist government at Ottawa during 1919. To farmers, this supposed nonpartisan federal party was nothing of the sort, and they felt betrayed by the return to party politics. As the Union government dissolved, many questioned how and if the old two-party system might be resurrected, or if the severing of traditional political bonds would lead to a new party.¹²

The agrarian political insurgency began not in the West, but in the East, when the United Farmers of Ontario (UFO) captured 46 seats out of 111 in the Legislative Assembly and ousted the Conservatives in the October 1919 provincial election. The UFO victory registered clearly the dissatisfaction with the Unionist government and set in motion the Western break with traditional parties after World War I. It laid bare the Western belief that the old parties were simply maintaining the National Policy (1878), especially protectionism and government connections with big business and monopolies. The UFO victory represented the first political manifestation of this sentiment, and the CCA's New National Policy served as a rallying point for the farmers.¹³

At the federal level events lent further credence to farmers' frustration with the ineffectuality of the old parties. After the war Prime Minister Arthur Meighen transformed the Unionist Government into the National Liberal and Conservative Party. With one look at its platform, farmers concluded that the party was nothing but the Conservative Party in new

¹² Paul F. Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1997 ed.), 100; David E. Smith, *Prairie Liberalism: The Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, 1905-71* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 74-75; W.L. Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 61.

¹³ W.L. Morton, "The Western Progressive Movement, 1919-1921," *Report of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association* 25, no. 1 (1946): 41-47.

clothes. It did not help the party that in addition to its policy of protectionism and support of the National Policy, Meighen denigrated the farmers' political movement as classist, socialist, and Bolshevist. When Liberal leader William Lyon McKenzie King toured the West, farmers were not too much more supportive than they were toward the Prime Minister.¹⁴

At Ottawa in early 1920, an agrarian group formed in the House of Commons, committed to the New National Policy. These eleven MPs, including respected farmer legislators from Saskatchewan, named themselves the National Progressive Party in February, and by the end of the year the CCA supported the insurgent party as the standard-bearers of the updated Farmers' Platform. The Progressives aimed to break the hold of protectionism and monopoly upon the old parties, and even destroy the two-party system if necessary. The agricultural depression and the conscription of farmers' sons by the Unionist Government in the spring of 1918 also informed the rise of the Progressive Party. Both the farmers' political victory in Ontario and the establishment of the Progressives marked agrarian distrust of the old party system.¹⁵

As an insurgent party determined to compete at the federal level, the Progressives faced an entrenched and mature two-party parliamentary system. This predominately Western political movement formed outside of this governmental structure, and thus began the challenge of creating an electoral party to compete competitively with the federal Liberals and Conservatives. That the Progressives were a "party of principle," rather than one based on pragmatism with a singular focus on electoral victory, compounded the complexity of insurgency. For Progressive leaders and supporters, the character of the party and platform mattered more than a sole focus on increasing its share of the electorate. Philosophy and a non-party character received more

¹⁴ Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 101-106.

¹⁵ Morton, "The Western Progressive Movement," 41-48; Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 96.

emphasis than the political realities of the Canadian parliamentary governmental and electoral systems.¹⁶

The postwar breakdown of ordinary political relations at the federal level, the issuance of the New National Policy, the UFO victory in Ontario, and the formation of the federal Progressive Party brought the issue of agrarian politics to the provinces. Though farmers could easily get behind the NNP federal platform, the existence of the sympathetic Liberal “farmers’ government” at Regina, disagreement regarding the merits of provincial political action, and ambiguity over what might compose a provincial political platform all contributed to a more complex situation in Saskatchewan. Powerful and influential leaders in the province’s agrarian organizations attempted to guide and bring form to new currents of politics. Such leaders were part of the so-called “interlocking directorate”—the prominent board members of both the SGGA and the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company (SCEC). Both had close ties with the provincial Liberal party, and the latter had become successful in part due to the government’s financial support. Prominent members of the interlocking directorate sought to preserve the base of their power and thus the political status quo.¹⁷

As a key leader in both the SGGA and SCEC, John B. Musselman emerged as the central figure in organized farmers’ flirtation with politics. From Ontario, Musselman first farmed in Saskatchewan in 1902, and worked his way up in the Grain Growers’ organization as director in 1912. The next year he became a director in the Elevator Company. By the outbreak of World War I, Musselman had quit farming altogether after accepting the powerful SGGA position of Central Secretary. John A. Maharg, another player in the interlocking directorate, served as

¹⁶ Frederick C. Engelmann and Mildred A. Schwartz, *Canadian Political Parties: Origin, Character, Impact* (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1975), 20, 30, 175, 252-53.

¹⁷ James William Brennan, “A Political History of Saskatchewan, 1905-1929” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1976), 451-2.

SGGA president for over a decade during this period, and mostly stayed out of the limelight as he pursued political power as a Progressive MP. With President Maharg in Ottawa, Musselman had free reign to actively keep the SGGA out of politics as much as possible, which he consistently argued would fracture the organization and sever its amicable relationship with the William Martin Liberal Government in Regina.¹⁸

By the convening of the 1919 SGGA convention, the delegates made clear their desire for some type of political action, though what type in particular remained in doubt. As Central Secretary, Musselman exploited this ambiguity to steer the organization away from what he considered self-destructive partisan politics. The sentiment among delegates for direct political engagement was so strong that Musselman realized he could not contain it, so he sought to manage it “along sane and rational lines rather than oppose it.” He pointed to the friendly provincial Liberal Government and questioned the reasoning for working against it, while also highlighting SGGA official agreement with the low-tariff position in the New National Policy. With this rationale Musselman helped found the New National Policy Political Association (NNPPA) to coordinate activity in each federal constituency, officially independent of the SGGA. Prominent members of the interlocking directorate staffed the leadership positions of the NNPPA and allowed Musselman close contact with and control over the new political body.¹⁹

The NNPPA received its first test in the federal field when local farmers nominated O.R. Gould to contest a federal by-election in late 1919. Though Premier Martin and the provincial Liberals purposefully remained conspicuously absent from the election, a stubborn party stalwart insisted on challenging Gould, and lost handily. The Assiniboia by-election demonstrated the

¹⁸ Brennan, “A Political History of Saskatchewan,” 453.

¹⁹ David E. Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 81-82; Brennan, “A Political History of Saskatchewan,” 453-59.

possibilities of an independent candidate running on the federal New National Policy platform. Provincial politics complicated the situation, however, because there was no specific mandate for action (other than opposition to the vague claim of “party politics”), no provincial platform, and no idea of exactly what a farmers’ party might look like. Nonetheless, a group of SGGA radicals sought provincial political action to destroy party government and partisan preference among legislators. Harris Turner, a war veteran and “soldiers” legislator, spoke for this group of so-called “Independents.” When one of these Independent farmer candidates won an uncontested provincial by-election in Kinderlsey, both the Liberals and Musselman jockeyed for position in what they believed might become an agrarian political insurgency in Saskatchewan.²⁰

In a brilliant move of political maneuvering, Premier Martin officially severed the ties between his provincial Liberals and the federal Liberals. This allowed Martin to claim distance from partisanship and highlighted his independence from unpopular federal dictates. Musselman faced a more difficult balancing act. By 1920, advocates of provincial political action sought to influence SGGA policy. Turner of the Independents admitted that the provincial Liberals had been responsive to farmers’ demands, but argued farmer candidates deserved constituency autonomy from a centralized organization, something a party machine such as the Grits could never offer. True, conceded Secretary Musselman at the 1920 SGGA annual convention, but that represented neither a mandate nor a central plank around which to develop a provincial political platform. Despite the vagueness surrounding a potential platform, delegates sought locals’ input on the efficacy of Grain Grower political involvement. Musselman and two SGGA leaders who

²⁰ Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 82; Brennan, “A Political History of Saskatchewan,” 465-73.

were also members of the Martin cabinet offered to poll every one of the 1,170 SGGA local bodies regarding provincial political action and a platform.²¹

The results of Musselman's circular to the SGGA locals came in during the summer of 1920. No matter one's interpretation, it was clear the majority of organized farmers had no interest in SGGA provincial political action. Only ten percent of the locals replied, and only a minority of those responses supported political involvement. The few ideas received regarding a provincial platform were uninspired and represented nothing the ruling Liberals could not offer if pressed by the electorate. Once again, the organized farmers of Saskatchewan indicated a preference for federal politics in support of the New National Policy, but ambiguity towards challenging the Martin Government. The Cobourg Grain Growers' local, for instance, debated the merits of provincial political action during 1919 and 1920 and came to the conclusion that the Liberals had given the farmers all the legislation they have demanded. The Cobourg local went on record against SGGA political involvement in Saskatchewan politics.²²

The return of the Saskatchewan Farmers' Political Nonpartisan League was another manifestation of agrarian politics. If the farmers wanted political insurgency in Saskatchewan, they need not look far. In late 1919 the League took advantage of the politically charged atmosphere and convened a special convention at Swift Current to announce its reentry into provincial politics. Led by newspaper editor Sidney Godwin, the Saskatchewan NPL proclaimed dissatisfaction with William Martin's Liberal government in the province and demanded that the

²¹ Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 82-83; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 473-79.

²² The list of locals' responses (or abstentions) with regard to SGGA provincial political action is found in full in File II.27, Folder 2, SGGA Files, 1901-1926, Records of the SGGA, FUC, and UFC-SS, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon; Cobourg Grain Growers' Minute Book, 20 Nov. 1919, p. 105; 15 Jan. 1920, p.109; 12 Mar. 1920, p.127; 1 Nov. 1920, 140-42, File 5, John Maharg Fonds, SAB Regina; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 474; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 80-84; Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 124.

premier pass the NPL provincial platform of state ownership. Godwin linked Musselman and the SGGGA with the Liberals and argued the NPL could bring real change to the province.²³

The League's political comeback began inauspiciously. NPL canvassers in Saskatchewan, desperate for money to fund their resurgence, misrepresented the organization to prospective members. These solicitors told farmers the League had the backing of the SGGGA and operated in conjunction with the CCA to push its New National Policy. J.B. Musselman publicly refuted any connection between the NPL and the SGGGA or CCA. Instead, he suggested that the League was liable to prosecution for falsifying links between it and the two farmer organizations. Anyone who had been approached by an NPL canvasser, Musselman warned, should immediately contact provincial police. The Association secretary argued that the North Dakota Nonpartisan League, though political, did not interfere with other farmer organizations in the state. The Saskatchewan League, however, sought to "exploit and capitalize on the pioneer work which the farmers' movements in this province have performed," Musselman proclaimed. It was clear most NPL members, even around the erstwhile League stronghold of Swift Current, had returned to the Grain Growers' fold. A League candidate in 1917, D.J. Sykes won election as an Independent in 1921 and ended up caucusing and supporting the Liberals. Another former Leaguer, P.L. Craigen, was by 1920 a close confidant of J.B. Musselman. In a moment of honesty he wrote to the SGGGA Central Secretary, "I don't know that we have much legitimate cause to attempt to defeat the Martin Government in this Province and am doubtful if we could replace it with as good a body of men while we might make it worse."²⁴

²³ *Grain Growers and the Nonpartisan League*, Pamphlet Collection, SAB, Saskatoon; *Nonpartisan Leader* (Fargo), 22 Dec. 1919, p. 10.

²⁴ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 1 Sept. 1920, p. 22; 24 Sept. 1919, p. 11; 2 Dec. 1919, p. 70; Harold A. Innis, ed., *The Diary of Alexander James McPhail* (Toronto: The University of Toronto Press, 1940), 31-32; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 82.

Immigrant communities represented one area in which the NPL could find a political niche. The SGGA harbored an “Anglo-Saxon bias” and did not appeal to or court any non-British European immigrant groups. After the war, nativism increased in Saskatchewan as returning soldiers competed with ethnic workers for jobs and harbored resentment towards the gains of immigrant farmers. After the Winnipeg General Strike in 1919 the prairies experienced their own Red Scare, and communism and bolshevism became linked with immigrants. Within this context, the Saskatchewan NPL canvassed immigrant communities in the northern reaches of the province. Such efforts brought a number of Ruthenian farmers to League meetings, though a substandard translator and language barriers ruined any potential support the ethnic farmers might have brought to the party. In essence, the League in Saskatchewan was too radical for even the most politically inclined SGGA members, and remained a fractured and isolated party until its ultimate disappearance after 1922.²⁵

Due to the unenthusiastic responses to Secretary Musselman’s circular, delegates to the SGGA annual convention in February 1921 agreed to abstain from provincial politics. Confident that the organized farmers would not challenge the government, Premier Martin called an election for June. He directed Liberal candidates to refrain from using party labels, and instead characterized his provincial campaign as composed of “Supporters of the Martin Government.” As the Liberal machine coalesced and readied for action, the various and loosely organized challengers attempted to get their political bearings. The NPL’s radical platform suggested the SGGA and Liberals represented capitalist oppression and producer exploitation. The League

²⁵ *Grain Growers and the Nonpartisan League*; *Manitoba Free Press*, 21 Jan. 1921, p. 13; Brennan, “A Political History of Saskatchewan, 560; Bruce Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots: The Remarkable Story of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1984), 7; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 240.

claimed 13,000 members in 1921, though the organization's lack of success in the provincial election belied that figure. The remaining political challengers represented a mixed bag of party affiliations. Independents, Leaguers, Tories, Progressives, and other candidates rounded out the contest. The Independents and Progressives had no official leader and certainly no political machine with which to direct the campaign. The Liberals exploited this loose structure, calling the political challengers un-British and "Independent but Not Neutral: No Party Organization, No Committee Rooms, No Machine." In a province proud of its British political heritage, such attacks resonated. Except for the NPL, the other candidates admitted their only real criticism of the Liberals was its party machine structure, though they never made clear exactly how a legislature or government might operate without a formal party structure. Except for the League, there was not much political radicalism in the contest.²⁶

The Saskatchewan Liberals took all the challengers seriously, especially the NPL, because they believed the League, in three-way fights with the Conservatives, siphoned off Liberal votes. The Grits attacked the League with all they had, but the Liberals need not have worried, for they won forty-six of sixty-three seats and a majority of the popular vote. More than a dozen independents and Progressives joined the legislative assembly, but not enough to challenge the political dominance of the Liberals. The Saskatchewan Liberals held on in 1921 by acquiescing to farmer demands and separating the provincial party from the federal party. At the same time, the SGGA witnessed its fortunes as the province's preeminent agrarian organization begin to fade. Membership was down thousands from a high of over 30,000, and locals dwindled. Most observers attributed the decline to the organization's dabbling in politics, and a

²⁶ R.M. Johnson to NNPPA constituency secretaries, 30 June 1921, and R.M. Johnson to the NNPPA executive, 12 Apr. 1921, both in folder 2, file E.53, McNaughton Papers, SAB, Saskatoon; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 478, 488-500, 584-87; Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 98; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 237.

challenge from a new farmers' body in the province, the Farmers Union of Canada, that grew at the expense of the SGGGA after its founding in 1921. Later, one politically active farmer noted, "There are too many cross currents in this province to allow the farmer organizations to get anywhere as it always breaks up their raft just when they think they have all the logs secure."²⁷

In the Canadian federal election in December 1921 Saskatchewan's organized farmers embraced federal political insurgency while supporting old-line party rule at home. The Progressive Party won all but one federal seat in Saskatchewan (15 of 16), on its way to winning sixty-five seats in the House of Commons in Ottawa. Though the political insurgency of the Progressive Party was muted at the provincial level in Saskatchewan due to Premier Martin's shrewd handling of the agrarian challenge, the third-party impulse did impact significantly the other prairies provinces. The Manitoba Liberals could not, as did their Saskatchewan counterparts, disassociate themselves from the federal party, and in 1922 the farmers, working through the United Farmers of Manitoba, took a majority of seats in the legislature. In Alberta the United Farmers, guided by the idea of "group government," won a plurality in the government in 1921. According to UFA leader Henry Wise Wood, the farmers' association entered politics strictly as an economic organization, or "group," not as a third party. Wood sought to keep UFA membership strictly limited to farmers and by doing so retain its economic and cooperative focus, and not succumb to the evils of partisanship and avoid domination by those professionals not engaged directly in farming. Of the three prairie provinces, then, only in Saskatchewan did the Liberal party survive the Progressive insurgency at the provincial level.²⁸

²⁷ Thrasher to Evans, 4 Dec. 1927, Folder XLIII.A., John Evans Collection, University of Saskatchewan Special Collections; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 87; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 500-503.

²⁸ Morton, "The Western Progressive Movement," 48-53; Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 89-92.

The tactics of the Progressives, though, led to their demise quickly after this stunning political showing in December 1921. The movement at its core focused on the ills of the party system. Thus, they had no central organization or leadership, and a general strategy never materialized. Candidates remained independent from the broader movement and electoral districts were given free reign. Once in power, the Progressives did not push their agenda on William Lyon McKenzie King's new Liberal majority, nor did the group become a cohesive parliamentary party. Even though they held the second largest number of seats in the House of Commons after the 1921 federal election, the inexperienced Progressives declined to act as the official opposition to the McKenzie King Government, arguing that such a move might transform the farmers' movement into a party machine. In its refusal, the Progressives lost a key political opportunity to reach additional voters and increase their success in successive electoral battles. The Progressive Party squandered its inherent power as an insurgent party in a parliamentary system with neither major party in a majority. In such a situation, the Liberal Government could only stay in office with the support of the third party, in this case the Progressives. Prime Minister McKenzie King, an adroit and seasoned federal politician, exploited the inexperience of the Progressives, brought them into the Government's fold, and by 1925 had "almost smothered them in his embrace." Apart from a few core MPs, the Progressive Party as a national force faded during the remainder of the 1920s.²⁹

The Progressive movement in the prairies, and the political jockeying of agrarian organizations in each province, reflect the broad outlines of the rise of interest group politics in the United States from the turn of the century through the 1920s. The most effective farm

²⁹ Morton, "The Western Progressive Movement," 53; Morton, *The Progressive Party in Canada*, 118-19; Engelmann and Schwartz, *Canadian Political Parties*, 53-56.

organizations of this period learned to exploit new, alternative channels towards political power—namely through an aversion to direct insurgent politics and rather by interest group lobbying and bureaucratic administration links to the multiplying state agencies of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In a nonpartisan manner, organizations such as the Farm Bureau and later the Farmers Union were successful in pressing legislatures for policy and then utilizing bureaucratic connections to maintain those policy achievements. In Canada, however, there existed different approaches and outcomes. J.B. Musselman seemed to have recognized the strategy of interest group politics, and the Progressive party less so. In Alberta, the UFA claimed nonpartisanship and still managed to take over the provincial government through more familiar insurgent politics.³⁰

Furthermore, the differences in American and Canadian federalism help explain the failure of agrarian politics in the postwar period. In the parliamentary system, major parties often co-opt the platforms of minor parties in order to halt political challenges. After the 1921 Progressive federal victory, Liberal Prime Minister McKenzie King mildly reformed Canada's tariff and freight rate policy and neutralized the agrarian political insurgency by appointing key Progressives to his cabinet. In Saskatchewan, the postwar Liberal government also co-opted the potential political challenge of the organized farmers by bringing high-profile SGGA leaders into the Premier's cabinet. As well, one characteristic of successful parliamentary parties is that of party discipline. With their lack of party structure and their commitment to candidate autonomy,

³⁰ Elisabeth S. Clemens, *The People's Lobby: Organizational Innovation and the Rise of Interest Group Politics in the United States, 1890-1925* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997), 18-28, 45-63, 325, and chs. 5, 7, and 8.

the Progressives could not compete in a system that demanded a high level of coordination among party MPs.³¹

Another explanation for the failure of agrarian politics in Saskatchewan centers on the long-standing bonds between the provincial Liberal Party and the organized farmers. These bonds were animated by the fusion of powers in parliamentary systems between the executive. In other words, the leader of the majority party in the legislature becomes the executive, whether a Prime Minister at the federal level or a Premier at the provincial level. In a majority government with party discipline, the government's legislative agenda is close to impossible to derail. The Saskatchewan Liberals' successive majority governments until 1929 gave it the power to pass legislation favorable to farmers and court the farmers' organizations aggressively. In contrast, the committees and committee chairmen in the American legislative branch represent autonomous bases of authority and influence. When, for instance, voters recalled the three members of the North Dakota industrial commission, it gave the IVA control of all significant state boards and commissions, which had been used by the NPL as powerful political bases.³²

The fusion of legislative and executive powers in a parliamentary system gives the executive unprecedented power and guarantees, in majority situations, the success of the government's program. In contrast, no American president or governor nears the legislative power of their Canadian counterparts, due to the separation of powers of the branches of government, term limits, and the requirement of legislative approval. Thus Saskatchewan Premier William Martin, when needed, severed bonds with the federal Liberals in order to head

³¹ Stephen Brooks, *Canadian Democracy: An Introduction*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 196; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 450-51.

³² Ronald Landes, *The Canadian Polity: A Comparative Introduction*, 5th ed. (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall Allyn, 1998), 198-200; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 204.

off the agrarian challenge. Governor Lynn Frazier needed to wait until his second term and NPL control of the legislature to begin to create state enterprises in North Dakota. When the IVA took control of one branch of the legislature in 1920, the League's program was essentially stymied. All the while successive Liberal Premiers in Saskatchewan wielded the power to pass agricultural measures through majority governments.³³

The direct primary made possible the League's victory in North Dakota. Under this system, the Republican Party had little control over the farmers who ran under its party label. This suggests another comparative difference between the U.S. legislative system, where party discipline is weak, and the parliamentary structure where it is a necessity. Victory in the direct primary also demands a candidate-centered party. Thus the farmers in North Dakota rallied behind Lynn Frazier, a Cincinnatus figure and the "farmers' governor." No such respected leader existed in the Saskatchewan NPL, and if he did, the lack of the direct primary would negate the League's central electoral strategy.³⁴

The Rise of the Wheat Pools

The failure of agrarian politics in North Dakota and Saskatchewan and the worsening agricultural depression diverted wheat farmers' attention to a new cooperative concept that dominated the 1920s. The "wheat pool" replaced politics and joint-stock marketing companies as the farmers' perceived economic salvation. A Jewish California lawyer, Aaron Sapiro, popularized the agricultural commodity pooling idea when he organized California's specialty crop farmers write after World War I, thus becoming the unlikely hero for millions of wheat farmers across the wheat belt of the United States and Canada.

³³ Landes, *The Canadian Polity*, 146-47.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 403-404.

Growing up in an orphanage in California, Sapiro organized bullied children against their aggressors. Later as a lawyer in California and an appointee to the state's markets board, he became familiar with agricultural cooperation. In the postwar period Sapiro traveled the country organizing commodity producers. He popularized the pooling principle among apple, prune, and raisin growers, in addition to cotton and tobacco farmers in the South, dairymen in the Midwest, and grain growers in the wheat belt. It is difficult to overstate the impact of Sapiro's contagious passion and inspirational leadership.³⁵

Sapiro's unwavering cooperative vision led him to organize the first wheat pool in North America, in Washington in 1920. The idea then spread east. Sapiro's fame stemmed from his spellbinding oratory coupled with the onset of the agricultural depression and the attendant desperation of farmers seeking a solution. Sapiro deftly explained the pooling method to enraptured agrarian audiences across the country. First, organize around a commodity. Allow only farmers to join, and create a democratic structure. Enforce delivery of the commodity to a central selling agency through a legally enforceable contract for members (usually from five to seven years). Sign up at least fifty percent of the commodity acreage in the area, and preferably more. Finally, do away with capital stock because the farmer provided the pool with finances through the goods it sold. A salaried expert needed to lead the entire pooling entity, Sapiro concluded. Though various elements of pooling were available in disparate cooperative tracts during the 1910s, Sapiro merged them into a comprehensive plan and popularized the idea. His speeches, "made the 'marketing of a barrel of apples more exciting than a Tale from Boccaccio

³⁵Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 18.

and the signing of a cooperative agreement seem as vital to social justice and progress as the Magna Charta.”³⁶

Farmers from North Dakota and the rest of the Great Plains met Sapiro for the first time at the national Grain Marketing Conference in Chicago in late July 1920. Organized by the Farm Bureau, the conference aimed to launch a nation-wide cooperative grain marketing program along the lines of Sapiro’s approach to commodity marketing. North Dakota Equity Cooperative Exchange president John M. Anderson led the Committee of Seventeen (C17), which was tasked with forming a national grain marketing cooperative organization. Anderson led the C17 to Winnipeg to begin structuring the American marketing operation upon the model of the United Grain Growers, Lmt. (UGG), the successor to the Western Canadian wheat marketing cooperative, the Grain Growers’ Grain Company, with which Anderson and the ECE had a long history of cooperation and interaction. Anderson linked the goals of the C17 with the Canadian marketing cooperative. The UGG, Anderson proclaimed, has “successfully accomplished what [we are] now striving to do for the farmers on this side of the border.” Returning from Winnipeg, Anderson outlined a non-stock and nonprofit national grain marketing scheme whereby farmers signed five-year contracts to take advantage of three different methods of selling on a national scale. After paying a ten-dollar membership fee, the farmer chose to market grain either by consignment, by direct sale to a local cooperative elevator, or through the pooling method. Whatever method the farmer chose, a national selling agency sold the grain.³⁷

³⁶ Joseph G. Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise: 1920-1945* (Danville, IL: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc. 1973), 7-8; Grace H. Larson and Henry E. Erdman, “Aaron Sapiro: Genius of Farm Co-operative Promotion,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 49 (Sept., 1962): 251-54.

³⁷ *Cooperators’ Herald*, 18 Feb. 1921, p. 6, 25 Mar. 1921, p. 5, and 16-23 Sept. 1921, p. 3; Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950: A Study of the Origins and Development* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 195, p. 3; Knapp, *The*

Though Anderson and the C17 sought to create a marketing organization that could rival the successes of their Canadian counterparts, U.S. wheat growers remained divided over how to move forward, and this division represented a serious weakness vis-à-vis the United Grain Growers. The UGG formed in 1917 from a “merger of considerable magnitude” between the GGGC and the Alberta Co-operative Elevator Company. With assets of almost \$3 million and 30,000 farmer shareholders, the massive cooperative company held seats on the grain exchanges at Winnipeg, Calgary, Fort William, and Vancouver and owned a private terminal grain elevator and leased another public terminal. Its subsidiaries included machinery warehouses, livestock offices, and the farmers’ periodical the *Grain Growers Guide* with over 35,000 subscribers.³⁸

Unlike their Canadian counterparts, wheat farmers in the U.S. remained fractured and of different organizational minds. For example, Anderson and C17 rejected Sapiro’s idea of compulsory pooling, and instead created the national United States Grain Growers (USGG), which officially began operation in April 1921 under the leadership of Equity president John Anderson and C.H. Gustafson of the Nebraska Farmers Union. Within a year it collapsed without ever handling any pooled grain. The sign-up drive barely reached 50,000 wheat farmers, far from the stated goal of one million. There was no money, the grain trade vociferously fought the organization, and the ambition of the plan outstripped actual resources and simply defied reality. Sapiro’s adherents formed a rival wheat pool in early 1922, based at Minneapolis. The American Wheat Growers intended to act as a central selling agency for state associations and adhered to the basic outlines of Sapiro-style commodity pooling, and aimed to become a national wheat

Advance of the American Cooperative Enterprise, 15, 35; Sharp, *The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada*, 96. On the formation and successes of the United Grain Growers, Ltd., see Harald S. Patton, *Grain Growers’ Cooperation in Western Canada* (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1969 ed.), 174-77.

³⁸ Patton, *Grain Growers Cooperation*, 174-76.

marketing agency. But this organization did not live up to its lofty goals. By the end of 1922, dreams of a national cooperative grain selling agency in the U.S., whether along the lines of Sapiro's model or otherwise, lay dormant, and the American Wheat Growers collapsed.³⁹

Smaller-scale state wheat pooling operations did not give up on Sapiro-style organization. With the League out of power in North Dakota and state politicians preoccupied with making the state mill and elevator profitable, farmers looked towards economic cooperation to combat the steadily dropping agricultural prices. By 1923 the North Dakota Wheat Growers' Association (NDWGA) began handling a significant amount of its 3,000 members' wheat. NDWGA President George Duis, a Grand Forks businessman but also a wheat farmer who struggled to make a profit from his 2,000 acres, believed Sapiro's model of commodity marketing represented the way forward. Leading up to the North Dakota pool's incorporation in early 1922, Duis and fifteen others convinced farmers in the eastern part of the state to sign five-year contracts, though low prices forced many farmers to write notes in lieu of membership fees. R.L. Taft, a former Montana banker and cashier at the Washington Wheat Growers Association pool, joined Duis and headed the financial department.⁴⁰

Canadian wheat farmers already had experience with a national selling agency along the pooling lines. From June 1917 until July 1919 the Board of Grain Supervisors controlled grain movement in Canada with monopoly marketing control and price-fixing abilities. Then in July

³⁹ Joseph G. Knapp, *The Hard Winter Wheat Pools: An Experiment in Agricultural Marketing Integration* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1933), 22; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth Century Populism*, 294; Knapp, *The Advance of the American Cooperative Enterprise*, 37-38; Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States*, 196-97.

⁴⁰ *History of Wheat Pooling in North Dakota and Plan of Operation as conducted by North Dakota Wheat Growers Ass'n*, n.p., n.d.; North Dakota Wheat Growers Association, *Co-operative Wheat Marketing in America* (Grand Forks: The North Dakota Wheat Growers Association, 1925), 6-8; *The Wheat Grower*, 1 Jan. 1926, p. 7; Kurt A. Grussendorf, "Wheat into Chaff: The Failure of the North Dakota-Montana Wheat Growers Association, 1922-31" (M.A. thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978), 3.

1919 the Dominion government created the Wheat Board to deal with the wildly speculative atmosphere and erratic price jumps that occurred with the resumption of the open market. The Board operated along the lines of a wheat pool in that it received wheat, had monopoly control over marketing, and returned funds from the sale to farmers in a series of payments during the crop year. The Wheat Board differed from a Sapiro-style pool in that it relied not on controlling crop acreage through voluntary contracts, but through compulsory wheat delivery by all farmers. On 18 August 1920 the Canadian grain trade returned to private trading, and the Wheat Board ceased to exist.⁴¹

Western farmers associated the high prices of the World War I and immediate postwar period with the operation of the Wheat Board, and blamed the precipitous price drops on the resumption of the open market. The Canadian Council of Agriculture, the SGGGA, and the other farmers' organizations across the prairies loudly called for the reinstatement of the Board. Ottawa had indicated that if the prairie governments passed enabling legislation and found willing and credentialed leaders, a Wheat Board-style marketing body might be viable. The governments of Alberta and Saskatchewan accomplished the former, but the latter proved difficult to realize. The best qualified men to head a reinstated government board represented entrenched interest in the private grain trade, and they refused to lead an institution that would end the open market in wheat. The Winnipeg Exchange as well argued strongly against its reestablishment.⁴²

Organized farmers in Saskatchewan and the prairies, however, made clear their demand for another government Wheat Board. Resolutions to that effect poured from farmers'

⁴¹ Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 168-77.

⁴² Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 256-60; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 547.

conventions, including the SGGA meetings of 1921 and 1922. Saskatchewan Liberals, by 1922 under the leadership of Premier Charles Dunning, a respected farmer and prominent SGGA member, followed suit in the Legislative Assembly at Regina. SGGA locals went on record demanding the return of the government marketing board, and an SGGA leader even wrote to one of Saskatchewan's Progressive MPs that if the Wheat Board did not return, its remaining profits should be dividing among the prairie provinces to provide a foundation for voluntary pools. "This money belongs to the people of the Western Provinces," he wrote.⁴³

With little hope for the return of the Wheat Board, ideas about forming a voluntary and cooperative pool in each prairie province gained prominence. Certainly any farmer-created pool could not operate by compulsion, as had the Wheat Board, and it would have to work in the open market system. Nonetheless, a voluntary contract pool could find some operational guidance in the now defunct government marketing board, especially in the need for centralized control over the selling of the crop, the elimination of middlemen by getting the wheat directly to millers, and in the method of payment by which farmers received a series of financial remuneration throughout the crop year. With this in mind, in Chicago at the National Board of Farm Organizations convention in May 1920, representatives from the Canadian Council of Agriculture listened to Sapiro's ideas about agricultural commodity pooling. There the Canadian farmers' delegates learned "many valuable lessons [from U.S. farmers] which will be of advantage to [us] in solving [our] own economic and social problems." As the agricultural depression deepened, Canadian farm leaders became interested in the pooling phenomenon in the

⁴³ George F. Edwards to John Evans, 12 Feb. 1924, File XLVII.A., John Evans Manuscript Collection, University of Saskatchewan Special Collections; Cobourg Grain Growers' Minute Book, 3 Mar. 1922, p. 193, File 5, John Maharg Fonds, SAB Regina Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 482-84, 518.

U.S. In an interview with Sapiro, the *Grain Growers' Guide* asked if the pooling concept could be applied to the vast region of Western Canada. "Easily," he replied.⁴⁴

As reinstatement of the Wheat Board became increasingly unlikely, even cautious and conservative farm leaders began to support the pooling idea, though not in a compulsory form. J.B. Musselman, secretary of the SGGA, had convinced J.M. Anderson to vote against the Sapiro plan when Anderson was leading the USGG, and instead urged the Americans to pursue a voluntary wheat pooling model. Musselman also tried to press upon the SGGA a voluntary, non-contract pool for the province with himself and other interlocking directorate members as guiding lights. By mid-1922, however, the Central Secretary's high-handed methods to maintain his power base and his high salary resulted in a cadre of SGGA leaders eager to end the system of interlocking directorates and get the organization focused on economic salvation through a contract pool. Musselman, recognizing this hostile group's growing power within the SGGA, resigned in August 1922 to take a promotion on his regular position in the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company.⁴⁵

At the head of this SGGA group hostile to the interlocking directorates, and Musselman's replacement, was the "rigid and idealistic" Bankend-area farmer Alexander James (A.J.) McPhail, who confronted the organization's loss of prominence in Saskatchewan. The SGGA's image of "comfortable conservatism" and its refusal to look beyond the Anglo-Saxon farming

⁴⁴ *Grain Growers' Guide*, 5 May 1920, p. 5, 19 May 1920, p. 5, 15 Sept. 1920, p. 12; *Conference of Grain and Flour Trade Representatives, with the United States Wheat Director, Julius H. Barnes* (Chicago, 1920); J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1920* (Toronto: The Canadian Review Co., Lmt., 1921), 119-120; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 210-13.

⁴⁵ Musselman to Local Secretaries, 11 Sept. 1922, Folder 1, File E.62, McNaughton Papers, SAB, Saskatoon; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 13-14; *Cooperators' Herald*, 18 Mar. 1921, p. 4; 15 Apr. 1921, p. 3; 8-15 July 1921, p. 6; *Nonpartisan Leader* (Fargo), 2 May 1921, p. 5; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 560-61.

population left the once-prominent body with only 15,000 members by 1922, down from a high of more than 30,000. McPhail traveled to the American wheat belt to learn of the new cooperative approaches, which he hoped might help revive the SGGA's sagging influence. In meetings with officials of the North-West Wheat Growers' Association of Washington state, McPhail came to the conclusion that the United States Grain Growers' rejection of the Sapiro model represented the main reason for its swift dissolution and convinced him that Saskatchewan must adhere to Sapiro's pooling methods.⁴⁶

The SGGA also lost clout and membership in the province to a new farmers' organization, The Farmers' Union of Canada (FUC), formed in late 1921 at Ituna. Born of the agricultural depression and steeped in the idea of farmer control of large-scale marketing, the FUC grew to 10,000 members by 1922. The organization eschewed politics and focused only upon the measures farmers could take towards economic independence. From early on the organization championed Sapiro's contract pooling approach. When the Farmers' Union publicized the idea of a five-year contract pool, Musselman and John Maharg of the SCEC rebutted with their own non-contract plan. The former SGGA Central Secretary believed the wheat pool had the potential to seriously challenge the predominance of the Co-operative Elevator Company. Under McPhail's leadership, however, the SGGA worked closely with the Liberal Dunning government, which had at first received the pool idea cautiously. The Liberals

⁴⁶ McNaughton to H.W. Wood, 17 July 1922; letter to McNaughton, 8 Sept. 1922; Organizational Department to Local Secretaries, 18 Sept. 1922, all in Folder 1, File E.62, McNaughton Papers, SAB Saskatoon; Innis, ed., *The Diary of Alexander James McPhail*, 40-41; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 7, 16; Fowke, *The National Policy*, 215-216.

quickly recognized the rising tide of support for a voluntary contract pool, and Premier Dunning urged the FUC and the SGGA to work together towards implementing Sapiro's plan.⁴⁷

Similar developments unfolded across the prairies, and the pooling drive in Western Canada dwarfed anything yet seen in the U.S. In the summer representatives of the SGGA, the United Farmers of Alberta, and the United Farmers of Manitoba met and agreed they would lead farmers in their respective province to organize identical wheat pools. A national central selling agency would handle and market the three pools' wheat. For the remainder of 1923 the three farmer organizations went to work creating voluntary wheat pools in the prairie provinces. In Saskatchewan the SGGA, led by A.J. McPhail, and the FUC, led by Louis McNamee, competed over which organization would be credited with inviting Aaron Sapiro to the province to assist in pool organization. Sapiro preferred a joint invitation from both organizations and along with Premier Dunning played a large role in bringing the SGGA and FUC together for a common goal.⁴⁸

Saskatchewan farmers excitedly received Sapiro at Saskatoon on 7 Aug. 1923. An attending journalist recalled, "He was the most inspiring, invigorating speaker I've ever heard. He moved, he played on the audience like an artist. He controlled their emotions, they yelled and cheered. He could do anything with them. I never saw anything to equal what Sapiro could do on a public platform." Many viewed his visit in religious terms and suggested Sapiro as a kind of savior. Sapiro proposed the same type of cooperative approach he promoted in the States: five-

⁴⁷ Duff Spafford, "The Origins of the Farmers' Union of Canada," *Saskatchewan History* 18 (Autumn, 1965): 89-98; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 580-82; Innis, ed., *The Diary of A.J. McPhail*, 34-35.

⁴⁸ "Report of Proceedings at Conference of Farmers' Union of Canada," Sunday, 5th August, 1923, File VI.6, Collection B2, Records of the SGGA, FUC, UFC-SS, SAB, Saskatoon; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 16, 20-21; Brennan, "Politics in Saskatchewan," 564; Patton, *Grain Growers' Cooperation*, 215-16.

year contracts that signed up at least fifty percent of the crop acreage, well-paid professional leaders, acquisition of pool elevators, and a central selling agency for the three provincial pooling organizations. He took the same message to Regina, Moose Jaw, and Swift Current, as well as to Alberta and Manitoba. Under the tutelage of the SGGGA and FUC, farmers then went to work to raise money, recruit pool members to sign five-year contracts, and secure marketing commitments for half the entire wheat acreage in the province. The United Farmers of Alberta and Manitoba began pool membership drives as well during the summer, fall, and winter of 1923 and 1924.⁴⁹

The sign-up drive for the Saskatchewan Cooperative Wheat Pool began in August 1923 and continued for almost a full year. Banks, boards of trade, retail merchant associations, and municipal councils recognized the grassroots fervor for the pool, and all lent support for organization and canvassing work. The agricultural department of the Saskatchewan government printed publicity posters, and federal MPs in Ottawa offered political influence, one claiming the farmers would be “slaves” without the pool. Almost two dozen life insurance companies in the province provided manpower to collect signed contracts. Even some private grain companies considered opposition to the pool movement as futile, publicly stated they would work with it, and some of their agents eventually became pool employees. This broad support, coupled with the backing of the Dunning government and the clout of the FUC and the SGGGA, created a powerful and widespread economic movement of farmers willing to try an untested but promising approach to wheat marketing.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ *Proceedings of the Second International Co-operative Wheat Pool Conference*, Kansas City, MO, May 5-7, 1927, 35. “Sapiro’s Address,” File VI.6, Collection B2, Records of the SGGGA, FUC, UFC-SS, SAB SAB, Saskatoon; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 24-25.

⁵⁰ *Proceedings of the Third National Co-operative Marketing Conference*, Jan. 1925, Folder: National Marketing Conference Proceedings, 1924-1926, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records,

The pool contract itself did represent a potential hazard in signing up individual farmers. Daunting verbiage in tiny type filled two legal-sized pages. Some SGGAs locals urged members to temper their enthusiasm for the pool until its contractual operations could be explained more clearly. The clause empowering the pool to force delivery of its members' wheat in certain situations caused some concern. Most farmers, however, aided by pool literature which discussed the contract in detail, grasped the basic principles of pooling relatively quickly, and came to believe the agreement between the grower and the pool had its foundation in solid business principles. "For if our right to produce is never questioned," chronicled the secretary of the Cobourg Grain Growers' local, "our right to sell should not be doubted either."⁵¹

The SCWP opened for business on 26 June 1924, with fifty percent of the wheat acreage covered under five-year contracts. This represented 46,000 contracts covering 6.5 million acres. The FUC had mobilized its lodges and the SGGAs its locals in support of the membership drive. In July the Central Selling Agency (CSA) came into existence to handle the crop of the three provincial pools: the SCWP, the Alberta Cooperative Wheat Producers, and the Manitoba Cooperative Wheat Producers. The CSA existed as part of the overarching Canadian Cooperative Wheat Producers, which represented all the pools of the prairie provinces. Individual farmers, along with Pool leaders, made all this possible. The democratic structure of the Pool engendered community spirit. An elected advisory committee existed at every delivery point to supervise local operations and discuss important matters. Such community support allowed farmers to band together to deliver grain to Pool elevators when some local private traders

UND Special Collections, 33; Evans to Brouette, 18 Mar. 1924, File XLVIII.A.; McPhail to Evans, 20 Mar. 1924, File XII.A.; and correspondence between L.J. Pepper and Evans, 22, 27, and 28 Mar. 1929, File XII.A., Evans Collection; Brennan, "A Political History of Saskatchewan," 574-75; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 28-31.

⁵¹ *What is the Contract?*, File II.12, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Collection, SAB, Regina; Cobourg Grain Growers' Minutebook, 3 Mar. 1924, p. 257; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 29.

attempted to force members to break their contracts. Pool leaders divided the province into sixteen districts with ten elected delegates each. These 160 men represented mostly foreign-born established farmers from Britain, primarily, but also included Germans and Scandinavians.⁵²

The pool certainly represented an impressive convergence of wheat farmers, businesses, and government in the creation of an economic movement, and “had the faith and hope of tens of thousands of people scattered across the farms of Saskatchewan, people who were relying on [the pool] as their tool for escaping from the suffocating trap of being without economic power.” Assistance came from Ottawa as well through the Campbell Amendment which empowered the pools to divert members’ grain from line elevators to pool terminals, and with a 1929 Exchequer Court ruling excepting pool elevator and commercial reserve deductions from federal taxes. At a social level, beginning in the late 1920s and continuing through the Depression, the pool used its fieldmen to maintain close contact with members and thus made the organization more than a simple economic organization. In a typical year, the average fieldmen met with about seventy committees, headed annual meetings in all ten of his subdistricts, and, beginning in the 1930s, presented a picture show at every major shipping point in his district. The fieldmen headed co-op schools for young people and Eastern European immigrants, especially Ukrainians; organized picnics and farm days in the summer; and helped organize a variety of cooperative enterprises.

⁵² “How Sapiro Was Paid,” File II.9, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Collection, SAB, Regina; *The Western Producer*, 16 Oct. 1980, Dixon Collection, Series 3c, Vol. 37, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections; S.M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968 ed.), 85-86; SGGGA memo to local secretaries, 13 Feb. 1924, Folder 2, File E.62, McNaughton Papers, SAB, Saskatoon; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 40-46; Patton, *Grain Growers’ Cooperation*, 227-28.

This grassroots element of the wheat pool movement in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba helped continue the spread across the prairies of the cooperative philosophy.⁵³

The Canadian Wheat Pools Take the Lead

By the beginning of 1925, Canadian pool successes had thrilled and inspired Americans. At the Third National Co-operative Marketing Conference in Washington, D.C., in January, Sapiro proudly discussed his work with the Canadian pools and held up those successes as a demonstration of what could be accomplished with mass participation in commodity marketing. A.J. McPhail, who left the SGGA and became president of the Saskatchewan pool, ruminated on why so many farmers supported the joined the Canadian pools. He concluded that the quarter-century experience in cooperation in Western Canada created a grassroots, cooperative spirit that continued to manifest itself in the pooling movement. From the creation of the interprovincial Grain Growers' Grain Company in 1906 onward, the organized wheat farmers of the three prairie provinces operated in solidarity as a powerful cooperative and economic block. The pool movement represented a continuation of this momentum, McPhail concluded.⁵⁴

McPhail was a determined and passionate agrarian leader. Saskatchewan farmers and his colleagues characterized McPhail as honest and lauded his "rock-ribbed integrity." This reputation preempted any efforts to slander or scandalize his leadership. After his parents' death, McPhail at the age of nineteen raised his eight siblings, farmed, traded livestock, and read voraciously. He notoriously ran the Saskatchewan pool on a very tight budget, and paid salaried

⁵³ Ian MacPherson, "Missionaries of Rural Development: The Fieldmen of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, 1925-1965," *Agricultural History* 60 (Spring, 1986): 73-96; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 44, 74.

⁵⁴ For Sapiro's address, see *Proceedings of the Third National Co-operative Marketing Conference*, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, UND, 39-58; for McPhail's, see 27-38. For background, see Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 64-65.

officials little and suggested they should be doing the work for the cause, not the money. Despite his rigid demeanor, he did seek compromise when possible and always tried to see all sides of an issue before making decisions.⁵⁵

Prominent Americans sought to learn from Canada's wheat pooling success. Secretary of Commerce Herbert Hoover sent an investigative team to study the wheat pools. The group's report concluded that the Canadian pools benefitted American wheat farmers by orderly marketing which raised wheat prices for everyone. That orderly marketing in one country actually increased prices paid to farmers globally is a dubious claim. The disposing of the Canadian crop at intervals, and the corresponding payments to farmers across the crop year, undoubtedly assisted the prairie farmer with his own finances from month to month. However, Canadian pool leaders disagreed among themselves to what degree orderly marketing actually contributed to global price control, and a conclusive economic study never materialized. Nonetheless, the highly centralized and tightly organized Canadian pools certainly engendered awe, and according to the Department of Commerce report the 122,000 pool members across Alberta, Manitoba, and Saskatchewan made the Canadian Wheat Producers "the strongest of its kind ever organized."⁵⁶

From the mid-1920s until the start of the Great Depression, the Canadian wheat pools certainly represented an amazing, financially successful agrarian marketing business. The five-year contract represented the core of the pools' accomplishment. As part of the over 140,000 signed-up farmers' contracts across the prairies, the pool deducted varying amounts from the prices paid to members during the crop year: a one-dollar deduction for one share of capital

⁵⁵ Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 46.

⁵⁶ North Dakota Wheat Growers Association, *Co-operative Wheat Marketing in America* (Grand Forks: The North Dakota Wheat Growers Association, 1925), 4-23; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 231.

stock; two dollars for organization and operational expenses; a one percent deduction from gross proceeds to be used for commercial reserves; and two cents for each bushel sold which went towards acquiring country and terminal elevators (and varying deductions from the sales of coarse grains such as oats, barley, flax, and rye). For the farmers' first delivery of the crop season, the Central Selling Agency financed the initial payment through an agreement with Canadian Bankers' Association, and by 1925 the banks had loaned \$25 million at six percent interest on the security of the pool members' warehouse receipts. The Central Selling Agency used such financial clout to engage in speculative buying of wheat futures, through which it brought in hundreds of thousands of dollars in 1925 alone. The Canadian Wheat Pool used part of this money to open up selling offices in the major terminal markets across North America and in fifteen additional international markets.⁵⁷

The most successful of the individual provincial pools, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, augmented such capitalization by acquisition of elevator facilities and the support of the provincial government. With regard to the former, McPhail and the other pool directors exploited the elevator deduction clause in the contract, as Aaron Sapiro had stressed, and in 1926 purchased the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company. With this merger, the Saskatchewan Pool Elevator, Limited, subsidiary owned by the end of the decade 970 elevators at most every interior delivery point in the province as well as five Lakehead terminals, with the renowned 7.2-million bushel Terminal 7 considered the most modern of its kind in the world.

⁵⁷ C.R. Fay, "The Canadian Wheat Pools," *The Economic Journal* 35 (Mar., 1925): 26-29; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 221, 244-45; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 61-62.

The pool in Saskatchewan also received significant start-up capital from the provincial Liberal government, which in 1924 provided \$45,000 for organizing expenses.⁵⁸

The pool passed such financial benefits to its members through the practice of “orderly marketing,” which was Sapiro’s popular catch-phrase but also one open to interpretation in practice. The main problem, of course, was the “dumping” of wheat on the market at fall harvest, lowering prices and forcing farmers to struggle through the winter with no additional income. Orderly marketing suggested the disposition of the crop at intervals throughout the crop year, thus avoiding the fall market glut, and included payments to the farmer at several points during the same time period, reducing the grain grower’s reliance on banks. As Sapiro argued, to orderly market a crop necessitated a centralized marketing structure to determine how and when to dispose of the crop during the year. The Central Selling Agency of the Canadian wheat pools served this function. Such a centralized structure, coupled with the pools’ ownership of subsidiary marketing entities, meant the elimination of the middleman, the direct selling of wheat to millers, and thus, theoretically, a price paid to the farmer free of the various deductions inherent in the traditional grain trade. McPhail and other pool leaders did disagree on how orderly marketing operated as a sales policy on a day-to-day basis. Nonetheless, the Canadian pool farmers believed fervently in the basic assumptions behind the concept. Colin H. Burnell of the Manitoba pool exuded such excitement over this marketing process when he told an Australian audience, “I hope you will excuse me if I appear over-enthusiastic on this subject of orderly marketing, but I feel very much like the rooster who found the ostrich egg. He called his

⁵⁸ Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 32, 59-60, 66-69.

hens around him, showed them the egg, and addressed them thus: ‘Folks, I don’t want to discourage you, but it shows what can be done.’”⁵⁹

In conversation with North Dakota pool president George Duis, Saskatchewan pool president A.J McPhail suggested another key to the Canadian pool success was the ability of the pool to cross provincial lines, organize farmers across the wheat belt, and sell their wheat through a central agency. The first element in making this possible, added George W. Robertson, secretary of the Saskatchewan pool, was control of the wheat crop, which meant a sign-up of fifty percent or more of the crop acreage. With that, he concluded, came member loyalty. The NDWGA’s central problem was in fact a lack of member loyalty. The organization faced a large number of members who broke the five-year contract by selling their wheat outside of the pool. This issue became so serious that at the 1925 annual NDWGA meeting the directors opted to waive litigation and the twenty-five cent penalty per bushel for members that reneged on contracts, and offered contract-breakers a second chance to deliver the year’s crop.⁶⁰

Though a national pool movement had yet to develop successfully, the North Dakota Wheat Growers Association moved forward with a state membership drive, buoyed by the remarkable formation of a powerful interprovincial wheat pool across prairie Canada. As in Canada, Aaron Sapiro played a central role in the 1924 pool membership drive in North Dakota and helped draw up the NDWGA five-year pool contract. Sapiro thanked the farmers, business leaders, and Valley City for hosting him, and concluded that “next to religion, next to

⁵⁹ “Visit of Mr. C.H. Burnell,” Folder: Manitoba Pool Elevators, Ltd.—Pool Materials and Misc., Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, UND Special Collections; Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy*, 209-34. See also Allan Levine, “Open Market or ‘Orderly Marketing’: The Winnipeg Grain Exchange and the Wheat Pools, 1923-1929,” *Agricultural History* 61 (Spring, 1987): 50-69.

⁶⁰ *The Wheat Grower*, 15 Jan. 1925, p. 3, 15 Mar. 1925, pp. 3, 7, 10, and 1 Aug. 1925, p. 3; *Co-operative Wheat Marketing in America*, 23-26.

determining your relationship with God, there is no worthier thing” than to help farmers organize. Despite Sapiro’s characteristically inspiring appearance in Valley City, the North Dakota pool never managed to sign up contracts covering fifty percent of the crop acreage in the state. When the pool began operation far below that figure, ignoring a central tenet in Sapiro’s commodity marketing plan, he refused to offer any additional assistance in North Dakota.⁶¹

George Duis and other adherents to the pooling concept were not able to give Sapiro’s plan their complete attention and energy, because a more influential legislative remedy quickly came to dominate national agricultural stage. A proposal developed by George N. Peek and Hugh S. Johnson of the Moline Plow Company in Illinois suggested a two-tiered price structure for farm commodities, including wheat: a domestic and world price. Portions of a given crop would be held off the domestic market and introduced back into it only to supply the demand at a fair price. Any excess crop went into the world market, where losses were recouped through an equalization fee assessed on those who sold for a higher price domestically. The goal was to keep the prices of farm exports level with the prices of nonfarm goods.⁶²

Senator Charles McNary and Representative Gilbert N. Haugen introduced the plan in Congress several times between 1924 and 1928, and throughout the decade it came to be known as McNary-Haugen. North Dakota pool president George Duis saw in the plan a way to realize orderly marketing and dispose of the pool’s surplus wheat. Conservatives in the U.S. Congress, mostly Republicans and led by two-term GOP President Calvin Coolidge, pushed back against McNary-Haugen and argued if enacted the paternalistic plan would engender a bloated agricultural federal bureaucracy, encourage overproduction in an already glutted market, lose

⁶¹ *The Wheat Grower*, 15 Feb. 1924, p. 8; 1 March 1924, p. 3-4, 11; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 37.

⁶² Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States*, 208-11; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 378.

taxpayer money, and result in retaliation by other countries in response to the dumping of the agricultural commodity surplus on the international market. When the McNary-Haugen bill did pass both houses of congress, Coolidge twice vetoed it. “Promises without action,” wrote pool secretary A.J. Scott, have “left agriculture by the wayside.”⁶³

Neither did the wheat pool in North Dakota receive assistance from the state government. Though not a Nonpartisan League member, Arthur G. Sorlie won the gubernatorial contest on the party’s ticket in 1924 and 1926 on a platform of reversing the financial losses of the state mill and elevator. A successful businessman, Sorlie appealed to the moderate—and dominant—internal League faction, and brought out middle-ground voters. The governor’s two terms were mild, uncontroversial, and uneventful, as the League, no longer radical but still considered the farmers’ party, fought conservative Democrats and Republicans in the state legislature. Operation of the state mill and elevator represented the main North Dakota political issue of the decade, and Sorlie decided not to run in 1928 because his administration had failed to turn around the finances of the state industries. The wheat pool officially supported Sorlie’s campaigns due to his pledge to make profitable the mill and elevator and his support for McNary-Haugen, but the legislature never passed, or even considered, legislation to assist the pool organization in a meaningful way. An editorial in the pool newspaper lamented that the

⁶³ Duis’s address at the 1924 National Cooperative Marketing Conference, *Proceedings of the Second National Cooperative Marketing Conference*, p. 62, Feb. 1924, Folder: National Marketing Conference Proceedings, 1924-1926, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, Special Collections, University of North Dakota; “Will You Pay Your Debt to Agriculture?” 1924, Folder: NDMWGA Pamphlets and Published Materials, 1922-1929, Box 51, Special Collections, UND; A.J. Scott, “Agriculture Needs a Farm Bill,” n.d., n.p., Folder: Publicity Releases, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records.

Saskatchewan legislature housed dozens of wheat pool members, while their own statehouse remained deadlocked on the old issue of state industries.⁶⁴

One piece of federal legislation, the Capper-Volstead Act of 1922, did create a better legal environment for agricultural cooperatives. The act allowed farmer marketing co-ops to engage in interstate commerce without the potential for prosecution under antitrust laws. President Duis hoped to establish the North Dakota pool as an interstate cooperative, just as the prairie provinces had created an interprovincial pool with a central selling agency. The organization still lagged significantly in reaching the goal to sign up fifty percent of the crop acreage and desperately needed a boost from the successful, energized, and optimistic Canadians. Expansion into Montana in 1926 represented the first step in the creation of an interstate pool, and added another state to the pool's name—North Dakota-Montana Wheat Growers' Association (ND-MWGA). However, the pool simply did not have the elevator capacity to service the almost 20,000 members in the two states. In addition, many elevator managers opposed the pool's efforts to acquire elevators because the pool competed with them at local points. In comparison with the 500-plus elevators owned and operated by the three provincial pools in Canada at the time and the strong support and cooperation from the prairie elevator community, the ND-MWGA recognized it lagged behind significantly with only sixteen. Duis believed the North Dakota pool should emulate the Canadian example of large-scale elevator ownership.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ "Sorlie Favors Haugen Bill," Folder: Publicity Releases, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records; *The Wheat Grower*, 15 June 1924, p. 2; 1 Mar. 1927, p.2; Scott, "Agriculture Needs a Farm Bill," n.p.; Gov. Sorlie to Duis (telegram), n.d., Folder 23, Box 3, ND-MWGA Records; Correspondence between Sen. McNary and Duis, 15 Apr. and 16 Apr. 1928, Untitled letter from Gov. Sorlie, n.d., and Duis to Ward, 14 Mar. 1924, all in Folder 22, Box 3, ND-MWGA Records; Edward C. Blackorby, "Political Factional Strife in North Dakota from 1920 to 1932," (M.S. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1938), chs. 3 and 4.

However, an antagonistic relationship with the Equity Cooperative Exchange hindered the pool's goal of increasing its presence at delivery points through the acquisition of additional grain elevators. Unlike the highly profitable merger between the Saskatchewan pool and the province's Cooperative Elevator Company, Equity and the North Dakota pool slandered each other in public and engaged in legal wrangling over finances and marketing policy. Editorials in the pool newspaper distinguished between the "dumping" method of marketing through Equity and the orderly marketing approach of the pool. The "road between the two groups seems to be widening," the editor wrote, and he argued that a farmer could not be a faithful member of the pool if he also sold through the ECE. By 1925, president Duis came to the conclusion that the ND-MWGA should cease delivering wheat to any Equity elevator and could no longer accept from members the storage tickets issued by the ECE. North Dakota elevator managers found themselves in the crossfire between the two marketing organizations. Eventually, the pool considered legal action against Equity in attempt to receive money owed.⁶⁶

It was evident, then, that in North Dakota the wheat pool faced significant challenges. As had Equity in the 1910s, the ND-MWGA looked to the more successful Canadian organized farmers for assistance. R.L. Taft, financial guide of the ND-MWGA, asked R.F. Chapman, vice president of the Manitoba pool, to send Canadian pool representatives for guidance. Privately, Taft said, "I can not help but admit that your pool has much the best of ours" and "in fact, you are in control." Chapman agreed to help. In preparation for the 1926 North Dakota pool

⁶⁵ *The Wheat Grower*, 1 June 1924, p. 2; 15 June 1924, p. 4; 15 Sept. 1926, p. 6; 15 Dec. 1926, p. 13; Porter J. McCumber to Scott, 20 Feb. 1922, Folder 22, Box 3, ND-MWGA Records; Kurt A. Grussendorf, "What into Chaff: The Failure of the North Dakota-Montana Wheat Growers Association, 1922-31," (M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978), 15, ch. 2.

⁶⁶ Taft to Duis, 21 Aug. 1924, and Taft to George Lambert, 28 Aug. 1924, Folder 23, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records; G.A. Thiel to ECE Board of Directors, 11 Aug. 1922, Folder 17, Box 9, Ole Olson Papers, North Dakota State University Special Collections; *The Wheat Grower*, 15 July 1924, p.4-5; 1 Sept. 1925, p.3.

membership drive, Taft led a group of ND-MWGA directors and officers in a visit to the Canadian pool offices. To be successful, Taft concluded from his visit, the North Dakota pool must follow closely the example of the Canadian wheat pool in terms of energizing the grassroots, bringing in new members, acquiring additional elevator facilities, and learning how to develop more amicable relations with banks and other financial institutions. The Canadians extended their assistance to both the 1926 and 1928 ND-MWGA membership drives.⁶⁷

The North Dakota pool used a new medium to generate excitement for the Canadians' visits. By the mid-1920s the radio transitioned from a novelty to a device that reduced the isolation and loneliness of northern plains farmers via practical information and entertainment. Both the North Dakota and Canadian pools used the radio to solicit new farmers and urge current members to renew contracts. In preparation for both the 1926 and 1928 membership drives, North Dakota pool secretary A.J.Scott began a weekly radio program broadcast over station CKY in Winnipeg, the home of the Canadian pools' central office. Airwaves were uncluttered in the early years of radio, so North Dakota farmers heard Scott's discussion of his visit to the Canadian pools and how they could inspire the rejuvenation of pools in the United States. Radio became a new recruitment and social tool for the movement and blended with more traditional organizational techniques.⁶⁸

For the pools in both countries, radio became a necessity by the later 1920s. ND-MWGA president Duis spread the gospel of cooperation across the airwaves, as did officials of the Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Manitoba pools. They quoted prices, presented the benefits of the

⁶⁷ R.L. Taft to R.F. Chapman, 2 Dec. 1925, and Taft to F.W. Copeland, 1 Dec. 1925, both in Folder 16, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records, Special Collections, UND.

⁶⁸ H.S. Fry to A.J. Scott, 7 Nov. 1927, Folder 17, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records, Special Collections, UND; *The Wheat Grower*, 15 Oct. 1926, p. 2; Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 274-75; Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 193.

pools, answered listener questions, made jokes, and simply reached current and potential members in a new and exciting way. Radio broadcasts also brought the North Dakota and Canadian pools closer together. Leaders often crossed the international border for broadcasts. Secretary Scott and president Duis used the radio connection to Canada to generate enthusiasm for pooling among North Dakota farmers. Vernice Aldrich, editor of the ND-MWGA official organ *The Wheat Grower*, noted in 1929, “radio has established itself as a necessity.”⁶⁹

Though a necessity, farmers who addressed audiences through the radio had to adjust to the new technology. S.M. Gibson, head of the Manitoba Pool Elevator Organization Department, explained some apprehensions he had when first broadcasting over the pool station at Winnipeg. Gibson had traveled across the province talking about the need for pool elevators at shipping points. He had years of experience discussing the wheat pool in farmers’ homes, on the road, in small towns, and at countless country meetings. But stepping in front of the radio microphone “scared me,” he admitted. “I don’t know whether this thing is repeating...what I am saying, or whether it is making up its own story,” he said. Gibson also noted differences between face-to-face pool canvassing work and radio speeches. In personal discussions and at meetings, he explained, “you can tell by the expression or the faces of the audience whether they believe, disbelieve, like, dislike or sleep through what you are saying.” Despite requiring some getting used to, the Canadians’ station at Winnipeg reached a wider audience than the lower-watt broadcasts coming out of station KFJR at Bismarck.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ *The Wheat Grower*, 15 Jan. 1928, p. 5-6; A.J. Scott radio address over Winnipeg station CKY (2 Nov. 1927), Folder: “Manitoba Pool Elevators, Ltd.—Pool Materials and Misc.,” Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, UND; “Scott Broadcasts Over University Station, KFJM,” 22 Mar. 1926, Folder: “ND-MWGA Publicity Releases, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, UND.

⁷⁰ S.M. Gibson radio address, 10 Nov. 1927, Folder: “Saskatchewan Co-operative Wheat Producers, Ltd., 1927-1936,” Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, UND; *The Wheat Grower*, 15 Oct. 1929, p. 4.

Building upon such radio publicity, president Duis hoped the Canadians' assistance with the membership drives in 1926 and 1928 would translate into increased sign-ups and pool elevator acquisition, but instead they revealed glaring weaknesses of the North Dakota pool's operation and the chasm that separated it from the Canadian Wheat Pool. F.W. Ransom and R.F. Chapman of the Manitoba pool and John H. Wesson of the Saskatchewan pool helped lead the 1926 membership drive. The Manitoba men each addressed ten separate meetings across the state and Wesson addressed eight, mostly in the western part of North Dakota, where pool members were few, due to the sparse and dispersed population. In the summer of 1928 ND-MWGA president George Duis invited Manitoba pool secretary F.W. Ransom to act as the main speaker on Wheat Pool Day at the North Dakota State Fair at Fargo. In addition to Ransom's speech, the ND-MWGA erected a "rest tent" where current and prospective members could learn more about the goals and operation of the pool. All services were free at the ND-MWGA tent during Wheat Pool Day at the fair.⁷¹

The Canadians' speeches focused first on energizing the grassroots. They traced the successful history of agrarian cooperation in the prairies, from the Grain Growers' Grain Company to the United Grain Growers to the successes of the provincial pools. North Dakota farmers and pool members are discouraged at present, they suggested, but triumph was on the horizon. Simply look to the Canadian pools for inspiration, the speakers concluded. Ransom told how, early in the Canadian pooling movement, Manitoba organizers visited the nascent NDWGA, learned pooling methods, copied the contract, and then used that as a basis for current success. He concluded that North Dakota farmers could follow the Canadians to "catch up with

⁷¹ *The Wheat Grower*, 15 May 1926, p. 2; 1 July 1926, p. 3; Ransom to Duis, 20 July 1928; and Scott to Ransom, 23 July 1928, Folder 16, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records; *The Wheat Grower*, 1 Aug. 1928, p. 1.

their successful pupil.” These speeches reveal how the Canadian pools took Sapiro’s plan, rigidly adhered to it, and executed it better.⁷²

The more effective execution of the pooling plan was manifest through a more robust grassroots effort on the part of the Canadian pools. At the 1928 Wheat Pool Day at the Fargo Fair Ransom focused on the grassroots organizational approaches of the Manitoba and Canadian pools. In Manitoba, almost 500 pool canvassers, each responsible for one township (six square miles), hit the road on foot, horseback, or buggy, in all weather, for twenty-five-cent commissions. Each canvasser used a map of all known pool members in the township, and thus could find where non-pool farmers lived. They used high-pressure sales methods at first, but once the general benefits of cooperative marketing became clear, Ransom explained, the intensity slackened. Simply put, the ND-MWGA lacked this type of organizational direction and canvassing power.⁷³

The role of the fieldmen in the Canadian and North Dakota pools represents one of the crucial organizational differences. To maintain personal connections between members and the pool, field men worked year-round to keep contact with the farmers. “To the member,” Ransom explained, “the field man is the Pool.” In contrast, unrealistic promises by field men about ND-MWGA elevators turned many members against the pool, and they reneged on contracts. Due to the dishonesty of several North Dakota pool fieldmen, some local elevator agents spoke publicly against the ND-MWGA. By 1928, to remedy the substandard performance of the North Dakota pool fieldmen, Duis had them train with their Manitoba counterparts. After the training the Manitoba field men accompanied North Dakota canvassers to communities along the North

⁷² *The Wheat Grower*, 15 June 1926, p. 2, 7, and 1 Aug. 1928, p. 7

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 1 Aug. 1928, p. 7

Dakota-Manitoba border. The North Dakota men hereafter, during the winter, frequently crossed the international boundary to attend Manitoba wheat pool meetings.⁷⁴

The Canadians' assistance also points to another indicator of sagging membership in North Dakota. Ransom explained that the ND-MWGA did not effectively "sugar-coat the pill." This approach involved the strategy of cloaking dry business wheat pool meetings in exciting social events. A typical Manitoba pool meeting included local talent, music, dances, and other social components to keep younger farmers interested in the movement. This strategy always worked, he concluded. The North Dakota pool attempted this approach, to little effect. The most exciting element of a ND-MWGA meeting was "old time dances," but it lacked the variety, excitement, and interest of the Canadian pool events.⁷⁵

Some of the meetings with Canadian keynote speakers drew overflow crowds of several hundred North Dakota farmers, attracted by the successes of the Canadian pools and eager to hear the commodity marketing leaders from the north. Other meetings had dismal attendance and caused ND-MWGA leaders embarrassment. One North Dakota pool state organizer wrote to Secretary George Robertson of the Saskatchewan pool explaining that the low attendance numbers illustrated a major problem with North Dakota pool members: they express interest in meetings, but never show up. As well, during F.W. Ransom's visit to the North Dakota State Fair during Wheat Pool Day, the editor of *The Wheat Grower* talked at length with members of both the Manitoba and North Dakota pool. He noticed they represented different breeds. In North Dakota members had a chip on their shoulder and did not have their soul in the organization, as

⁷⁴ Series of letters between E.E. Lycke and Ransom, Nov. 1926, Folder 16, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records, Special Collections, UND; *The Wheat Grower*, 1 Aug. 1928, p. 7; Grussendorf, "Wheat into Chaff," ch. 2.

⁷⁵ E.E. Lycke to W.A. MacLeod, 2 Feb. 1927, Folder 16, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records; *The Wheat Grower*, 1 June 1927, p. 7, 1 Aug. 1928, p. 7, and 15 Aug. 1928, p. 6.

did their counterparts in Canada. Until the pool farmer in North Dakota adopted the attitude of the Canadians, the editor concluded, the pool would not progress.⁷⁶

This suggests a final differentiation and explanation of the gulf between Canadian and North Dakota Wheat Pools . North Dakota farm canvassers were, by the mid-1920s mainly old Leaguers and other formerly active farmers who were by now “tired radicals” and “saddle sore farmers.” In North Dakota the farmers had tried so hard to better their position, first through the Equity Cooperative Exchange and then with the Nonpartisan League, but apparently failed. Morale across the state was low. The NPL was gone, and its state industries were ineffectual. Equity was gone from the scene as well, despite efforts to court Canadian cooperative assistance and organizational methods. The agricultural depression of the early 1920s revealed problems in the fifteen-year-old marketing organization. Poor leadership, overdrawn capital stock, weak local elevator mismanagement, and other financial problems all led the ECE into receivership in the spring of 1923. Its subsidiaries within the North Dakota, Montana, and Minnesota Societies of Equity drained resources as well. When the United States Grain Growers failed in 1922 it took ECE members’ grain with it, because the ECE had contracted with the USGG.⁷⁷

In contrast, the Canadian farmers had experienced consecutive successes in cooperative marketing and large scale economic organization between the turn of the century and the onset of the Great Depression. It is telling that in private some ND-MWGA officials sought to join the Canadian pool. ND-MWGA publicity director E.E. Lycke sought to purchase farmland in

⁷⁶ ND-MWGA state organizer to George Robertson, 3 June 1926, Folder 16, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records, Special Collections, UND; *The Wheat Grower*, 15 June 1926, p. 2, and 15 Aug. 1928, p. 4.

⁷⁷ James Manahan personal history, n.p., 1929, Folder 17, Box 9, Olson Papers, North Dakota State University; *Cooperators’ Herald*, 13 Feb. 1920, p. 7; Theodore Saloutos, “The Decline of the Equity Cooperative Exchange,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 34 (Dec., 1947): 418-19.; Wilkins and Wilkins, *North Dakota*, 92; Charles and Joyce Conrad, *50 Years: North Dakota Farmers Union* (1976), 11.

Manitoba. In correspondence with F.W. Ransom, Lycke said, “this should enable me to become a wheat farmer in Canada. Then I would join your wonderful pool.” Canadian organized farmers had not experienced the disappointments of their counterparts in North Dakota. By 1929 the Canadian Wheat Pool handled one-fifth of the world’s wheat trade and represented one of Canada’s most conspicuous and economically successful institutions.⁷⁸

At first glance it seems as though the Canadians’ assistance in the 1926 and 1928 membership drives created a stronger foundation for the North Dakota wheat pool. In 1929 the ND-MWGA claimed almost 30,000 members, up from about 17,000 in 1925. This number, however, is misleading because many of the members reneged on the five-year contracts and delivered grain outside the pool. North Dakota pool fieldmen intentionally misinformed potential members about the existence of an extensive elevators system, and even drew up false contracts to that effect. This forced the ND-MWGA to cancel late in the decade many of the misrepresentative contracts. Outside elevator managers remained hostile to the pool. To do business, the independent elevator operator had to accept the pool’s delayed payment structure while exercising no control over marketing. Finally, even if the membership numbers were accurate, the North Dakota pool did not control sufficient wheat acreage and thus did not near monopoly control of the crop in the northern plains. The ND-MWGA had always claimed it needed at least 100,000 pool contracts to monopolize the crop.⁷⁹

Though the Canadians’ visit to North Dakota demonstrated clearly to farmers how agricultural commodity pooling could succeed and bring real benefits to grain growers, the

⁷⁸ *The Wheat Grower*, 15 July 1926, p. 2; E.E. Lycke to Rushfeldt, 28 June 1926; F.W. Ransom to E.E. Lycke, 31 Mar. 1927; E.E. Lycke to Ransom, 22 Apr. 1927; and Ransom to E.E. Lycke, 26 Apr. 1927, all in Folder 16, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 83.

⁷⁹ Grussendorf, “Wheat into Chaff,” 3-29.

business and financial realities of operating such an enterprise slowed what little momentum had been gained by the ND-MWGA. The pool first received funding in 1922 from the War Finance Corporation, a federal government agency supported by the Farm Bloc and authorized to loan to cooperatives beginning in 1921, and then contracted with the Federal Intermediate Credit Bank in St. Paul for long-term loans. By 1928, this funding proved insufficient to provide members with an initial payment large enough to carry the farmer until the interim and final payments. This situation developed because the ND-MWGA did not control enough crop acreage and thus could only advance an average of 70% of the market price for the initial payment at any given local point. Thus the pool sought short-term loans from private banks, and financial department head R.L. Taft had to travel to banks in person and, as he described it, “beg for finances” because the pool’s money reserves were depleted.⁸⁰

President George Duis, too, found himself in the humiliating position of asking for money for the organization. Most country elevators, dependent upon Minneapolis commission houses for sale of their grain, and line elevators of Minneapolis and Duluth firms, either refused to work with the North Dakota pool or made selling grain difficult. Such elevators and firms refused Duis’s appeals to sell pooled grain or agreed to only accept wheat in the autumn, not at intervals throughout the crop year as necessitated by the orderly marketing strategy. In private Duis lamented “how badly we need the small amount of money we are asking for” and that “I am not very crazy about this job but will get through with it some way before long.” These were not

⁸⁰ Duis to McNary, 13 Nov. 1928, Folder 22, Box 3, ND-MWGA Records; Taft to Duis, 28 Aug. 1924, Folder 23, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 384-85; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 330.

the words of an optimistic and passionate agrarian leader, nor did they indicate an organization on solid business and financial footing.⁸¹

When North Dakota Republican state senator Dell Patterson introduced a resolution calling for an investigation into the ND-MWGA for insolvency, Manitoba pool vice president Colin H. Burnell asked to audit the pool's books. North Dakota pool secretary A.J. Scott angrily pointed out that these were merely rumors. His displeasure at Burnell's unquestioned acceptance of such dubious information led Scott to conclude, "I am at a loss to quite understand how leaders of farm movements can accept and give any credence to the opposition of any co-operative association." Such organizational tensions across the international border also stemmed from the Americans' desire to profit from the success of the Canadian wheat pools. American agricultural leaders met in 1928 with A.J. McPhail at Winnipeg and requested that the Canadian pools act as a clearinghouse for U.S. farm products. They argued that the prestige of the Canadian organizations would be a boost to the membership of American wheat pools. McPhail rejected this proposition and told Canadian pool board members "we must be very careful to preserve the good name of our organization." And it was a good name, indeed. As the 1920s came to a close, farmers celebrated the fact that the Canadian Wheat Pool was prospering and exclaimed, "Long may it do so!"⁸²

⁸¹ Duis to Taft, 17 Jan. 1928, Folder 23, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records; "Wheat Growers Claim Discrimination," Folder: Publicity Releases, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records.

⁸² "Wheat Pool Head Refutes Charges Made in Patterson Resolution," Folder: Publicity Releases, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records; Scott to Burnell, 8 Mar. 1928, Folder 16, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records; Sutherland to McNaughton, 23 Mar. 1925, Folder 2, File E.53, McNaughton Papers, SAB Saskatoon; Innis, ed., *The Diary of A.J. McPhail*, 192-93.

The International Wheat Pool Movement

Canadian wheat pool success became an international phenomenon among grain growers not only in the U.S., but also in Australia and the Soviet Union. Wheat pools from the four countries convened a series of conferences in the second half of the 1920s designed to increase coordination between the pools and inaugurate a world wheat pool that controlled the marketing of the crops of all the wheat producing regions across the globe. This attempt at international cooperation coincided with improved agricultural economic conditions between 1926 and 1929, and so it was no surprise that attendees exuded optimism and confidence.⁸³

The Australian wheat pools formed after the collapse of a compulsory government marketing board in 1921. Government policy in postwar Australia aimed at “men, money, and markets,” which meant settlement and growth in agricultural areas, government subsidies, and production for new markets. As a major agricultural export, wheat factored significantly into the country’s 1920 economic policy. With the onset of the agricultural depression early in the decade the government offered financing for cooperative commodity marketing, but it was the farmers’ responsibility to organize, which they did under the pooling arrangement. After World War I Australia lacked a widespread agricultural cooperative tradition and large farmers’ organizations, thus the pools lagged behind those in North America. Minimal transportation infrastructure and technological backwardness also hampered Australian agriculture. When prices fell in the early 1920s, Australian wheat farmers formed cooperative selling agencies and then the wheat-producing states formed marketing pools. The individual Cooperative Wheat Pools of South

⁸³ Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 403; Brennan, “A Political History of Saskatchewan,” 623, 663; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 79. On the organization of the conferences, see correspondence between the ND-MWGA and the Saskatchewan Cooperative Wheat Producers, Folder 13, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records, Special Collections, UND.

Australia, West Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales were structured on the same basic pooling basis as their Canadian and American counterparts, except they operated on a voluntary, rather than contractual basis, as the farmers were wary of signing long-term agreements. Each state pool sent representatives to the three international conferences in 1926, 1927, and 1928.⁸⁴

Reports from the New South Wales Pool, the Western Australia Pools, and the Victoria pool revealed that Australian wheat farmers lacked a high level of marketing integration, coordination, and cooperation across state lines. Farmers in the New South Wales Pool, for instance, voted strongly against any type of government interference with wheat marketing and against any type of compulsory wheat delivery by its members. Nevertheless, the pool handled almost 25% of the New South Wales crop by 1927, and aimed for 40% in subsequent years. In Western Australia, members could market through the pool or through the warehouse system of the pool's cooperative handling agency. However, during the 1925 price slump too many farmers opted for the warehouse method, disrupting pool deliveries. The next year in Western Australia the pool stipulated members must market at least one-third of their crop through the pool system. The Victoria Pool operated simply as a voluntary marketing organization with an average of 50% of the marketable wheat in the state. Such divergent approaches contrasted with the uniform

⁸⁴ Information on the Australian pools is found in several pamphlets: *Growers' Questions Answered*; *Manifesto of the Federated Co-operative Wheat Pools of Australia*; and *Co-operative Marketing*, all in Folder: "Misc. Materials," Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, Special Collections, UND. See also, *Proceedings of the International Wheat Pool Conference at St. Paul, Minnesota* (Winnipeg: Canadian Co-operative Wheat Producers, Lmt., 1926), 14, 34-35, 38; Stuart Macintyre, *A Concise History of Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 170-71; Macintyre, *The Oxford History of Australia, Vol. 4: 1901-1942: The Succeeding Age* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1986), 208-209; F.K. Crowley, ed., *A New History of Australia* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, Inc., 1974), 379-82.

marketing of the Canadian's Central Selling Agency, and the Australian farmers sought guidance on ways to coordinate their varied state pool systems and achieve orderly marketing.⁸⁵

Russian wheat pooling developed as part of the Soviet state's New Economic Policy (NEP), which aimed to stabilize industrial and agricultural production to provide a foundation for the development of socialism. As part of the NEP, sectors of the economy, including agriculture, were legally allowed to participate in limited private enterprise, which existed alongside burgeoning state industries. Throughout the 1920s the Soviet state generally left rural peasants alone, though the government did urge the formation of various cooperatives as a transition to collectivization. In other words, the Bolsheviks initially aimed to pacify the countryside with the allowance of limited private economic activity. As in Australia, Russian farms lacked the technology common to North American agriculture. Nonetheless Russian agricultural production by 1925 increased 64%, and thereafter exceeded even the best years before the revolution. During the decade Russian farmers, including grain growers, pursue their own cooperative methods with minimal state interference, though soon, by the early 1930s, Stalin would begin the state-led process of agricultural collectivization which resulted in the deaths of millions.⁸⁶

The Canadian Wheat Pool took the initiative and invited the Soviet delegates, who represented a variety of co-ops, to the three international conferences. In the 1920s the wheat pooling system remained in a nascent state in the Russian countryside and involved the simple

⁸⁵ *Proceedings of the Second International Co-operative Wheat Pool Conference* (Kansas City, MO, May 5-7, 1927), 65-71; *Manifesto of The Federated Co-operative Wheat Pools of Australia*, n.p., n.d., Folder: Misc. Materials, and *The Trustees of the Co-operative Wheat Pool of Western Australia*, n.p., n.d, Folder: Agricultural Cooperation—Published Materials, 1925-1932, both in Box 51, ND-MWGA Records.

⁸⁶ William B. Husband, "The New Economic Policy (NEP) and the Revolutionary Experiment, 1921-1929," in ed. Gregory L. Freeze, *Russia: A History*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 265, 275-76, 280, 290; Alan Ball, "Building a New State and Society: NEP, 1921-1928," in ed. Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Cambridge History of Russia, Vol. III: The Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 169, 178-81.

voluntary delivery, without contracts or compulsion, of grain to shipping points with access to a co-op or a state bank. However, rural cooperatives of all stripes experienced remarkable growth during the decade, and this was reflected in the Soviet attendees. N.E. Svordloff represented Centrosoyus, a consumer co-op, and D.P. Pavlov, Joseph A. Perrottet, and J.A. Lambert attended on behalf of the Soviet trade delegation in Montreal. Mark Lubinsky and Marc Belenky of the All-Russian Cooperative Societies and Alex A. Zykoff, Director of Moscow's Consumers Societies rounded out the Soviet attendees.⁸⁷

The Soviets explained the difficulties rural areas faced in creating a vibrant wheat pool. These challenges included an insufficient number of elevators, few or substandard agricultural implements and machinery, and underdeveloped transportation routes and infrastructure. Despite these drawbacks, Russia boasted a remarkably strong cooperative structure, with a credit system handled under the Central Credit Bank, and a Grain Export Corporation that worked to build and acquire grain elevators and acted as an export agency for the various grain purchasing cooperatives. Mark Lubinsky of the All-Russian Co-op Society told the Canadian, American, and Australian delegates that the Russian farmers hoped to develop robust international relations with other cooperative organizations, and looked to the Canadians to help them build a thriving wheat pool system.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ *Grain Trade, Cooperatives and Grain Exports of the Soviet Union* (1927), 1-30, Folder: Agricultural Cooperation—Published Materials, 1925-1932, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records; *Proceedings*, conference at St. Paul (1926), 4; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), n.p.

⁸⁸ See *Report of the Soviet Delegation to the International Wheat Pool Conference held at Kansas City, Mo., May 5-7, 1927: Grain Trade, Cooperatives and Grain Exports of the Soviet Union*, Folder: "Agricultural Cooperation—Published Materials, 1925-1932, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, UND; *Proceedings of the First International Pool Conference which includes the Third International Wheat Pool Conference* (Regina, 1928), 58-61; *The Wheat Grower*, 1 Mar. 1926, p. 3; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), 58-59, 83-84.

Several wheat pool delegates represented the United States, including president Duis, vice president F.W. Copeland, and secretary-treasurer A.J. Scott of the North Dakota pool, alongside leaders from eight state bodies of the Wheat Growers Association. Prominent officials of all three provincial pools and the Canadian Wheat Pool Central Selling Agency steered the conferences. Saskatchewan Premier James Gardiner's attendance at the 1927 conference indicated the prestigious position of the meetings.⁸⁹

The series of meetings highlighted the crucial role of the radio in international agrarian organization. Radio broadcasts took the delegates' addresses at each conference to the farmers across the prairies and northern plains. J.S. Teasdale of the Western Australian Co-operative Wheat Pool explained how the pool radio represented the only broadcast station in the entire state, helped with recruitment, presented accurate crop information to farmers, and served as a counterweight to those who might feed the farmer false information. Similarly, a North Dakota delegate told how, in the city of Bakken, a grain buyer received telegram information of a six-cent price rise. The grain man pressed a local farmer to sell quickly for a two-cent price increase and suggested the price would soon fall. The farmer, however, already had the price information from a pool radio report, and thus caught the speculator in a lie. Surprised, the grain buyer exclaimed, "My God, what is this world coming to?" The farmer's wife replied simply, "Radio."⁹⁰

The Australians, the Russians, and the Americans all looked to the successful Canadian Wheat Pool to help them further develop their marketing organizations and to lead the pools

⁸⁹ *Proceedings*, conference at St. Paul (1926), 2-3; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), n.p.

⁹⁰ W.A. MacLeod to A.J. Scott, 11 May 1928, Folder 16, Box 1, ND-MWGA Records, UND; *Proceedings*, conference at St. Paul (1926), 36-38.

toward international coordination and cooperation. The Americans and Australians especially gushed about the Canadian wheat pools. An Australian delegate confessed “one feels almost ashamed to get up and admit how far we, in Australia, are from the ideal” represented by the Canadian Wheat Pool. “If they have done it,” he continued, “there is no reason why we in Australia and you in the United States [and Russia] cannot follow a lead once it is given.” North Dakota pool vice president F.W. Copeland said, “I am sorry to say we never adopted the plan of our Canadian neighbors...if we had followed it up we probably would have profited.” Australian James M. McDonald neatly summed up the attitude of the non-Canadian delegates: “We must take the Canadian lead. We must look on the Canadian lead with absolute jealousy in this way, that nothing must be done to injure that lead at all.”⁹¹

In an effort to convince the wheat farmers in South Australia, Victoria, and New South Wales to adopt the Canada-style pool contract, the Australian pools courted the Canadians. Australian delegates foresaw only three alternatives for their pools if they remained on a voluntary basis: government compulsion, the contract system, or the “pools die.” Thus the three Australian state pools invited George W. Robertson (secretary of the Saskatchewan pool), Henry Wise Wood of the Alberta provincial pool and vice president of the Canadian Wheat Pool Central Selling Agency, and Colin H. Burnell of Manitoba to visit Australia and familiarize farmers with the contract pool and help the organizations make the transition from a voluntary basis to that of a multi-year agreement. The most important reason for implementation of a contract pool, the Australians argued, involved creating a system of orderly marketing. January

⁹¹ *Proceedings*, conference at St. Paul (1926), 14, 25, 111.

was harvest season in the Southern Hemisphere, thus it was important to coordinate disposal of the wheat crop on the world market in a systematic manner throughout the year.⁹²

The Canadian pool leaders traveled to Australia in the fall of 1926 and explained to farmers the workings and benefits of contract pooling. Australian wheat farmers came to recognize the power of the Canadian pools and agreed to make the transition to a contractual basis. As a result of this visit, the New South Wales pool adopted a contract (the first to do so), and in Victoria and South Australia the pools transitioned to a three-year contract. With these Australian successes in hand, and with their knowledge of the sorry state of the American pools, Robertson, Wood, and Burnell returned to Canada convinced that Australia, not the United States, was the next significant arena for wheat pool development.⁹³

The central reason for convening the wheat pool conferences was to move toward international cooperation and coordination in wheat marketing. Certain assumptions formed the foundation for this effort. All delegates agreed with A.J. McPhail that all wheat farmers faced similar problems, that wheat marketing was a global enterprise not contained within state, provincial, or national boundaries, and that firms in other industries operated internationally and thus proved the feasibility of a global approach. The plan involved not the creation of a single global central selling agency—because the “value of cooperation is the closest possible touch between member and organization,” as George Roberston of the Saskatchewan pool reminded delegates—but the coordination between the various wheat pools in orderly marketing, which

⁹² *Proceedings*, conference at St. Paul (1926), 38, 114; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), 60-64.

⁹³ H.W. Wood speech at annual meeting of the Co-operative Wheat Pool of Western Australia, Folder: “Cooperative Material—Canada,” Box 51, and Colin H. Burnell to A.H. Scott, 11 Jan. 1927, Folder 16, Box 1, both in ND-MWGA Records, Special Collections, UND; Innis, ed., *The Diary of Alexander James McPhail*, 129-30; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), 65-66, 70-71; *Proceedings*, conference at Regina (1928), 145-46.

meant synchronization among the various pools in strategically placing surplus wheat upon the global market, because any country sitting on wheat waiting to be sold depressed prices for everyone else. This could be done, he believed, without centralization and through the constant sharing of information and market planning between the pools in Australia, the U.S., the Soviet Union, and Canada.⁹⁴

The vision of voluntary international cooperation, without any type of centralization or large-scale bureaucratization between the involved organizations, reflects the idea of “associationalism” popular during the decade. Promoted by former World War I food administrator, Secretary of Commerce, and soon-to-be United States President Herbert Hoover, associationalism envisioned a decentralized, though large and complex model, for organizing extra-governmental units, such as trade associations, boards, committees, or agricultural cooperatives. This model fit into the Australian, Russian, Canadian, and American vision for international wheat marketing coordination, one situated between individualism and collectivism, driven by grassroots participation, and unfettered by bureaucracy, paternalism, or government intrusion. International cooperation and information-sharing towards the goal of orderly marketing did not implicate the wheat pools in an attempt to circumvent their respective national governments. It represented an acknowledgement that agricultural marketing was global and that through synchronized wheat selling prices might be shielded from drastic and detrimental fluctuations.⁹⁵

The Australian, Russian, and United States delegates urged the Canadian Wheat Pools to take the initiative and guide them towards the goal of international cooperation. The first aim

⁹⁴ *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), 44-45, 113-114, 142-43.

⁹⁵ Joan Hoff Wilson, *Herbert Hoover: Forgotten Progressive* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1975), 86-87; Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 192.

was to help the pools in each country create a strong and effective central selling agency, between which the Canadian, U.S., Australian, and Russian wheat pools could share crop information and coordinate marketing strategy. Then each of the pools needed to develop a contractual system of membership (with which the Canadians had already helped the Australians) and control a sufficient and significant portion of the crop area in each respective country. The Canadian pools' Central Selling Agency began in 1927 disseminating crop information to Australia, Russia, and throughout the wheat belt of the United States, and it convened a committee to begin the development of international marketing coordination, beginning with the creation of a small international bureau with a moderate budget. Unfortunately, as these plans took shape after 1928, the world neared the agricultural collapse of the Great Depression, which destroyed dreams of global cooperation among wheat farmers' organizations.⁹⁶

Though international orderly marketing between the wheat producing countries never rose to a stage of formal synchronization, the US and Canadian pools' relative engagement with the global economic movement did have domestic impacts. Cut off from the potentially huge United States market by the tariff walls of the 1920s, the Canadians naturally shifted their viewpoint to the international arena. Enamored by Sapiro's orderly marketing approach, the Canadian pools embraced it, came to believe in its efficacy, and sought to influence other wheat producing countries to believe in it too. The Canadian Wheat Pool's close working relationship with the Australian organized farmers, and their assistance in initiating that country's contract pools (a prerequisite, according to Sapiro, of orderly marketing), is the best example of this. The Canadians and Australians also developed close ties because they both believed the easiest path

⁹⁶ *Proceedings*, conference at St. Paul (1926), 111-16; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), 142-47.

to true global cooperation began with the natural bond between Commonwealth countries and the formation of a Commonwealth-wide wheat pool. The Canadian Wheat Pool's fifteen international selling offices also provided members early on with a reason to look beyond provincial and national borders.⁹⁷

ND-MWGA president George Duis did not speak the language of internationalism. He rarely, in fact, evinced interest in creating a national pool in the United States. Though North Dakota pool representatives showed support for global cooperation around mid-decade, it declined as the 1920s came to a close. Struggling with unenthusiastic members, uncooperative banks and elevator companies, and operating in the shadow of the Canadians' successes, Duis had the basic challenge of simply keeping the organization in North Dakota and Montana operational and avoiding bankruptcy. By 1929, the ND-MWGA was in no position to contribute meaningfully to international marketing coordination. Thus the pool offered to members and potential contract signers no energizing vision of global agricultural cooperation on the cusp of controlling the movement and marketing of wheat across national boundaries, oceans, and continents. A recognized global leader in wheat marketing, the Canadian pools demanded respect and commanded a place among the most highly centralized and successful large-scale international businesses in any industry. The North Dakota and other American wheat pools could only follow.⁹⁸

⁹⁷ *The Trustees of the Co-operative Wheat Pool of Western Australia*, n.p., n.d., Folder: Misc. Materials, Box 51, ND-MWGA Records; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), 26-29, 44-45; *Proceedings*, conference at Regina (1928), 59.

⁹⁸ *The Wheat Grower*, 15 July 1926, p.9; *Proceedings*, conference at St. Paul, 116-22.

Conclusion

Why was the Canadian Wheat Pool more successful than the American pools? A long-term, structural view suggests several answers. Constant French-English tensions in Canada, and a series of concessions made to Quebecers in the late eighteenth century led to a system of federal-provincial relations within which the Dominion government ceded power to the provinces, and it created conditions amenable to interprovincial relations. Compared to American states, Canadian provinces operated with a high level of autonomy and power in relation to the federal government. And because Canadian federalism divides political jurisdictions into fewer, and thus larger, subnational units, provinces could attain “bureaucratic economies of scale,” such as wheat pools, which simply was not possible for American states.⁹⁹

U.S. wheat farmers rarely looked beyond local and state conditions and this made it difficult to create large-scale interstate marketing organizations. Canadian wheat farmers did the opposite: by the wheat pool era, organized farmers had over twenty years’ experience in putting a significant amount of time and money into interprovincial, regional, and national educational and commercial bodies. The Canadian Wheat Board also familiarized farmers with the benefits and advantages of compulsory marketing. Geographic conditions contributed as well—Western Canada was a one-crop region, thus all organizational energies were focused on wheat. Most wheat production in the U.S. was sold within the country, while Canada exported the bulk of its crop, giving organized farmers a greater incentive for large-scale organization and control of terminal marketing. In all this, the U.S. experience was often the opposite.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁹ Jason Kaufman, *The Origins of Canadian and American Political Differences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 8, 12-14, 191-95.

In sharper focus, explanations for the divergent paths of the Saskatchewan and North Dakota pools come clear. Premier James G. Gardiner told the delegates at the 1927 international pool conference how the provincial government supported the pool in all matters because the financial success of the organization positively affected Saskatchewan as a whole. In contrast, the North Dakota state government never engaged with the ND-MWGA in a significant way. All U.S. pools, furthermore, lacked a central selling agency, which, A.J. McPhail noted, eliminated competition between the prairie provinces and their marketing organizations. L.C. Brouillette of Saskatchewan emphasized heavily the fact that the pool followed Sapiro's model stringently and without deviation: no interlocking directorates among the pool and other farmers' organizations, one-year elections for leadership, no engagement in partisan politics, and most importantly the requirement to sign up at least 50% of the crop acreage before beginning pool marketing operations. The North Dakota pool never signed up half the state's wheat crop, and thus never had the economic clout to create a thriving marketing system.¹⁰¹

In Saskatchewan, organized farmers made a more successful transition from failed agrarian political insurgency to economic association. Farmer politics did not bear economic fruit, whether in the form of the federal Progressives or the independent provincial politics of radical SGGA members. Organized farmers turned to Sapiro-style pooling, an approach that promised economic rewards, and when entrenched leaders of the interlocking directorate refused to offer full-throated support for pooling, the grassroots of the SGGA helped push them out and replaced figures like Musselman with passionate pool supporters such as McPhail. Seeing no

¹⁰⁰ On the differences in the US and Canadian wheat pools and wheat farmers' organizations in general, see address by J.F. Booth, agricultural economist of the USDA, *Proceedings*, conference at Regina (1928), 31-37.

¹⁰¹ Address of Canadian Wheat Pool Director O.L. McPherson, *Proceedings of the Fourth National Co-operative Marketing Conference* (1926), 46; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), 28-35.

other choice, the provincial Liberals gave the wheat pool significant political and financial support. Though Ottawa never considered such drastic federal legislation akin to McNary-Haugen, Parliament did pass bills supportive of the farmers' large-scale marketing bodies.

In North Dakota, the transition from farmer politics to cooperative marketing fared less well. The NPL, pushed off the political stage by 1922, was replaced by moderate administrations preoccupied not with pooling but with the operation and financial future of the state mill and elevator. Some state legislatures actively fought the ND-MWGA and sought to discredit it and reveal its financial problems. In Washington, years of support for the ultimately unsuccessful McNary-Haugen bills left farmer energy depleted, and distracted pool supporters from economic cooperation. While business, elevators, and banks worked with the Saskatchewan pool, the same entities remained hostile to the organized farmers in North Dakota. As the SGG and FUC put aside differences to work together towards pooling, and as the SCEC merged its elevator operations with the Saskatchewan pool, the ND-MWGA fought openly with the Equity Cooperative Exchange and witnessed its demise in 1926.

Finally, the North Dakotans never generated the type of excitement or grassroots support that characterized the Saskatchewan pool movement. F.W. Copeland of the ND-MWGA lamented that the organization never gave precedent to county and township canvassing drives, believing it too expensive. "That is where we made a big mistake," he suggested, "I am sorry to say we never adopted the plan of our Canadian neighbors...if we had followed it up we probably would have profited." It is striking that the North Dakota pool only had fourteen paid fieldmen on staff while the Canadian pools boasted hundreds in each province. With almost 50,000 contracts in Saskatchewan alone, and over 100,000 across the prairies, the interprovincial Canadian Wheat Pool had the excess capital to employ full-time fieldmen. Even though North

Dakota farmers did sign contracts in the tens of thousands, many never delivered wheat through the pool because of the lack of pool-owned elevators. The success of the Saskatchewan pool made it easier to sign up farmers. After hearing that a Saskatchewan fieldman only needed about ten minutes to convince a non-pool farmer to join, ND-MWGA president George Duis responded, “If you can fix fellows up in ten minutes we need you in [North Dakota] very badly.” Ultimately, the Saskatchewan farmers believed in the wheat pool. McPhail said members prided themselves in their feeling of ownership. And George Robertson noted that the most valuable aspect of the pool movement was public support and the goodwill of the farmers. The Saskatchewan wheat pool fostered a cooperative spirit and a “willingness to bear one another’s burdens.”¹⁰²

¹⁰² *Proceedings*, conference at St. Paul (1926), 25-26, 52-53; *Proceedings*, conference at Kansas City (1927), 28-35, 44-50, 142; Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 87.

Chapter Five

Hard Times, Organization, and Politics: The Great Depression and the Transnational Plains

During the winter of 1937-38, with farmers still suffering from both drought and depression, the Liberal Government of Saskatchewan implemented a plan to pasture farmers' stock. As spring 1938 dawned, dozens of deceased and emaciated horses were reported at Weyburn after spending the winter under the care of the Government. Reports soon trickled in that this was not an isolated incident. Across the province horses returned from Government pasture half-starved or dead. The Liberals claimed not enough hay existed to feed the stock under their plan.

George H. Williams, leader of the agrarian socialist Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, pointed out that thousands of tons of hay existed in the region north of the Carrot River and south of the Saskatchewan River, from the Manitoba boundary to within fifteen miles of Carrot River village. Williams found it unacceptable that horses starved or died during the winter under the Government's plan while plenty of feed lay unused. G.N. Fulmore, a farmer near Carrot River village, offered his complete assistance (and hay feed from his farm) to the CCF to help the starving horses returning from the Government pasture plan.¹

Two years earlier, southeast across the international boundary in North Dakota, Bert M. Salisbury, the secretary of the Benson County Farmers Union and county auditor, had a frenzied year. From his office in Minnewauken, on the shores of Devils Lake, Salisbury worked with U.S. Senators and Representatives from North Dakota, the Farmers Union and Farmers Holiday

¹ *Was Starvation Necessary?* File II, CCF Pamphlet Collection, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections.

organizations, and federal officials to assist farmers' dealings with rural rehabilitation, foreclosures, and the federal Farm Credit Administration. In just a few months in late 1936 Salisbury negotiated a loan from the federal Resettlement Administration for George Ebach and Christ Ehli, who were facing foreclosure on their farms; he helped push back the mortgage payments for Charles Landis of Baker until the drought lessened and crops returned; he negotiated with the Bank of North Dakota to stave off the eviction of a recently widowed head of household; and Salisbury also kept in contact with local judges and urged sympathy in their dealings with eviction and foreclosure cases.²

Salisbury also addressed Farmers Holiday Association meetings. This organization first formed in the early 1930s to keep farm produce off the market in attempts to raise prices, but later morphed into a body that fought farm foreclosures. It had deep connections with the North Dakota Farmers Union. In one of Salisbury's addresses he railed against capitalism and the profit system, which he and most farmers in North Dakota blamed for the problems of the Great Depression. He told his audience to envision a cooperative system that embraced the redistribution, rather than the concentration, of wealth in the hands of the few. He concluded with wholehearted support for President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the New Deal.³

These two incidents illustrate the differing experiences of agrarian organizations in North Dakota and Saskatchewan. It is nothing new to argue that the New Deal tempered farmer radicalism in the northern plains, and the lack of a commensurate federal program in Canada helped create the conditions for the rise of radical agrarian protest movements on the right

² Salisbury to the Bank of North Dakota, 28 Aug., 21 Aug., 1936; Salisbury to Judge Grimson, 21 Aug. 1936, and reply, 29 Aug. 1936; Salisbury to Ebach, 23 Nov. 1936; Salisbury to Duffy, and Salisbury to Mabel and Ethel Maloney, both 27 Nov. 1936. Bert M. Salisbury Collection of Papers, North Dakota State University.

³ Untitled address, n.d. Bert Salisbury Collection.

(Social Credit in Alberta) and on the left (the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan).⁴ Placing these movements in a broader binational context elucidates several overlooked aspects of the “Dirty Thirties” and the organized wheat farmer in North America.

The Depression absolutely devastated North Dakota and Saskatchewan. Before the New Deal, the North Dakota Farmers Union avoided politics and pursued direct action on the ground via the Farmers Holiday Association to raise wheat prices and stop foreclosures. The political failures of the Nonpartisan League left farmers “saddle sore” to pursue a political agenda. But even without pressure from organized farmers rural North Dakotans had the support of Governor William Langer, who initiated aggressive action on behalf of agrarians. Conversely, as soon as the Depression hit, leftist leaders in the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) rallied their supporters for political action. Despite this threat from the left, successive provincial governments in Saskatchewan left little impression that they were fighting for the farmers.

Roosevelt and other New Dealers actively courted the Farmers Union. The North Dakota chapter became intimately connected to various New Deal programs, and received a lion’s share of federal financial support. The CCF, lacking such support at the federal level, developed into a political machine and made significant inroads into Saskatchewan politics during the decade and became the alternative to traditional party rule in the province.

⁴ For general ways in which the New Deal neutralized radical movements in comparison to Canada in the 1930s, see Seymour Martin Lipset and Gary Marks, *It Didn’t Happen Here: Why Socialism Failed in the United States* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2000). For farmers’ movements in the U.S., see Theodore Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal* (Ames: The Iowa State University Press, 1982), and Glenn H. Smith, “William Langer and the Art of Personal Politics,” in ed. Thomas W. Howard, *The North Dakota Political Tradition* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981). For Canada, see Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan: A Study in Political Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968 ed.), and David E. Smith, *Prairie Liberalism: The Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, 1905-71* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975).

There is more to the story, however. The ravages of the Depression largely severed the international links between agrarian organizations in North Dakota and Saskatchewan. Not until the end of the 1930s did tenuous cooperative connections reemerge between organized farmers on either side of the border. At the organizational level, the Farmers Union and the CCF worked hard to bring in new supporters and mobilize members. Both consciously appealed to ethnic communities, used Christian ideals to inform leftist ideologies, and expanded the role of young people in the respective movements. The North Dakota Farmers Union and the Saskatchewan CCF were grassroots political movements. The New Deal politically co-opted one, and the other evolved as an independent political entity. Whatever the goals, the two organizations worked in their own way for the wheat farmer.

The Impact of the Great Depression, 1929-1933

American farmers were already experiencing an economic downturn when the stock market collapsed in 1929 and ushered in the Great Depression. Wheat prices declined relative to the World War I and immediate postwar era, though they rose somewhat between 1927 and 1929. Farmers had gone deep into debt to mechanize and expand their operations. A wave of bank failures ravaged the state, foreclosure rates were among the highest in the country, and North Dakota farmers' per capita income dropped to about half the national average, with many of the beleaguered farmers burdened by large debts. Though not near the dismal situation of the 1930s, wheat farmers in North Dakota struggled to find prosperity.⁵

⁵ Jerome D. Tweton and Daniel F. Rylance, *The Years of Despair: North Dakota in the Depression* (Grand Forks: The Oxcart Press, 1973), 4-5; David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country: A History of Rural America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 194.

In contrast, grain growers in prairie Canada believed they were in the midst of prosperity. Increases in price, yields, and acreage during the 1920s fueled this optimism. The successes of the Canadian Wheat Pool and its three provincial arms reaffirmed the farmers' faith in cooperative marketing within the capitalist system. The prairies' largest wheat producing province, Saskatchewan, led the way. There, the net income of the average farmer ranked among the highest in the world among regions with commensurate population. Thus when the Depression settled in, North Dakotans certainly took a hit, but at least they had experienced elements of hardship during the preceding decade. For Saskatchewan, "no other province of Canada and probably few other places on earth changed within a few years from such heights of wealth and prosperity to such depths of depression and poverty."⁶

The gilded façade in Saskatchewan and the prairies obscured troubling structural weaknesses in the wheat economy. A monocultural agricultural system is always sensitive to fluctuations in the world market, and the market itself was unstable late in the decade. Furthermore, during the boom years of World War I and the immediate aftermath, grain growers expanded into the submarginal lands of Palliser's Triangle in southwest Saskatchewan that was only one drought away from devastation. As in North Dakota, farmers were borrowers, and prairie wheat growers held a large percentage of debt at fixed interest rates. All these potential problems became a reality during the Depression.⁷

The Depression itself took hold in Canada soon after the New York Stock Exchange collapse in late October of 1929. The exchanges in Toronto and Montreal took massive hits as

⁶ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 383-84. Quote from S.M. Lipset, "The Rural Community and Political Leadership in Saskatchewan," *The Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science* 13 (Aug., 1947): 413.

⁷ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 384. On drought in Palliser's Triangle and along the international border during the mid-1930s, see *The Western Producer*, 28 June 1934, p. 9.

well. These financial shocks occurred in an unstable international situation marred by the residual effects of the First World War, such as the reparation payment structure and protectionism. After the war the United States emerged as the world's leading creditor nation, but the stock market collapse resulted in protectionism under the Hawley-Smoot tariff and destroyed that crucial link in the global financial chain. As result of such economic nationalism, debtor countries found their exports cut off and faced increased difficulty in servicing debts. In both the U.S. and Canada in the early 1930s the commercial and industrial sectors faced plummeting demand, the loss of export markets, rapidly declining prices, wages, and production, in addition to banking collapse and general deflation that harmed debtors.⁸

The reverberations of the disintegrating commercial and industrial sectors in the U.S. and Canada quickly reached farmers in the prairie provinces. Demand for farm commodities dropped precipitously and export markets disappeared. In the United States, farm prices in 1929 hovered over ninety percent of parity, defined as a fair value between farmers' income and the prices paid for consumer goods. In other words, parity was based on a 1909-14 baseline comparison between agricultural and industrial prices. Three years later prices dipped below sixty percent of parity. Rural bank closures and mortgage foreclosures scarred the countryside. The drop in domestic wheat prices was due in no small measure to global wheat overproduction, which led Argentina and Australia to dump grain on the world market, even though the latter sought to engage in the "orderly marketing" pioneered by the Canadian Wheat Pool. The Soviet Union, too, under the first years of collectivization, placed over 90 million bushels on the market in 1931, up from only 5.7 million bushels in 1929-30. A bushel of wheat at the Winnipeg exchange netted the prairie farmer a few cents over a dollar in 1928. In 1932 the best one could expect was twenty-nine

⁸ John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 194-95; Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 197-98.

cents. Drought and crop failure in both North Dakota and Saskatchewan during the first years of the Depression magnified the economic maladies.⁹

The human cost of the agricultural depression is difficult to fathom. According to the wife of Charles W. Fine, a member of agrarian organizations and of the legislature in North Dakota in the 1930s, “Beginning in ’26 we had property but nothing was worth anything. Even earlier than that. You just couldn’t get a few dollars out of anything you had. It just wasn’t worth anything and that was true way up into the 30’s...Oh, yes, I cried many a tear because I needed something and there just wasn’t anything on the farm that would bring enough money to get it. I was thankful for a dollar many a time to buy a few pairs of cheaper stockings for the children because times were really hard. We know what it means to get along without money...We just couldn’t see any sunshine in the horizon, in the sky. Everything seemed to be dark and uncertain. A traveler in Saskatchewan wrote in 1934 how “the land was lifeless as ashes, and for miles there was scarcely a growing thing to be seen. Where a scanty herbage had struggled up throughout the dust, flights of grass-hoppers had apparently completed the destruction.”¹⁰

In June, 1929, just months before the stock market crash in the United States, Congress and the Hoover administration sought to address the dismal agricultural situation by passing the Agricultural Marketing Act, with the broad goals of encouraging agricultural cooperatives and stabilizing agricultural commodity prices. This legislation created the Federal Farm Board with

⁹ C.F. Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), 237-8; Thompson and Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939*, 194; Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 190, 198-202; Lawrence Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots: The Remarkable Story of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1984), 109-10.

¹⁰ Mrs. Charles W. Fine, “Description of Life in North Dakota,” 19-20, Charles W. Fine Collection, NDSU; Walter D. Young, *Democracy and Discontent: Progressivism, Socialism and Social Credit in the Canadian West* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1969), 45.

\$500 million to loan to cooperatives which would then purchase farm commodities in attempts to avoid dramatic fluctuations in prices.

The Board first focused on wheat production, and urged pools and cooperatives to turn over their selling agencies to the Farmers' National Grain Corporation in late 1929. Throughout 1930 and 1931, the Farmers' National acquired over 250 million bushels of wheat in storage, with the aim of holding out until prices rose. But prices continued to fall as Russia, Argentina, and other wheat producing countries in need of money dumped the crop on the international market. To combat this, the Farm Board urged spring wheat farmers to voluntarily curb acreage, which very few did. By the end of 1931, most agricultural observers accepted that the Farm Board could do little to hold up prices, but the North Dakota Farmers Union (NDFU) continued its support of the Board because its terminal marketing co-op, the Farmers Union Terminal Association, was the largest stockholder in the Farmers National.¹¹

Though the North Dakota wheat pool participated fully in the operations of the Federal Farm Board, the onset of the Depression precluded the any federal benefits going to farmers through the board. Unable to enforce its five-year contracts or pay pool members, the North Dakota-Montana Wheat Growers' Association collapsed in early 1931, one of the first (but not the last) agricultural victims of the Great Depression.¹²

During this same period, the Canadian Wheat Pool buckled and the three provincial pools became shells of their former selves. When wheat prices dropped in 1930, the Saskatchewan

¹¹ David B. Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 192; Theodore Saloutos and John D. Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism: Agricultural Discontent in the Middle West, 1900-1939* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1951), 290, 410-430; Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 241.

¹² Kurt A. Grussendorf, "Wheat into Chaff: The Failure of the North Dakota-Montana Wheat Growers Association, 1922-31" (M.A. Thesis, University of North Dakota, 1978), chs. 3-5.

pool and its provincial counterparts were hampered by large debts and millions of bushels of unsold wheat. Prime Minister R.B. Bennett stepped in to stem the bleeding and had Ottawa take control of the Canadian Wheat Pool Central Selling Agency. The federal government closed the selling agency in 1931 and Ottawa essentially ran the pool as a stabilization agency. In August 1931, the premiers of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba publicly announced the provincial pools would thereafter function separately as private entities. Freed from contractual obligations, pool members sold what wheat they could for immediate payment.¹³

The failure of the wheat pooling movement in general, and the ND-MWGA in particular, left an agrarian organizational vacuum in North Dakota. This vacuum, in fact, stemmed from the earlier decline of the Equity Cooperative Exchange (ECE) and the disappearance of the Nonpartisan League (NPL). In Ward County, for example, the NPL had been the most pervasive and important agrarian organization. By the mid- to late-1920s, however, “there was no champion for the farmer” and in Ward County grain growers were “anxious and willing to join an organization which promised to do something for them.” The North Dakota Farmers Union expanded during the early years of the Depression, filling that organizational void, and dominating the state during the 1930s.¹⁴

Charley Talbott and A.W. Ricker organized the Farmers Union in North Dakota. Ricker headed the National Producers’ Alliance, a crop-holding body created by former NPL head Arthur Townley in the immediate post-League years. The Alliance never amounted to much, though it did bring Ricker to the National Farmers Union meeting in Iowa in 1925. There, Ricker

¹³ Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 305; Garry Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 90-107.

¹⁴ Claud L. Scroggs, “Historical Highlights,” in eds. Martin A. Abrahamsen and Claud L. Scroggs, *Agricultural Cooperation: Selected Readings* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1957), 27-28; Nellie Erickson, *Fifty Years: Ward County Farmers Union* (Minot, 1977), 1.

abandoned the National Producers' Alliance and decided to bring the Farmers Union to the northern plains. He was drawn by the Farmers Union emphasis on organization at the local level with frequent community- and township-level meetings among members. A former Populist newspaper editor in Iowa, and previously active in the NPL and Equity in North Dakota, Ricker saw how mass meetings at the state level worked to generate enthusiasm in the short run, but rarely sustained an organization over the long term. He received support from the national Farmers Union leadership, and from the militant Iowa Farmers Union leader Milo Reno, and dedicated himself to creating a strong grassroots organization in North Dakota.¹⁵

As Ricker began the grueling work of building a new agrarian organization from the bottom up, he came across a remarkable personality. While travelling from township to township, Ricker sat in on a local meeting in a Dickey County school house. There he heard a passionate, square-jawed speaker with a booming voice address the farmers. This was Charley Talbott, whose family emigrated from England and moved to Dickey County, in southeast North Dakota, when Charley was thirteen years old. It was said Charley could organize any farmer if only he had the opportunity to personally confront the man. Talbott proved himself as an effective canvasser and organizer in the NPL and the National Producers' Alliance, and as a leader in the local co-op elevator movement. Ricker drew Charley into the Farmers Union, where Talbott railed against the economic injustices affecting the wheat farmer. Director Cal A. Ward of the federal Rural Resettlement Administration said of Charley Talbott in 1937, "His great physique, coupled with everlasting ambition and courage, enabled him to carry the message of social and economic reform to the four corners of this nation...His ability to clearly, intelligently

¹⁵ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 5 Oct. 1936, p. 1; Harold V. Knight, *Grass Roots: The Story of the North Dakota Farmers Union* (Jamestown, ND: Inter-County Cooperative Publishing Association, 1947), 24-27.

and forcefully deliver his message was outstanding.” Marion Thatcher joined Ricker and Talbott as the key leaders of the new NDFU. Thatcher was longtime auditor and financial specialist in the ECE and NPL, as well as “a keen student of the grain market and a lobbyist of no small stature.”¹⁶

In 1926 the National Producers’ Alliance merged with the Equity Cooperative Exchange and joined the National Farmers Union, giving the NDFU a strong economic foundation and access to potential new members. The NDFU took control of Equity’s marketing structure and terminal elevator at St. Paul. Here, under the leadership of Ricker, Talbott, and Thatcher, the NDFU focused on the creation of Farmers Union locals across North Dakota. Charley recognized this when at the merger meeting he proclaimed, “We have realized...the necessity of organization for the purpose of supporting your marketing activities...The mother of your marketing organization was the little local out at the crossroads. You let that local die. When you got into trouble and needed help you looked around and you found that you had forgotten to keep in existence the thing that had made you.” Resurrecting the locals made the North Dakota Farmers Union an informed, active, and robust organization.¹⁷

With this new focus on the grassroots and with the restructuring of Equity’s cooperative marketing machinery, the NDFU was in position to fill the organizational void in the state, left by the demise of the League, the ECE, and the wheat pool movement. With \$500 from the National Farmers Union, organizing crews under the leadership of Talbott and Ricker canvassed

¹⁶ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 5 Oct. 1936, p. 1; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 1-10. Nancy Edmonds Hanson, *Changing Landscapes: North Dakota Farmers Union* (Jamestown, ND: North Dakota Farmers Union, 2001), 10-11; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 254. A former Equity man and Townley disciple J.W. Brinton, in *Wheat and Politics* (Minneapolis: Rand Tower, 1931), 73-74, claimed that as ECE and NPL auditor Thatcher falsified financial information, and that the NDFU cooperative agencies were not true co-ops. Such accusations were isolated, and Thatcher did not face formal charges or prosecution.

¹⁷ Knight, *Grass Roots*, 24-27

at the township level. Though the organization would soon build up robust and thriving social elements, in the late 1920s they pitched the NDFU as an economic benefit to struggling farmers living in what Charley called a “rural ghetto.” NDFU members, they informed farmers outside barns, in rural school houses, and in dusty country kitchens, can market grain through the cooperative Farmers Union Terminal Association (the successor to the ECE), market livestock through the Farmers Union Livestock Commission Company, purchase cooperative NDFU life and property insurance, patronize the NDFU oil co-ops, and make bulk purchases via their local through the Farmers’ Union Central Exchange wholesale co-op. The motto of the Exchange became, “If you can’t get more for what you grow, then pay less for what you need.” Soon NDFU subsidiaries diversified into poultry and wool, as well as wheat and livestock marketing. Through these local units linked and coordinated by the formal organization of the Farmers Union, the NDFU began the solid basis of an effective organization.¹⁸

By the time of the first state convention in 1927, the NDFU boasted the largest membership of any of the thirty-one state bodies of the National Farmers Union, with 13,000 members, 400 locals, and nineteen organized counties. NDFU president Charley Talbott, along with former Equity fieldman Edward E. Green as secretary, charted the organization’s path, from which it strayed very little over the next twenty years. Do not focus on patronage dividends as had the ECE, they concluded, but use the real savings from the NDFU cooperative businesses to build the educational, legislative, and social resources of the organization. Create strong local

¹⁸ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 124; Hanson, *Changing Landscapes*, 12-24.

bodies, educate farmers in cooperative principles, give them practical experience in operating local NDFU co-ops, and help members develop confidence from working together.¹⁹

As the Depression deepened and prices continued to fall, drought came to western North Dakota. By this time, the NDFU represented the most important farm organization and farmers' spokesman in the state. Charley Talbott met with President Hoover in August 1931 and returned to North Dakota with an emergency loan program for livestock feed. But such federal measures were insufficient, and the NDFU took charge in bringing relief to drought ravaged areas. Most Farmer Union employees donated ten percent of their salaries to relief, and the Farmer Union's Northwest Drought Relief Commission, headed by M.W. Thatcher, distributed food and feed from eastern North Dakota to those suffering in the western parts of the state. Though times were hard, the NDFU had a burgeoning business, co-op, real estate, and oil profit center from which to draw funds to underwrite such relief measures. As the Depression deepened, Talbott remained unimpressed with the Hoover administration's agricultural relief program, and this set the stage for North Dakota's strong support for Roosevelt and the New Deal and the continued strong development of the Farmers Union business and cooperative sectors.²⁰

Both the National and North Dakota Farmers Union created a strong foundation for lucrative businesses, centered on grain marketing, purchasing and reselling farm necessities in bulk, oil co-ops, borrowing and lending money and capital stocks or bonds of outside corporations, the acquisition of real estate, and "of doing all other acts and things that a natural person may lawfully do in manufacturing, buying, selling and dealing in any agricultural

¹⁹ William P. Tucker, "Populism Up-to-Date: The Story of the Farmers' Union," *Agricultural History* 21 (Oct., 1947): 202-204; Ross B. Talbot, "The Politics of Farm Organizations in North Dakota" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1953), 44-46; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 30-38; Hanson, *Changing Landscapes*, 8.

²⁰ Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 32-34.

products or any merchandise consumed or used by men engaged in agriculture.” Thus the variety of Farmers Union cooperatives “could be devised...to meet almost any emergency,” such as the relief demanded from the early years of the Depression.²¹

The cornerstone of the Farmers Union business was the Farmers Union Terminal Association (FUTA), which by 1930 could plausibly claim to be the largest grain marketing cooperative in the country. By 1930, FUTA handled over fifteen million bushels annually, and distributed \$35,000 in patronage dividends. The relatively good times for northern plains grain growers in the period 1926-29 had given the marketing co-op a solid financial foundation, and popular National Farmers Union president Charles Huff enhanced its reputation for business acumen. To take advantage of existing corporate law, FUTA incorporated the Farmers Union Exchange and acquired it in 1927. The Exchange contracted with outside companies in the northern plains to supply common farm supplies in bulk, thus farmers could purchase goods at wholesale prices. In addition, the NDFU pioneered oil and gasoline cooperatives in 1930, and by 1934 these member-run business brought in profits of almost one million dollars. Thus when drought and hard times came to North Dakota in the early years of the Depression and the Hoover administration offered little assistance to agriculture, the NDFU was well situated to help farmers, both members and non-members alike.²²

Similar to Hoover’s perceived impotence, the efforts of the Dominion government to combat the effects of the Depression in Canada left much to be desired. In the 1930 federal elections the Conservatives, led by R.B. Bennett, came to power on a platform of jobs, not relief.

²¹ Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 248-49, 252.

²² *Ibid.*, 247-51. The Farmers Union incorporated the Exchange in Delaware because it was cheaper, and because, under Minnesota law where the FUTA was chartered, a cooperative could not own another cooperative—but it could own a corporation. The FUTA owned all of the stock of the Exchange, and its leaders appointed their counterparts in the Exchange.

Parliament passed a modest set of laws aimed at reducing unemployment and setting up general relief funds, derisively termed “the dole.” For western farmers the government passed the Unemployment and Farm Relief Act in 1931 that sent federal funds to municipalities and provinces for public works projects. Under constitutional law, provinces and local governments remained responsible for relief. Unfortunately, the prairie provinces were broke because the West had been hit the hardest and Bennett’s federal measures were completely ineffective. After over two years in power the Tory government had little to nothing to show for their meager efforts. One out of every four Canadians had no work and millions were on the hated “dole.” “Bennett buggies,” “Bennett boroughs,” and “Bennett blankets” mirrored the “Hooverilles” and “Hoover flags” in the states.²³

After the 1929 provincial election, the Conservatives, Progressives, and Independents formed the Co-operative Government, bringing an end to a quarter-century of Liberal rule in Saskatchewan. Then Depression heavily settled upon the prairie landscape. In a cruel twist, severe, sustained drought hit southern and especially southwest Saskatchewan beginning in 1930. The Co-operative Government thus faced human misery compounded by natural disaster. The provincial government focused on two issues during the early 1930s: relief and farmer debt. The Saskatchewan Relief Commission directed emergency assistance. To address the collapse of the credit system in the province, the Government turned to the provincial Farm Loan Board, a body formed in the 1920s before the Depression. Funds for loans from Board dried up by 1932 as the provincial and Dominion governments retrenched. Another effort to deal with farmer debt came through the Debt Adjustment Board which had the power to arbitrate settlements between

²³ Thompson and Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939*, 199-221; Vernon C. Fowke, *The National Policy and the Wheat Economy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957), 256-62.

creditors and debtors, or declare interest moratoria for individuals. Neither the Co-operative Government's relief or debt programs improved the situation of Saskatchewan farmers, and Prime Minister Bennett remained unpopular and ineffective²⁴

To the South, the Depression overwhelmed the Hoover administration as well, and until William Langer became North Dakota governor in 1932 the state government had little to show in way of agricultural assistance. Thus organized farmers in Saskatchewan and North Dakota looked for more radical solutions to farmers' ills. The ideology of the Farmers Union in North Dakota and that of the UFC in Saskatchewan differed little in the early years of the Depression. A young Farmers Union leader in North Dakota, Morris Erickson, was one of the best at delineating the worldview of the organization. Though not yet thirty, this young Farmers Union secretary and former teacher from McKenzie County caught Charley's eye after Erickson's graduation from the North Dakota Agricultural College in 1931. Erickson became close with president Talbot who empowered the young secretary to use his writing skills to present the ideals of the NDFU to North Dakota Farmers.²⁵

Erickson's enunciation of NDFU beliefs fit squarely in the tradition of United States agrarian socialism of the early twentieth century. Strongest in the plains states, farmer socialism emerged during the Progressive Era and argued that capitalism glorified individualistic competition which eroded community life. Left-leaning farmers from Oklahoma to the Dakotas suggested that the alternative, a Cooperative Commonwealth, offered a future defined by

²⁴ Blair Neatby, "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission, 1931-34," *Saskatchewan History* 3 (Spring, 1950): 41-56; P.A. Russell, "The Co-operative Government's Response to the Depression, 1930-1934," *Saskatchewan History* 24 (1971): 81-100. On the 1929 provincial election, see David E. Smith, *Prairie Liberalism: The Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, 1905-71* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), chs. 4 and 5.

²⁵ Talbot, "The Politics of Farm Organizations in North Dakota," 57; *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 5 Oct. 1936, p. 1; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 55-56, 79.

production for use, not profit, and the erosion of class distinctions. Such farmers often spoke of the dichotomy of competition and cooperation. The challenge in bringing socialism to the countryside included the so-called “land question.” With deep ties to the land, agrarianism clashed with socialists’ calls for government ownership of private property, presumably including farms and agricultural lands. For farmers on the left, then, socialism guaranteed the maintenance of the family farm, and the farmers’ right to “use and occupancy,” and for the complete product of their work on the land. The vision of the Cooperative Commonwealth was infinitely preferable to a demand for the end of privately held land or collectivization, which was “politically insane.”²⁶

The other prominent founders and leaders of the Farmers Union in North Dakota participated in the development of agrarian socialism in the plains states in the 1910s and 1920s. A.W. Ricker, editor of the *Farmers Union Herald* and one-time editor of *Appeal to Reason*, the main mouthpiece of rural socialism, spoke forcefully against bankers, mortgage companies, and other “class enemies.” Charley Talbott, the figurehead of the Farmers Union in the northern plains, ran twice as a socialist candidate for the North Dakota state legislature. North Dakota had a long history of socialist activity in addition to the Nonpartisan League. The president of the National Farmers Union in the late 1930s and 1940s, James G. Patton, told a Socialist Party

²⁶ For the development of these ideas, see Morris Erickson, *Mankind: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* (Jamestown, ND: Farmers Union Cooperative Education Service, 1938). On agrarian socialism through the 1920s, see Michael Kazin, *American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation* (New York: Knopf, 2011), 113; Jim Bissett, *Agrarian Socialism in America: Marx, Jefferson, and Jesus in the Oklahoma Countryside, 1904-1920* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 65-68; and James R. Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism: Radical Movements in the Southwest, 1895-1943* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 85-86.

representative that in Oklahoma and North Dakota “most of the state officers of the Farmers Union had at one time been members of the Socialist Party.”²⁷

The development of the Canadian left through the 1910s was working class and Marxist, as the Socialist Party of Canada and various trade unions spearheaded the movement. After World War I, and especially in the wake of the Russian Revolution, Canadian socialism became increasingly social democratic—mainly Protestant, Fabian, and modeled on the postwar British Labour Party. During the 1920s, Winnipeg MP John Shaver Woodsworth led the Ginger, or Labour, Group in the House of Commons. At the same time, the agrarian political revolt manifest through the Progressive Party. Thus it was the interaction and integration of the agrarian and labor left that “ultimately determined the character and ideological outlook of Canadian social-democracy” from the 1930s on. Agrarian groups such as the UFC in Saskatchewan came to work with labor groups, such as the Independent Labor Party, and eventually the farmer-labor Cooperative Commonwealth Federation formed and began contesting federal and provincial elections in the early 1930s.²⁸

In many ways, that Canadian socialism developed by the 1930s into a recognizably British-influenced but Canadian-born ideology allowed socialists to avoid some of the more vicious attacks experienced by their American counterparts. Though socialism in both countries struggled to appeal to Catholics, American socialism stressed anticlericalism more so. And the fact that German speakers were largely responsible for importing radical socialist doctrine and

²⁷ William C. Pratt, “Socialism on the Northern Plains, 1900-1924,” *South Dakota History* 18 (Spring/Summer, 1988): 1-35; Lowell K. Dyson, *Red Harvest: The Communist Party and American Farmers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 42; Green, *Grass-Roots Socialism*, 232-33.

²⁸ Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1977), 23-39, 171-75; Walter D. Young, *Democracy and Discontent: Progressivism, Socialism and Social Credit in the Canadian West* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1969), 49-52.

that many supporters were foreign workers, opened up socialism in the United States to charges of un-Americanism. The predominately British-heritage constituency of agrarian Canadian socialism shielded leftists there from similar assaults.²⁹

For Canadian farmers, however, the problem was that the “land question” was never addressed in such a definitive way as it was in American agrarian socialism. Though most agrarian leaders, such as United Farmers of Canada president George H. Williams, reiterated support for private property, some threw around ideas of government “lease” of farm land facing foreclosure, or other schemes whereby the farmer relinquished the land title, if only for a temporary period. This forced UFC members to press Williams on the organization’s stance on the land issue. Williams had led a political revolt within the UFC grounded in using the power of the state for the common good, and was probably more radical than the average Saskatchewan farmer. The issue of the socialization of land would remain a liability for agrarian socialists, and would only be clarified later in the 1930s under the CCF program.³⁰

Most leftists’ discussions of social change in the dark years of the early 1930s had to examine the Soviet experiment, because it was the only place where socialism was in operation. As it seemed that democratic capitalism crumbled before their eyes, North American thinkers and social critics saw in the USSR a sense of orderliness and direction, exemplified in Five-Year Plans. Objective assessments of the Russian experiment were hard to come by, as most observers saw what they wanted to see. Not many leftists had the honesty to admit the human toll of

²⁹ Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 126.

³⁰ G.H. Williams to Violet McNaughton, 12 July 1932, and McNaughton to Williams, 9 Nov. 1932, File E.70, McNaughton Papers, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Saskatoon; Mrs. George Williams, “Recollections: The CCF in Saskatchewan,” in ed. Donald C. Kerr, *Western Canadian Politics: The Radical Tradition* (Edmonton: NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies, 1981), 51; Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 377-78.

communism, but to be fair accurate information was hard to come by, obscured by propaganda and arranged foreign tours. For many on the left in the U.S. and Canada, their worldview was invested in the outcome of Russian socialism.³¹

The New Economic Policy of the 1920s was meant to develop cooperatives, or kolkhozes, as a means to draw peasants into contact with state industries and as a transition policy towards full socialist development. During the decade, the kolkhozes operated as voluntary co-ops and made connections with the wheat pools in the U.S., Canada, and Australia. With Stalin's solidification of power and the beginning of the first Five-Year Plan, the Soviet state, between 1929 and 1931, began to compel the kolkhozes to produce increasing yields of grain to feed the rising industrial population. Such grain seizure was quick and brutal and accompanied by the confiscation of property, attacks on the richer peasants, or kulaks, and the expulsion of families from their lands and onto large, state-directed collectivized farms.

The famines that killed millions across the grain producing areas began in 1932 and 1933. In the Ukraine, the northern Caucasus, the lower and middle Volga region, the southern Urals, and Kazakhstan, mass famine killed millions, and those kolkhozes unable to fill the state quotas had their members arrested, attacked, or killed. Agricultural production, as compared to the pre-1930 period, suffered greatly, and millions of farm animals died as well. By 1933, the voluntary, cooperative kolkhozes disintegrated, and farmers became tied by state coercion to agricultural labor on collectivized farms.³²

³¹ Richard H. Pells, *Radical Visions and American Dreams: Culture and Social Thought in the Depression Years* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 61-68. For an example of this from the UFC in Canada, see *The Western Producer*, 11 Oct. 1934, p. 9 and 25 Oct. 1934, p.9.

³² Victor Danilov, "Russia: Developing, then Crushing, Peasant Farming," in ed. Mieke Meurs, *Many Shades of Red: State Policy and Collective Agriculture* (New York: Rowman &

George H. Williams and M.W. Thatcher toured Russia only months apart in 1931. By this time, the state was pressing the kolkhozes with grain procurement, and beginning to liquidate the kulaks and dismantle private land ownership. The massive famines, arrests, violence, and killings were not yet widespread. Williams visited first, during the spring, at the behest of the UFC to gather information on Russian wheat production to learn why the USSR had been dumping grain on the world market. He had met Soviet delegates at the 1931 World Wheat Conference in London, and, impressed with his knowledge of wheat agriculture, they invited him to tour the country. Williams visited several collective farms in the Volga region southeast of Moscow, though he also traveled widely outside of agricultural establishments and met with several Soviet officials. Thatcher traveled to Russia later during early summer. The NDFU terminal marketing agency, the Farmers Union Terminal Association, of which Thatcher was general manager, arranged his visit as part of a broader tour of Europe's cooperative agricultural marketing organizations. Thatcher spent most of his time in Russia in the region around Moscow. It seems that Williams visited one area of intense state compulsory grain procurement, the Volga region, but not other affected areas including Ukraine and the northern Caucasus.³³

The two men offered slightly different conclusions about Russian communism and its effect on agriculture. Williams claimed the state farms might increase efficiency of grain production, and had made Russia a major player in the international grain trade. He strongly

Littlefield, 1999), 48-77. The best survey of the collectivization of Soviet agriculture in the context of the broader 1930s is Robert Conquest, *The Harvest of Sorrow: Soviet Collectivization and the Terror-Famine* (New York: Oxford University Press).

³³ G.H. Williams, *The Land of the Soviets* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, Ltd., 1931), 1-14; Friedrich Steininger, "George H. Williams: Agrarian Socialist" (M.A. Thesis: University of Regina, 1976), 78-80; Nicolas Toulaykov (vice president of the Lenin Academy of Science and Agriculture, Moscow) to Williams, 21 Apr. 1931, File E.70, McNaughton Papers, SAB Saskatoon; *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 6 July 1936, p. 2; *Farmers Union Herald*, 22 June 1931, p.1; Proceedings of UFC 1932 Convention, 57-58, Folder 1.6, Annual Convention Reports, UFC-SS Ltd. Collection, SAB Regina.

denounced revolution and bloodshed. His visit did not move his views further to the left, however. Upon return, Williams emphatically rejected any type of collectivization policy and reaffirmed the farmer's right to his land. Once the farmers' political organization formed and foreclosures began to sweep the province, the question of land returned, but agrarianism in Saskatchewan did not include collectivization schemes.³⁴

Thatcher painted a realistic picture of collectivization and communism in general. Communism seemed like a preferable system in theory, Thatcher contended, but in reality it did not improve lives in Russia and it would not improve lives in the United States. Thatcher explained how, during his entire trip in Russia, he subsisted on bread and tea, because there was no meat or fruit anywhere, though he did encounter some rotten strawberries for sale by a peasant woman. The Soviets bled and impoverished their people through forced production and discarded all elements of freedom, security, and comfort for a government of martial law, he concluded. As head of the country's largest cooperative grain marketing body, one that dealt in millions of bushels and millions of dollars, Thatcher and the NDFU remained steadfast in their belief that co-ops were an integral part in combating the conditions of the Depression.³⁵

Different Paths: Governments, Farmers' Organizations, and the Depression

As the Depression deepened and showed no sign of abating, the UFC began a more radical trajectory. Under Williams's leadership the UFC joined with labor groups and entered the

³⁴ Williams, *The Land of the Soviets*, 28-85; Steininger, "George H. Williams," 80-94; *How Other Countries Are Helping Their Farmers* (Regina: Saskatchewan Cooperative Wheat Producers, 1936), 25-26, Folder: SCWP, Ltd., Box 51, ND-MWGA Records, UND.

³⁵ *Farmers Union Herald*, 13 July 1931, p.1, 3; 3 June 1931, p.1; 19 Oct. 1931, p.2. For an analysis and comparison of the CCF, American Populism, and prerevolutionary Russia, see J.F. Conway, "Populism in the United States, Russia, and Canada: Explaining the Roots of Canada's Third Parties," *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 11 (Mar., 1978): 99-124.

political field. In early 1931, under Williams's guidance as president, the UFC supported a strategy of direct political pressure to achieve a compulsory wheat pool, a state medical program, the nationalization of public utilities, and the controversial use-lease land system whereby foreclosed farms would be held by the state while the owner maintained residence on the land and worked to pay off the debts. This program could be easily misunderstood or construed to suggest that the UFC supported the end of private land holdings. That summer the UFC cooperated with the Independent Labour Party, an urban-based Progressive group, and they both sent representatives to Regina to pressure the Co-operative Government to increase financial assistance to the Farm Loan Board and to protect debtors from aggressive creditors. Premier Anderson and the Government did little to address these concerns.³⁶

Facing a provincial government unable or unwilling to pursue drastic measures to combat the misery of the Depression, in 1932 the majority of UFC convention delegates voted to enter politics directly. The UFC did not field its own candidates, but instead formed a separate political body with the leftist laborites of the ILP: the Farmer-Labour Party. Major James Coldwell of Regina led the Farmer-Labour Party. An Englishman, Coldwell came to Canada in 1910 and pursued teaching, first in a Norwegian homesteading community and later as a principal in Saskatchewan's capital city. In the 1920s Coldwell bridged rural and urban as a

³⁶ Proceedings of the 1931 UFC Convention, 51-57, Folder 1.5, Annual Convention Reports, UFC-SS Ltd. Collection, SAB Regina; Peter R. Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF: Ascent to Power and the Decline of Socialism," *Canadian Historical Review* 54 (Dec., 1973): 420-22; S.M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan: A Study in Political Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 105-111.

leader in both the Farmers' Political Association and the Independent Labor Party in Saskatchewan.³⁷

Soon after the Farmer-Labour Party organized, Coldwell led the party to join most of the Canadian socialist groups in Calgary in the summer of 1932, where they sought to organize a collective response to the Great Depression. Here, sympathetic Parliamentarians, the UFC, the United Farmers of Alberta, the United Farmers of Manitoba, labor groups, and socialists formed the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, an avowed socialist national political party. CCF leaders included J.S. Woodsworth, a Methodist preacher and Member of Parliament from Winnipeg, and, from Saskatchewan, Williams and Coldwell. The CCF political platform espoused public ownership of finance, credit, utilities, and natural resources, and the establishment and spread of cooperatives. Above all, the new party advocated economic planning as an alternative to free market capitalism. Though it took until 1934 for the Farmer-Labor Party to change its name to the Saskatchewan CCF, it was already the de facto CCF body in the province.³⁸

This forceful and broadly supported move into direct political action via a third party represented a significant change in repertoire for the farmer organizations in Saskatchewan. Such fundamental shifts happen slowly, but do occur when states and capitalism itself is altered—a situation apparent in the depths of the Depression. With the ostensible failings of the free market

³⁷ M.J. Coldwell, *Left Turn, Canada* (New York: Duell, Sloan, and Pearce, 1945), vii-ix; William C. Pratt, "Politics in Alberta and Saskatchewan in the 1930s," *Journal of the West* 41 (Fall, 2002): 52; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 311-13.

³⁸ *The Western Producer*, 12 July 1934, p.6; Dean E. McHenry, *The Third Force in Canada: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, 1932-1948* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1950), 24-27; David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 167-77; Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 378-80.

and an unresponsive state, farmers and laborers took advantage of the opportunity and of the possibilities for a broad-based coalition and redefined capitalism as an unjust and immoral economic system. Economic cooperation had always served the farmers well, but in the early 1930s socialists successfully refocused the solution towards politics and to the creation of a cooperative commonwealth. The railroads, line elevators, or the big grain exchanges no longer represented the problem. The problem now was capitalism itself.³⁹

The creation of the CCF, combined with the Regina Manifesto, which was the party's broad program of public ownership and nationalization, Canadian socialism came to be defined as a farmer-labor alliance. Though the founders and members had looked to the British socialist model, Woodsworth and George Williams portrayed the new party as representative of a distinct Canadian socialism. Unlike British labor parties, Canada's were relatively small and disparate. The country's farmer groups, however, played an increasingly important role in socialist organization and politics. The CCF and the Regina Manifesto gave consideration to agrarian problems to a degree unprecedented by the Socialist Party of Canada or the Social-Democratic Party. The CCF became the first socialist party to embrace the farmer-labor alliance and promote a strictly nonviolent and constitutional reform agenda.⁴⁰

In Saskatchewan, despite the Farmer-Labour Party's rejection of any type of collectivization policy, the albatross of its proposed use-lease system of land tenure hung around its neck. Coldwell realized the negative connotations of the term, and in 1932 the party changed the wording to the "use-hold" system. The word "hold" indicated to farmers that in the case of

³⁹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 31, 71-72, 110.

⁴⁰ James McCrorie, "The CCF and the Tradition of Agrarian Radicalism," in ed. Kerr, *Western Canadian Politics*, 27-30; Young, *Democracy and Discontent*, 50-51; Penner, *The Canadian Left*, 174-78, 195.

foreclosure, government title to their land would be voluntary and that they would retain tenure on their land until debts were paid, whereby the farmer once again would own the land outright. Though still controversial, the use-hold program made the fact a bit clearer that state ownership of farms did not play a part in the proposals of the Farmer-Labour Party in Saskatchewan.⁴¹

When the provincial government ignored the demands of the UFC and Farmer-Labourites, they created the conditions for political opportunity not possible in less agitated times. Such reactions of the state—in this case the rejection of the challengers' claims—began the slow political cycle of bringing about significant change.⁴² In the run-up to the 1934 provincial elections, the Farmer-Labour Party operated a decentralized political machine. Committed individuals, small groups or clubs, and intellectuals aimed to inform the electorate of the broad philosophical underpinning of the CCF party movement—Fabianism and democratic socialism, the retention of private property, the replacement of the capitalist system with a cooperative commonwealth. Party representatives made concerted efforts to convert the farmers into true believers. Most of the small meetings and gatherings heard party speakers and then opened the floor for questions. UFC lodges set up constituency committees in fifty-two rural ridings, while the Independent Labour Party formed branches in cities and large towns. The farmers' and workers' organization mobilized their members for political action.⁴³

While the Canadians formed a leftist political party of farmers and workers, the farmers in North Dakota turned to direct action on the ground. The North Dakota Farmers Holiday Association grew from connections with the national Holiday movement. Militant Iowa Farmers

⁴¹ Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF," 424-25.

⁴² Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 145-50.

⁴³ Proceedings of 1932 UFC Convention, Folder 1.6, 63-64; Ivan Avakumovic, *Socialism in Canada: A Study of the CCF-NDP in Federal and Provincial Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 67; Young, *Anatomy of a Party*, 180-81.

Union leader Milo Reno formed the Farmers Holiday organization in 1932 with the goal of having farmers withhold their crops from market, by persuasion or even force, if necessary. This “holiday” aimed at getting the attention of governments at all levels to address the need for agricultural relief. President Charley Talbott of the North Dakota Farmers Union attended the Des Moines meeting where Reno created the Farmers Holiday Association. Talbott took to the idea and returned to North Dakota where he used the influence of the NDFU to create the Holiday movement.⁴⁴

Talbott’s leadership in forming a North Dakota chapter of the Holiday movement generated widespread support due to the deteriorating conditions in the state by the summer of 1932. Wheat prices hit record lows and mortgage foreclosures became more and more commonplace. Charley Talbott chaired the Farmers Union meeting at which the Holiday organization came into being, and delegates crafted a two-pronged approach: picketing and strikes to keep wheat off the market until the farmer realized “cost of production” plus a reasonable profit, and confrontational efforts to stop mortgage foreclosures.⁴⁵

While Farm Holiday-led strikes in Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota, and across the Midwest blocked farmers (sometimes violently) from taking crops to market during the summer of 1932, the North Dakota branch grew to encompass thirty of the fifty-three counties in the state, and several tens of thousands of members, which heavily overlapped with the Farmer Union’s membership. In September, after a meeting of governors from states experiencing Farmers Holiday conflicts failed to reach a proposal to address low farm prices, president Usher

⁴⁴ Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 435; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 35.

⁴⁵ “No Dispossession,” n.d., North Dakota Farmers Holiday Association Collection of Papers, North Dakota State University; Larry Remele, “The North Dakota Farm Strike of 1932,” *North Dakota History* 41 (Fall, 1974): 5-7; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 35.

Burdick convened a meeting in Bismarck and called for the first Holiday farm strike in the state. The Holiday-led farm strike in North Dakota paled in comparison to other states. They were actually more like parades than blockades, with farmers carrying banners that read “No More Collections, No More Foreclosures, No More Evictions,” or “We are Broke But They Have Not Got Our Goat.” A manure spreader represented “Hoover’s Platform.” Northwestern North Dakota, a center of socialist and communist activity since the World War I period, did experience some more confrontational strikes. None of these direct actions in North Dakota, Iowa, or other Midwestern and plains states influenced prices, though they did offer publicity for farmers hard-hit during the Great Depression.⁴⁶

More effective were the Farmers Holiday efforts in the grain and corn belts to stop farm foreclosures. In late 1932 and early 1933 the North Dakota Farmers Holiday Association pursued an approach that had a much greater impact on individual farmers. During the winter of 1932-33 the organization ceased advocating farm strikes and focused on efforts to stop mortgage foreclosures. Local Holiday Councils of Defense made decisions about whether a farmer facing foreclosure deserved the support of the organization. If so, the Council or a vigilante committee used implied threats to cease the foreclosure, or convinced the sheriff or banker that community ostracism would not be worth the cost if it required the seizure of people’s homes and property. Actual violence never occurred in North Dakota., but persuasion occurred in various ways. In Steele County, Holiday members met the sheriff at the courthouse and convinced him not to sell any farm at a foreclosure sale. Tense confrontations characterized other instances. Also in Steele County, five farmers barged into a bank and surrounded a banker who was preparing to foreclose

⁴⁶ Usher Burdick, “Farmers Holiday Strike,” 20 Sept. 1932, NDFHA Collection of Papers, NDSU; Remele, “The North Dakota Farm Strike,” 11-18; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 444-45.

on a widow whose husband had committed suicide. The chairman of the county Holiday organization, Ed Cooper, stuck his finger in the banker's face and said simply, "If you foreclose on that woman, we'll hang you." It was an empty threat. Harry Kolpin, who joined the farmers in confronting the banker, explained, "We didn't need to hang him." And they didn't. The banker agreed to rescind the foreclosure order.⁴⁷

The New Deal and the Farmers Union in North Dakota

Though as an organization the Farmers Holiday existed throughout the decade, its militancy and direct action dissipated with the inauguration of the New Deal. "When they were given reason to hope for something better," notes David Danbom, "their radicalism evaporated like the dew on a sunny Midwestern morning." Under the New Deal's Agricultural Adjustment Act, wheat farmers and other major agricultural commodity producers were urged to eliminate surpluses in order to raise prices, and were paid subsidies by the federal government to do so. For wheat, the curtailment of the crop began for the 1934-35 season. The Farm Bureau-dominated Extension Service of the USDA was tasked with administering the AAA program at the county level. The county extension agent explained the program to farmers and helped set up the administrative machinery in crop areas. The county agent also appointed the leaders of the county committees, which led the AAA sign-up campaigns and the allotment committees.⁴⁸

The Farm Bureau, however, had only a miniscule presence in the Farmers Union-dominated wheat belt territory, where its relationship with the USDA was derisively termed the "Farm Bureau-Extension Axis." Thus in areas where anti-Farm Bureau sentiment was strong,

⁴⁷ Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 204-5; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 37.

⁴⁸ Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 173-5, 205; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 473.

such as North Dakota, there were disagreements over the appointment of the county and allotment committee leaders. Due to Farmers Union dominance of the state, NDFU leaders took control from the Farm Bureau of the administration of the AAA at the local, county, and state levels. Thereafter the Farm Bureau ceased to have a presence in North Dakota until the mid-1940s. In June and July M.W. Thatcher, Charley Talbott, and close Talbott family friend Walter Maddock met with New Deal officials to craft the AAA approach for wheat. Maddock, a North Dakota homesteader and former NPL state legislator and later a governor, was appointed Assistant Wheat Director for the AAA in the northwest spring wheat region.⁴⁹

With the Farm Bureau county agent out of the picture and the Farmers Union in control of AAA administration in the spring wheat belt, the NDFU organized over one hundred meetings across every county to educate farmers about the AAA. President Talbott, Charles Fine, Maddock, Ricker, and others spoke frequently during September. At those meetings the Farmers Union representatives also boasted that the administration announced the first allotment benefits, and North Dakota farmers were to receive \$18 million. In all, over ninety percent of North Dakota farmers signed up to restrict acreage for the 1934-35 crop season. Many needed little curtailment, as drought and grasshoppers had destroyed much of their wheat already. The North Dakota Farmers Union took conspicuous credit for the amount of money distributed by the AAA to farmers in the state. The Farmers Holiday Association in North Dakota admitted FDR is working “like no man in all history has worked” for agriculture.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Christiana McFadyen Campbell, *The Farm Bureau: A Study of the Making of National Farm Policy, 1933-40* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1962), 123; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 41; Saloutos and Hicks, *Twentieth-Century Populism*, 472, 491-92.

The AAA sought to prop up farm prices. Well and good, but farmers in North Dakota and elsewhere lacked basic necessities such as food, clothes, and feed for stock. By the time FDR became President, local charities throughout North Dakota had no money. Farmers in the state could not survive without assistance from the federal government. Beginning in June 1933, the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA) funneled money to North Dakota. For the next two years North Dakota had the highest percentage of population on relief compared to the rest of the country.⁵¹

As the federal government and its agricultural programs came to dominate more and more of the state, the Farmers Union organized a Washington lobby group, the Northwest Legislative Committee. This body sought to influence federal officials in shaping New Deal agricultural legislation, and to that end Talbott, Ricker, and Thatcher spent much time meeting with New Dealers. In doing so, the National Farmers Union, and the NDFU in particular, came to reap the benefits of additional New Deal programs and became Roosevelt's champion in the northern plains wheat belt. The rehabilitation programs of the Resettlement Administration (RA) and the Farm Security Administration (FSA), which replaced the RA in 1937, were the vehicles by which the Farmers Union became wedded irrevocably to the New Deal. The programs aimed to retire marginal farmland and resettle farm families to better, government-built farms. Another approach involved leaving families on marginal lands and rehabilitating the farm there. Either

⁵⁰ Memo to County Officers and Councilmen, 2 May 1933, North Dakota Farmers Holiday Association Collection of Papers, North Dakota State University Archives; Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal*, 75-76; *Farmers Union Herald*, July 1933, p. 1.

⁵¹ Tweton and Rylance, *The Years of Despair*, 9-12; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 406.

way, the rehabilitation program included relief and efforts to salvage a countryside ravaged by low prices and drought.⁵²

Whether moved to a new, government farm, or rehabilitating the farm one was on, the RA and FSA sought to teach farm families how to properly manage their farm and home. The ultimate goals included self-sufficiency in food and feed, diversification, and soil fertility and conservation. Rural rehabilitation impacted North Dakota immensely, and the administration worked arm-in-arm with the Farmers Union and the Farmers Holiday Association. The RA set up facilities in North Dakota in late 1935 and quickly purchased 700,000 acres in the western portion of the state. State director Howard Wood and assistant director Leonard Orvedal managed an immense caseload and essentially offered support for anyone family that claimed to be farmers.⁵³

The Farmers Union was the only national agricultural organization to offer strong support for the RA and FSA and lobby for federal funds. The strengthening bonds between the farmers' organization and the Roosevelt administration displaced the Farm Bureaus monopoly position within the New Deal and disrupted the "cliental bloc" of the USDA's Extension Service, the land grant state colleges, the county agents, and the Farm Bureau itself. With the creation of the RA and FSA and their operation outside of the cliental system, the Farmers Union and the RA/FSA county supervisor now encroached on the Farm Bureau's previously monopoly access, via the county agent, to farmers at the local level.⁵⁴

⁵² *Farmers Union Herald*, Apr. 1935, p. 1, 6.

⁵³ Articles of Incorporation of North Dakota Rural Rehabilitation Corporation, Oct. 1934, Folder 16, Box 8, Ole Olson Papers, NDSU; Michael Johnston Grant, *Down and Out on the Family Farm: Rural Rehabilitation in the Great Plains, 1929-1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 86-109.

In addition to providing financial assistance to North Dakota farmers for general relief, to deal with the effects of drought, and for farm rehabilitation, the RA and FSA also channeled money into Farmers Union cooperatives. Thousands of federal loans to individuals allowed farmers to purchase stock in the most profitable Farmers Union co-op, the Farmers Union Grain Terminal Association, but also in a variety of local Farmers Union cooperatives as well. That the general manager of the Grain Terminal Association, W.M. Thatcher, was also the chair of the National Farmers Union Legislative Committee strengthened the connections between the Roosevelt administration and the Farmers Union and gave the farmers' organization unprecedented access to FDR and other New Deal officials. It also meant that millions of dollars in federal aid found its way into North Dakota and into the cooperatives affiliated with the NDFU. The programs came to be known as "the Farmers Union agencies" and the Farmers Union controlled important appointments in the FSA during the life of the program.⁵⁵

In addition to the Roosevelt administration, the North Dakota state government, and the state's U.S. Senators and Representatives, aggressively worked to assist farmers during the decade, and thus received the support of the Farmers Union. William Langer became governor after the 1932 election. Langer's goals included efforts to raise wheat prices, halt farm

⁵⁴ Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 115, 172, 286, 290-91.

⁵⁵ "The Credit Association Has Funds to Loan on a Sound Basis," Folder 7, Box 11, Ole Olson Papers, NDSU; *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 19 July 1937, p. 1; 3 Aug. 1937, p.1; 20 Sept. 1937, p. 1, 4; 3 May 1938, p.1, 4; Campbell, *The Farm Bureau*, 169-70; Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 205. Tweton and Rylance, *The Years of Despair*, 14-15; Saloutos, *The American Farmer and the New Deal*, 162; Talbot, "The Politics of Farm Organization in North Dakota," 51-52, and "The North Dakota Farmers Union and North Dakota Politics," *The Western Political Quarterly* 10 (Dec., 1957): 877.

foreclosures, and reduce public expenditures. He did so in flamboyant fashion, with the full support of North Dakota farmers and the Farmers Union.⁵⁶

In the fall of 1933 Langer instituted an embargo in the state that forbade wheat exports, with the aim to raise prices, though a federal district court ordered an end to the practice after a few months. The governor also issued a moratorium on farm foreclosures the same year, and even used the National Guard to halt farm sales. Though faced with recurring legal troubles related to political patronage and his subsequent removal from office by the state supreme court in 1934, Langer was eventually cleared of federal charges and North Dakotans reelected him by a large margin in 1936, as they did Roosevelt on the national ticket. The Farmers Union supported Langer, as did most farmers in the state, “because they felt that the state government was doing everything in its power to help them.”⁵⁷

In the U.S. Congress, Representative William Lemke and Senator Lynn Frazier drafted a bankruptcy act to reduce farm debt and inflate the money supply. Lemke hit the airwaves, subsidized by the North Dakota Farmers Union, to promote the Frazier-Lemke Bankruptcy Act. Though the bill passed both houses of Congress and FDR signed it into law in 1934, the Supreme Court emasculated the measure the following year. Lemke’s belief that FDR had betrayed farmers by not supporting the act more robustly led him to run in 1936 on the third-party Union ticket, organized by the Reverend Charles Coughlin. That Lemke, North Dakota native son, garnered less votes than FDR’s opponent Republican Alf Landon in 1936 speaks to New Deal

⁵⁶ Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 403-404.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 405-13.

support in the state. Essentially, the North Dakota Farmers Union and Holiday Association and their alliance with Governor Langer defined and characterized state politics during the decade.⁵⁸

The closeness between the Farmers Union and the New Deal is undeniable. Leaders and members praised Roosevelt for his efforts, while continuing to criticize capitalism and envision a cooperative system not based on the profit motive. FDR carried usually Republican North Dakota in 1932 and 1936. All the major Farmers Union leaders publicly supported Roosevelt. Without the New Deal, the Farmers Union in North Dakota would have shriveled and most likely disappeared. The state itself would not have survived without federal subsidies during the 1930s. North Dakota's most important business was the federal government during the decade. And thousands of North Dakota farmers remained on their farms and kept their homes because of New Deal programs and the Farmers Union.⁵⁹

The New Deal also tempered the more radical agrarian elements in North Dakota. During the Holiday movement, communists were active, most notably the indefatigable Ella "Mother" Reeves Bloor. Bloor, a participant in the Farmers Union and Holiday movement, as well as a member of the communist United Farmers League, made some parts of northwest North Dakota a hotbed of communism and founded some UFL locals in the area. The socialist tendencies of Farmers Union leaders prior to the New Deal are also evident, as Ricker and Thatcher both voted for Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas in 1932, for example. As the Farmers Union in North Dakota became more wedded to New Deal programs, its stance became more moderate.

⁵⁸ Wilkins and Wilkins, *North Dakota*, 129-31; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 415; on the relationship between the NDFU, Holiday, and state politics, see Remele, "The North Dakota Farm Strike of 1932."

⁵⁹ *The Farmers Union Herald*, Feb. 1938, p. 2; Mar. 1938, p. 5; Talbot, "The Politics of Farm Organization in North Dakota," 54; Tweton and Rylance, *The Years of Despair*, 16; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, p. 60, 70. Thatcher and president Talbot even backed FDR's court-packing scheme.

By 1936 the NDFU publicly called for the prevention of any socialists or communists in the organization, and reiterated its function as a cooperative organization striving for equality and justice, not via politics, but as a group of individual producers and consumers.⁶⁰

Thus, as the excitement of the “disruptive phase” of the Holiday movement ended, the Farmers Union in North Dakota institutionalized its tactics and became a powerful interest group in Washington and Bismarck.⁶¹ Roosevelt and other New Dealers demonstrated to the Farmers Union and the people of North Dakota a genuine desire to help during the Great Depression, and farmers embraced the administration’s programs. In the summer of 1934 both Rexford Tugwell, then undersecretary of agriculture and later head of the administration’s efforts towards rural rehabilitation, and President Roosevelt toured North Dakota drought regions. Charley Talbott, Walter Maddock, and other Farmers Union leaders accompanied them across the state. For county chapters of the Farmers Union, this was extremely important for morale and it let them know the federal government actively addressed agricultural problems in the wheat belt. As Tugwell and Roosevelt visited Jamestown, Devils Lake, Mandan, Bismarck, and towns in between, county Farmers Union members lined roads to show support and filled outdoor events with their county Farmers Union banners flying high.⁶²

⁶⁰ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 5 Oct. 1936, p. 2; Dyson, *Red Harvest*, 137-38; Jean Choate, *Disputed Ground: Farm Groups That Opposed the New Deal Agricultural Program* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2002), 52; William C. Pratt, “Rethinking the Farm Revolt of the 1930s,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Summer, 1988): 132-33. On agrarian communism in general during first half of the twentieth century, see Dyson, *Red Harvest*.

⁶¹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 101.

⁶² *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 2 July 1934, p. 1; 16 July 1934, p. 1.

The Politicization and Radicalization of Organized Farmers in Saskatchewan

The efforts of Prime Minister R.B. Bennett and his government to address the Depression left much to be desired, and by December 1930 the UFC in Saskatchewan had issued a scathing indictment of the Bennett Conservative Government. UFC president George H. Williams argued that the Prime Minister's policy of protectionism and lack of direct action did little or nothing to ameliorate the deplorable condition of prairie wheat farmers. The UFC demanded programs to guarantee prices that covered cost of production and living expenses, a state crop insurance program, and a stabilization board to bring agricultural commodity prices on par with those of manufactured goods. When the Prime Minister toured the ravaged West in August 1931, there were no parades or crowds of supporters holding banners to greet him.⁶³

Dissatisfaction with the Saskatchewan provincial Co-operative Government matched that of the UFC and Farmer-Labour Party toward the federal Conservative Government. The Co-operative Government and Premier Anderson came under fire for inadequate rural relief and debt adjustment legislation, along with the fact that there were no farmers in the Government's cabinet. The Great Depression rendered the provincial Government helpless and its policies ineffective. The Farmer-Labour Party in Saskatchewan noted that although Roosevelt was not a socialist, he had at least acted to address the Depression with interventionist policies that were moving leftward, and that the New Deal agricultural programs had begun to address the crisis. This contrasted with the inaction of the provincial and federal governments in Canada. For instance, by late 1932 the UFC had taken it upon itself to provide relief to the most destitute regions of the province. Though short on finances, the UFC closed all but the most necessary

⁶³ *Memorandum to Mr. Bennett*, File 3.21, Pamphlet Collection, SAB, Regina; Thompson and Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939*, 214-15.

internal departments and managed to obtain from lodges donations of food, clothing, and even some cash. In fact, so many lodges sent money to the Central Office than in 1932 the UFC made an agreement with banks to extend its loan repayments while the organization used the cash to shore up its internal finances, to a small degree. Upon seeing the reality of suffering, President George Williams demanded the Saskatchewan Co-operative Government set up a government relief body rather than rely on the meager resources of UFC members. Premier Anderson refused and linked the UFC and the Farmer-Labour Party with Russian communism.⁶⁴

This situation set the stage for the Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour Party to participate in its first provincial election, on a platform calling for the use-hold land system, public ownership of major industries, and in general an alternative to free market capitalism along Fabian lines. It was clear the Conservative-led government, its tenure saddled with devastation of the Depression, would fall, so the Liberals fell back on their long-time claim of being a reform party, but one more responsible and moderate than the Farmer-Labourites. In contrast to the proposed use-hold program, the Grits championed the expansion of local debt adjustment boards to address the issue of foreclosures across the province.⁶⁵

During the campaign the Farmer-Labour Party fumbled explanations of the use-lease issue. Some candidates and spokesmen clearly did not themselves fully understand the proposal, and the fact remained that though under the plan the foreclosed farmer would remain on his land

⁶⁴ *Saskatchewan C.C.F. Research Bureau* 1, no. 3 (Sept., 1933): 2; *The Western Producer*, 17 Nov. 1932, p.5; 10 May 1934, p. 1; 27 Sept. 1934, p. 1; 11 Oct. 1934, p. 7; Proceedings of 1930 UFC Convention, 49-50, Folder 1.4; Proceedings of 1931, 41-42, Folder 1.5; Proceedings of 1932 UFC Convention, 39, Folder 1.6, all in Annual Convention Reports, UFC-SS Ltd. Collection, SAB Regina; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 206; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 311-12. On the origins of the UFC financial difficulties, see Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 123.

⁶⁵ *Saskatchewan C.C.F. Research Bureau* 1 (Aug., 1933): 1-20; George Hoffman, "The Saskatchewan Farmer-Labor Party 1932-1934: How Radical Was It at Its Origin?" *Saskatchewan History* 28 (Spring, 1974), 52-64; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 214-16.

while the debts were paid, he did not own the land, the state did. Agrarian theorists believed the plan would resonate as foreclosures washed across Saskatchewan, but it instead became a liability. Liberals characterized it as nationalization of land and the beginning of the end of private property. Many in the opposition claimed the plan and party represented communism—especially George H. Williams, only a few years removed from his trip to the Soviet Union. Though the Farmer-Labour candidates explained how the use-lease system had operated successfully in New Zealand, Liberals suggested that was a lie and the program had actually failed in the “socialist” Antipodean islands. Despite these attacks, the Farmer-Labour Party won five seats and became the official opposition in the legislature as the Conservative Party disappeared after the 1934 elections. The Liberals won all remaining seats and commanded a strong majority.⁶⁶

Farmer-Labour socialism had been at the center of the political debates during the provincial elections of 1934. Detractors labeled it as a Soviet totalitarian threat to private property, the family farm, and the small businessman. They also disparaged socialism by highlighting its supposed atheist characteristics. Liberals convinced Catholics that a socialist government would destroy the church. Catholic distrust and hostility towards socialism transcended the election, and had a particular history in the Saskatchewan and Canada. In 1931, the pope’s encyclical condemned both democratic and revolutionary socialism and maintained that no true Catholic could be a socialist or support a socialist party. Canadian and Saskatchewan bishops spoke against socialism in the early 1930s. Saskatchewan politics too had historical contours involving Catholics. Since the 1917 election when the provincial Conservatives

⁶⁶ *Saskatchewan C.C.F. Research Bureau* 1 (Oct., 1933): 3; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 311-12; Pratt, “Politics in Alberta and Saskatchewan in the 1930s,” 53-54; Young, *Anatomy of a Party*, 202.

supported English-only schooling, the political lines were drawn. For Catholics, the Tories were a WASP party and against ethnic settlers and especially French Canadians. Catholics supported the Liberals, whom they saw as defending ethnic groups and not favoring Protestantism at the expense of Catholicism. After the nativism- and Klan-dominated 1929 provincial election, the Liberals under James Gardiner again earned the support of Catholics as the party fought the KKK.⁶⁷

Led by Methodist minister and national CCF leader J.S. Woodsworth, the socialists fought back. CCF socialism, they argued, in fact represented the best of Christian cooperation and ideals. Socialism and Christian doctrine both rested on mutual self-help, brotherhood, and the rejection of the rapacious competition of capitalism. As such, there was a small group of Saskatchewan Catholics who supported the party. Hector Roberge and farmer Joseph Burton worked hard to show how Catholic social teaching aligned with socialist doctrine and against capitalism. Burton, for example, was elected to the provincial legislature as a CCF candidate in 1938 in part through public analyses of papal encyclicals showing how Catholic doctrine actually repudiated capitalism and welcomed the tempering effect of government upon the economy. Both men were maligned within the Church, and represented a minority in the province, however. Mostly, CCF leaders like George Williams and Major Coldwell gave speech after speech showing the congruity of socialism's brotherhood and mutual help with the teachings of Jesus and Catholic Church.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Gregory Buam, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism: Political Thought in the Thirties and Forties* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1980), 147-79.

⁶⁸ *Social Democracy in Canada*, Undated material, CCF Pamphlet Collection, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections; "Democracy," File XI, Folder C.2, John Evans Manuscript Collection, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections; George H. Williams, *Social Democracy in Canada* (Regina: McInnis Brothers, n.d.), 47-48; Paul T. Phillips, A

The return of Liberal Government in Saskatchewan did not change the situation of suffering very much. The Liberals campaigned on a more responsive approach to debt adjustment, but even as they worked to revise the debt adjustment board it did not lessen the multiplication of farmers' debts or negate the threat of foreclosure. The unemployed still struggled and those on relief did not experience a change in their plight. The UFC and CCF in Saskatchewan, working together, aimed to remedy what they argued were manifest deficiencies in the Liberal approach to relief, debt, and unemployment, and used this as a major campaign issue leading up to the 1938 provincial elections.

The CCF Central Office and the UFC Central Relief Committee, both headquartered in Regina, received thousands of cases of foreclosure per year. By mediating between government officials, creditors, and debtors both organizations managed to allow some farmers to remain on their lands with possession of their chattels, or obtained alternate terms of settlement, such as time extensions for payments. The two organizations were able to juxtapose these actions with the claims that the Government's debt adjustment tribunals were "little more than collection agencies for creditors." Through such mediation, and by publicizing the suffering of individuals through local meetings, newspapers, and other literature, the UFC and CCF pressed the provincial government to provide feed and fodder in a more timely manner thereby saving innumerable farm animals, forced the Government to pay money withheld from farmers who did roadwork in 1934, and helped single men working on farms receive a five-dollar-per-month bonus. Such actions by the UFC and CCF proved the organizations worked tirelessly for the farmer and laborer, while the Liberals were "kidding them along." Thus, by cultivating ties

Kingdom on Earth: Anglo-American Social Christianity, 1880-1940 (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 151-55, 236-37, 262; Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF," 423-24; Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies*, 194-96; Buam, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism*, 154-55.

between like-minded groups, and around the issues of relief from the ravages of failing capitalism, the UFC and CCF were able to create an effective coalition—one that could utilize joint campaigning during the next provincial election in 1938.⁶⁹

Local CCF bodies took advantage of the Government's shortcomings in providing relief. In Melfort, northeast of Saskatoon, the Government had cut off relief. A group of women, desperate after surviving a winter with very little provisions, organized themselves in April 1935 into the Women's Auxiliary of the Melfort Union of Unemployed and confronted the mayor. Local CCF representatives assisted the women, who rejected the mayor's promises for future relief and demanded milk for their children immediately. With this pressure the mayor gave the Women's Auxiliary relief coupons to be used for some necessities. One woman said the winter had been so brutal without provisions that she had no fear of going to jail for such confrontational measures. Melfort CCF officials talked with the mayor about reinstating Government relief, and threatened to contact the premier if it was not done. The mayor replied, "That's right and I hope you get better results than we can get." In light of the situation, the Melfort CCF set up its own relief system in the town, short on money, but staffed by volunteers and financed by donations. These reflected a general CCF policy, in the absence of government efforts, of creating local relief organizations across the province to provision needy residents and protect the unemployed from exploitation.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Williams to CCF Campaign Managers and Candidates, 2 Apr. 1935, File VIII.31, Folder 1, Records of the SGGA, FUC, UFC-SS, SAB, Saskatoon; Proceedings of the 1931 UFC Convention, 57, Folder 1.5; Proceedings of the 1934 UFC Convention, 33-34, Folder 1.8; Proceedings of the 1935 UFC Convention, 28, Folder 1.9; Proceedings of 1936 UFC Convention, 29-30 Folder 1.10, Annual Convention Reports, UFC-SS Ltd. Collection, SAB Regina; *The Western Producer*, 25 April 1935, p.5; 2 May 1935, p.5; 23 May 1935, p.5; 29 Aug. 1935, p.8; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 220-21; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 134.

⁷⁰ Williams to CCF Campaign Managers and Candidates, 10 Apr. 1935, File VIII.31, Folder 1, Records of the SGGA, FUC, UFC-SS, SAB, Saskatoon.

After 1934 the Saskatchewan CCF recognized the planks associated with socialism hurt their political fortunes. To neutralize attacks the party officially removed references to socialism from the platform, and removed the controversial land use-hold program as well. At the 1936 provincial convention the CCF promoted a vision of the privately owned family farm. Nevertheless, opposition groups and some segments of the population in general continued to conflate the CCF with the communism and the Communist Party. Though the national party in 1936 reaffirmed a policy forbidding national candidates' cooperation with other groups, the Saskatchewan CCF remained open to cooperation with other groups against the Liberals, so as to avoid multi-cornered fights in provincial elections. That Saskatchewan CCF leaders were steadfast against communism did not negate the fact that some rank-and-file members flirted with the Communist Party. The Liberals used this ambivalence against the CCF in the province.⁷¹

Eventually the Saskatchewan CCF did enforce a policy of suspension for any candidate who shared an official political forum with a communist. To combat the immediate needs of those suffering during the Depression, however, the CCF publicly announced its relief agencies would work with any organization. In Regina in the summer of 1935, as result of the Popular Front strategy of the communists whereby they worked with any like-minded group to combat the spread of fascism, the local CCF organization corroborated with labor groups and the Communist Party to assist relief tenants threatened with eviction and forced labor. This again brought charges that the CCF was part and parcel of Russian totalitarianism and revolutionary

⁷¹ Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 232-3; Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 136; McHenry, *The Third Force in Canada*, 119; Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF," 426; Young, *Anatomy of a Party*, 255-66.

communism. The party refused to cease such apolitical cooperation but the CCF officially adopted a policy of non-collaboration with the Communist Party in political matters.⁷²

Western farmers saw no prospect of a government at the federal level willing to institute a true Canadian New Deal led by a Canadian FDR. In preparation for the 1935 federal elections, Prime Minister Bennett announced his own New Deal-style reforms: legislation regulating labor conditions, providing unemployment measures, an agricultural credit program, the creation of an economic advisory board, and a call for the investigation of big business. By election day, it was clear the call for such reform was mostly political posturing, and the few programs Bennett managed to pass in the House were gutted by judicial fiat. The Conservatives in power everywhere bore the blame for the Great Depression, and in October 1935 the Liberals under Mackenzie King formed a moderate administration. In Saskatchewan, the Liberals won all but eight ridings, while two CCF candidates went to Parliament. The McKenzie King Government did not embark upon any major social welfare or agricultural programs, and when the Depression deepened severely in 1937 it was coupled with the worst wheat crop in history.⁷³

With little help from the federal government, and the impotency of sitting provincial governments, protest movements in the prairies multiplied and some vied with the CCF to claim the mantle of reform. In 1935 Social Credit overthrew the United Farmers Government and took control of Alberta and then emerged in Saskatchewan. As a political party, Social Credit took the monetary ideas of Englishman C.H. Douglas and amalgamated them with the fervent Christian outlook of Alberta Baptist preacher William Aberhart. Aberhart utilized the radio airwaves and

⁷² CCF Central Office to Campaign Managers and Candidates, 11 June 1935, File VIII.31, Folder 1, Records of the SGGA, FUC, UFC-SS, SAB, Saskatoon; Peter Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF and the Communist Party in the 1930s," *Saskatchewan History* 26 (1973): 1-10.

⁷³ Thompson and Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939*, 261-99.

propounded the idea that modern technology could create conditions to provide a living for all, only if the existing corrupt monetary system that favored international financiers could be radically restructured. All this could be accomplished, he concluded, without changing the fundamental tenets of capitalism and private property. In the desperation of the Depression, and in the context of an impotent UFA government, Social Credit came to control Alberta.⁷⁴

As the CCF moderated its platform, publicly denounced cooperation with radical leftist elements such as the communists, and dealt effectively with Social Credit, the Saskatchewan Liberals faced attacks from all sides. The Liberals focused their political ammunition upon Social Credit, warning voters of a dictatorship if the party formed a government. The Liberals maintained a majority of seats, but the CCF also fared well, using a more streamlined and professionalized campaign organization to win eleven of the thirty seats it contested. Social Credit disappeared and lost its appeal, especially after it failed to adequately address the Depression in Alberta after three years of political control. The provincial Conservatives failed to win a single seat. By the end of the decade, the CCF in Saskatchewan became the leading opposition party to the ruling Liberals. Though not in power during the 1930s, the Saskatchewan party proved itself a durable alternative to traditional party rule.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 409-13.

⁷⁵ For an example of a Saskatchewan CCF attack on Social Credit, see George Williams statement from the CCF Central Office, 20 Aug. 1935, Folder 1, File VIII.31, Records of the SGGGA, FUC, UFC-SS, SAB Saskatoon; Smith, *Prairie Liberalism*, 238-42; Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 145-46; Young, *Anatomy of a Party*, 180-81; Pratt, "Politics in Alberta and Saskatchewan in the 1930s," 55.

The Cooperative Commonwealth at the Grass Roots: Economic, Educational, and Social
Mobilization of Agrarian Organizations During the Great Depression

Throughout the 1930s NDFU cooperatives animated the locals, brought in new recruits, and proved to farmers the worth of the Farmers Union. Through the Farmers Union Central Exchange the locals could purchase almost anything—from farm staples such as twine or coal to canned goods to home appliances. The FUCE contracted with manufacturers to meet the locals’ demands for goods. In Bottineau County in north-central North Dakota, along the Manitoba-Saskatchewan border, the county Farmers Union ordered twine in bulk and resold it for less than the local merchants. When the Depression deepened, the Bottineau County chapter, and other county organizations, provided its paid-up members with necessities such as fruit, flour, or potatoes. Many members with outstanding dues quickly paid up in order to take advantage of such cooperative and self-help measures.⁷⁶

The Farmers Union Terminal Association (renamed the Farmers Union Grain Terminal Association in 1938 and subsidized by the Farm Credit Administration⁷⁷) became the central grain marketing body for NDFU members. Talbott and Thatcher worked to retain the remaining

⁷⁶ “Resolutions Adopted at the Joint Meeting of the Stockholders of the Farmers Union Central Exchange, Incorporated, Farmers Union Terminal Association, and Farmers Union Livestock Commission Company, on Friday, December 13, 1935,” and *Articles of Incorporation and By-Laws of Farmers Union Central Exchange, Inc.*, both in Folder 7, Box 11, Ole Olson Papers, NDSU; Jerrell Erickson, *History of Bottineau County Farmers Union, 1927-1978*, (n.p., n.d.), 1-2; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 34.

⁷⁷ The FUTA until 1938 was affiliated with the federal government-sponsored Farmers National marketing body, a federation of grain marketing organizations across the country. As an effect of the Depression, the Farmers National collapsed, and the regional grain marketing organizations went their separate ways. M.W. Thatcher worked with Roosevelt to have the Farm Credit Administration provide the FUGTA with \$300,000 to take over the FUTA, and extend almost \$1 million in credit to finance initial grain marketing operation expenses. The FUGTA became so successful that it repaid these government loans in two years. Knight, *Grass Roots*, 101-102.

patrons of the old ECE, and created the country's largest cooperative grain marketing entity. Locals wrote by-laws urging all members to ship grain through the FUTA, and cooperative elevators became part of the larger marketing structure. The Minot Farmers' Co-operative Elevator (f. 1915), for instance, was integrated into the FUTA structure in Ward County. Farmers Union members in Minot saw how the creation of the Ward County Farmers Union animated the cooperative elevator members after many desultory years. By the end of World War II, FUGTA had a net worth of \$15 million, boasted an average annual volume of 125 million bushels, and saved members up to \$3 million annually.⁷⁸

As farms slowly mechanized and families increasingly used automobiles, Farmers Union oil co-ops abounded across North Dakota. Co-op leaders understood that the large profit margins of oil and gas sales could underwrite a significant portion of the NDFU organizational, educational, and social components. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, North Dakota had dozens of local oil co-ops, each with a Model T, a bulk plant (a central location for the receipt, storage, pumping, shipping, and distribution of petroleum products), and gas pumps. Local and country NDFU branches channeled members' business to the oil co-ops. The Ward County Farmers Union passed resolutions urging all locals to patronize the country oil co-op, and even successfully petitioned the Ward County Commissioners to give the cooperative a county business contract. The Devils Lake Farmers Union Oil Company saved its members over \$118,000 during 1931-40 and sold over 1.1 million units of oil during the same period. In 1932 the NDFU oil business was second in gas and oil sales in North Dakota, behind only international giant Standard Oil. By 1938 Farmers Union oil co-ops netted members a savings of

⁷⁸ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 3 Aug. 1936, p.2; 20 July 1936, p.2; Erickson, *Fifty Years*, 1; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 102.

eight to twelve cents per gallon and returned \$1.5 million in patronage dividends. In 1940 the NDFU oil cooperatives enjoyed \$45 million in business and served 129,000 North Dakotans.⁷⁹

A dues check-off system directly tied NDFU's financial successes into the growth and development of social and organizational aspects of the Farmers Union and also helped sustain and increase the number of paid up memberships, a crucial concern for farmer cooperatives. The dues check-off system deducted members' annual dues from savings garnered from co-ops or from patronage dividends. In other words, Farmers Union co-op patrons had their memberships paid and renewed automatically. The NDFU began the dues check-off system early on, in 1932, and urged all local and county bodies to follow suit. The Ward County Farmers Union, for example, created and implemented the dues check-off system in 1932 and used the dues money to pay for educational programs.⁸⁰

The NDFU created a system of youth education designed to train future cooperative leaders, promote the cooperative system, promote public ownership in transportation and utility sectors, and in general create a "cooperative commonwealth" from the next generation of farmers. The NDFU Co-op Institutes, founded in 1936, were designed to create "a future cooperative society to take the place of the old order." Begun at Jamestown but soon spread across NDFU counties, the Co-op Institutes involved multi-week cooperative education programs to train future leaders, delegitimize capitalism and the competitive system, and have the young people return to their communities to spread this teaching. Students arrived from

⁷⁹ *Fifty Years of Progress, 1931-1981: Devils Lake Farmers Union Oil Company*, 16; Hanson, *Changing Landscapes*, 12-17; Erickson, *Fifty Years*, 2.

⁸⁰ Albert S. Goss, "Influence of Business Cooperatives in Maintaining Membership in National Farm Organizations," in eds. Abrahamsen and Scroggs, *Agricultural Cooperation*, 314-15; Erickson, *Fifty Years*, 3.

across North Dakota and surrounding states to study for four weeks the history and principles of cooperation, sociology, public speaking, law, and economics.⁸¹

This education prepared young members for leadership positions in the NDFU. Leaders explained how “these children are being raised on cooperation...to sell the idea of cooperation to their parents. They are trained in basic economics and drilled in cooperative philosophy...The program of youth education is pushing the cooperative organization of North Dakota faster than any other single factor.” Many Co-op Institute students did in fact serve in leadership positions in the organization. A variety of contests first help identify potential young leaders. For example, Dale Hight of the Torning NDFU local in Ward County was forced to quit school after the eighth grade, but continued his education through the Farmers Union high school correspondence courses and the Co-op Institute in 1935. He won a Farmers Union Junior speech contest, became imbued with the cooperative spirit, and the next year the Farmers Union Co-op Association in Minot hired him. Many other Co-op Institute graduates became directors and managers of local NDFU co-ops or Junior leaders.⁸²

Consider the career of NDFU youth leader Mary Jo Wieler. Although she attended a St. Paul college for two years on scholarship, Depression conditions brought her back to the family farm near Lisbon, Ransom County, North Dakota, where she attended a NDFU picnic and became interested in the Farmers Union. In 1930 Mary Jo placed third in a NDFU-sponsored essay contest and had her way paid to attend the state convention. There she met Gladys Talbott Edwards, Charley’s daughter, who was responsible for focusing attention on farm youths and developing their commitment to the Farmers Union. It was Gladys, as Director of Junior Work

⁸¹ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 12 Feb. 1936, p.1; Aug. 1932, p. 2; Mar. 1936, p.1.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 18 Mar. 1935, p.1; 7 Dec. 1936, p.3; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 78-81.

for the NDFU beginning in 1932, who sponsored the essay contests for young people. Gladys recruited Weiler to work for the Junior program and at the AAA office in Jamestown. By the mid-1930s, Mary Jo served as State Director in the Junior Department of the NDFU. The NDFU youth program identified her as a potential future leader, trained her, and eventually recruited her to a leadership position.⁸³

Co-op Institute graduates served as foot soldiers during the major membership drives. During the summer of 1938, Co-op Institute-trained organizers canvassed the state, traveling in a caravan of cars and trailers. The organizing crew slept in the trailers while on the road to save money. They began in Sargent County, located in the southeast corner of the state, and perfected an approach they replicated across North Dakota as they drove over 1,500 miles. At every township the crew invited farmers to the schoolhouse, preached about the benefits of federal agricultural programs, and solicited memberships for \$3.50. The next day the crew blanketed the township, farm to farm, and even accepted chickens as membership dues. The organizing drive exceeded its goals in signing up 15,000 new members as part of 1,200 new locals. The NDFU enjoyed a twenty percent increase in income from 1937, mostly through the on-the-ground effort of Co-op Institute graduates.⁸⁴

The North Dakota Farmers Union focused on the mobilization and education of youth to an unprecedented degree. Through various essay and other contests for young NDFU members, the organization effectively prepared the next generation of farm leaders. The most promising young people had a prominent place in the annual state conventions, and their various experiences are worth retelling. Thelma Lee, a young girl from the Hazel local in Williams

⁸³ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 21 Sept. 1936, p. 2; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 29-31.

⁸⁴ National Farmers Union Convention pamphlet (1966), 11; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 21, 66-67; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 106-107.

County, saved hundreds of pennies to pay her father's NDFU dues. Thelma displayed on a large wooden poster the 350 inlaid coins, and to the delight of hundreds of delegates presented it at the 1934 state convention. Thelma, a member of the NDFU youth program, said she could have bought herself many things with the money she saved, but the cooperative spirit of the Farmers Union showed her a better use of the pennies.⁸⁵

At "Junior Day" during the 1936 state convention in Wahpeton, dozens of youth members demonstrated their talents and made booklets and handicrafts for display to the attendees. Riley Hinchberge performed a piano solo of "Autumn Leaves," Joyce Lee of the Ramsey County local recited the Farmers Union Creed, and five Grant County Juniors dressed as hillbillies and put on a play and sang songs to the delight of the delegates. Neileen Weinberger made a "weed booklet" displaying the invasive species of her family's farm. "Some of the weeds were pressed last year or I wouldn't have so many," Neileen explained. "The grasshoppers took even the weeds."⁸⁶

Without the NDFU youth and young adult educational programs and the Co-op Institute, president Charley Talbott's death in 1937 might have left a leadership vacuum. Talbott had recently returned from a trip to Washington to meet with New Dealers, when en route to Bismarck to stump on the radio for FDR his car ran off the road, injuring him gravely. FDR telegraphed, "Please tell [Charley] of our concern. We cannot spare him now." Charley passed away in April, but his son Glenn, steeped in Farmers Union cooperative education, ascended to the presidency and successfully led the NDFU for the next twenty years. In remembrance of

⁸⁵ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 5 Nov. 1934, p.3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 19 Oct. 1936, p.3.

Charley Talbott's service, the NDFU set up a folk school where farm youth could hone agricultural skills through education in economics, farm science, and cooperative ideals.⁸⁷

Folk schools, which became in the late 1930s a centerpiece of NDFU educational programs, originated in Denmark. The National Farmers Union in 1931 sent president John Simpson to study Danish folk schools and co-ops and thereafter he urged the creation of folk schools among Farmers Union state chapters. The Farmers Union was not alone in its interest in Danish co-ops and folk schools. A significant number of Americans—and many people from around the world—found in Denmark a model society during the bleak 1930s. Though Danish government-sponsored rural co-ops impressed visitors such as FSA director Will Alexander in 1938, the folk schools “were central in American visitors’ minds.”⁸⁸

Formed in the mid-nineteenth century, ubiquitous by the Depression years, and funded by the state, folk schools in Denmark drew young rural adults into cultural and cooperative education. These nineteen- to twenty-five-year-olds spent a full season in residence and full immersion in cooperative living, along with song and dance and various curricula on cooperation. The intense interest in the folk schools led the NDFU to work with Dane Dr. H. Holm-Jensen, a scholar of cooperatives at the University of North Dakota, to develop Farmers Union folk schools. Along with Dr. Holm-Jenson, who was born in Denmark and participated in the folk schools in his home country, the NDFU also partnered with Dr. Grace Hanson of the Mayville State Teachers College and the North Dakota Agricultural College to create folk

⁸⁷ Hanson, *Changing Landscapes*, 46; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 84.

⁸⁸ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 22 June 1931, p.6; June 1940, p.2; Daniel T. Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings: Social Politics in a Progressive Age* (Belknap Press: Cambridge, 1998), 357.

schools in remote rural areas of the state. The NDFU folk school program began in the late 1930s and flourished during the following decade.⁸⁹

As the 1930s ended, the cooperative aspects of the Farmers Union and its ability to bring federal government largesse to North Dakota made it for many farmers an indispensable organization. The NDFU during the Great Depression also counteracted the isolation, despair, and feelings of helplessness among farmers in the North Dakota. The wife of Farmers Union activist and North Dakota legislator Charles W. Fine lamented that the hardest part of her life during the 1930s involved “a peculiar feeling of sort of being forsaken... We didn’t see too much of the neighbors. There was a peculiar loneliness.” Mrs. Fine periodically attended Farmers Union conventions and she realized how important the organization was for social cohesion and community outside the home.⁹⁰

The success of the Farmers Union in North Dakota during the Depression stemmed from the integration of social intercourse with the pecuniary benefits of the various cooperatives. The social aspects of the NDFU were not “window dressing,” but an integral component of the farmers’ movement. State leaders urged locals to hold weekly meetings, even during the hectic harvest season. Local meetings, in addition to addressing business and organizational work, always included social components to fulfill people’s needs for fun and companionship during the Depression. Thus Callahan Local in Renville County initiated a pie social to raise money for the year. Coburn Local in Ransom County organized a harmonica band, and Manning Local in

⁸⁹ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 21 Nov. 1938, p.8; 17 Oct. 1938, p.9; Rodgers, *Atlantic Crossings*, 354-58, 421.

⁹⁰ Mrs. C.W. Fine, “Description of Life in North Dakota,” 16-17, Charles W. Fine Collection, NDSU.

Dunn County had an oyster supper after a meeting. One Benson County resident fondly recalls Farmers Union winter parties with fiddlers and square dances and “everyone having fun.”⁹¹

Farmers Union picnics represented the most anticipated and energizing local and county activity. Certainly the social aspects of the picnics excited members. It was fun to meet old friends, make new ones, discuss economic conditions and the crop situation, participate in ball games or compete for prizes in various contests. The large spread of good food brought members and non-members alike to township and county Farmers Union picnics, and the dances in the evening kept them late. However, the state Farmers Union understood that picnics served an important mobilizing and organizational function. Vice president Alex Lind connected the popular social aspects of the picnics with the idea that they could contribute to quicker organization at the grassroots level. Lind told the young members at picnics, “We older folks are depending on you to carry the organization on to success.”⁹²

The NDFU used funds from the co-ops to sponsor radio programming on KFJR Bismarck and WDAY Fargo. Members even purchased KLPM in Minot, creating the country’s first cooperatively owned radio station. In addition to farming and marketing information, a regular Friday program from 1935 included a variety of music (“Milkman’s Serenade,” a dance interlude, an orchestra performance, “Musical Moments,” and “Paulson Melody Masters”), religious reflection (“Morning Devotions”), baseball scores, and broadcasts for farm wives (Peggy Phillips’s “Housekeepers’ Chat”).⁹³

⁹¹ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 21 Jan. 1934, p. 4; 2 July 1934, p. 2; Untitled interview with Benson County resident, n.p., Bert M. Salisbury Collection, NDSU.

⁹² *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 5 Aug. 1935, p. 2; 21 June 1937, p. 1; Erickson, *History of Bottineau County Farmers Union*, 4

⁹³ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 1 June 1936, p. 1; *Conrad and Conrad*, 50 Years, 45.

To energize the rank-and-file to patronize Farmers Union Co-ops, and to offer a moral and ethical rationale that went beyond financial gain, the NDFU argued that cooperation represented social consciousness. This also neutralized the charges that the Farmers Union represented communist atheism, an accusation that increased especially after World War II. Christian beliefs clashed with capitalism, NDFU writers argued, while cooperation “is Christianity personified” and the educational program of the Farmers Union “makes members better...Christians.” NDFU literature indicated that a variety of church organizations—including the International Missionary Council, the Federal Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Bishops’ Program of Social Reconstruction, and the National Catholic Rural Life Conference—affirmed the relationship between cooperation and Christian doctrine. This demonstration, through NDFU educational programs and literature, brought members into Farmers Union co-ops, because along this line of reasoning socialism was the economic expression of a Christian life and the epitome of the cooperative commonwealth in which men and women shared the common gifts of God.⁹⁴

Though many Germans in North Dakota attended the Catholic Church and in more prosperous times would not be amenable to the NDFU message, the organization courted them successfully. German-speaking organizing crews canvassed areas of German settlement. Germans from Germany congregated in Cass, Barnes, and Richland Counties in southeast North Dakota. German Russians settled in a “triangle” in the central portion of the state, from Sargent

⁹⁴ Federal Writers’ Project, *North Dakota: A Guide to the Northern Prairie State* (Fargo: Knight Printing Co., 1938), 4; *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 21 Dec. 1936, p.2; 20 May 1940, p.8; Benson Y. Landis, *Bethlehem and Rochdale: The Churches and Consumer Cooperation, 1884-1944* (New York: The Cooperative League of the U.S.A., 1944), 55-58; Jacob H. Dorn, “‘The Oldest and Youngest of the Idealistic Forces At Work in Our Civilization’: Encounters Between Christianity and Socialism,” in ed. Jacob Dorn, *Socialism and Christianity in Early 20th Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 2-28.

to Adams County on the North Dakota-South Dakota border to an apex near the forty-ninth parallel. At the time of the Depression people of German ancestry constituted about one-fifth of state's population. The devastation of the Depression and the Farmers Union connection with New Deal agricultural programs brought German communities into the NDFU orbit.⁹⁵

In McIntosh County, where a majority of the residents were of German Russian extraction, severe drought resulted in crop failure on the majority of the farms between 1930 and 1936. Until Governor Langer's executive order halting foreclosures, the county experienced three to six mortgage defaults per week. The German Russians appealed to the Farmers Holiday movement, and this began to bring them into the Farmers Union fold. For example, German Russian farmer John Haller wrote to Holiday president Usher Burdick about an impending farm foreclosure. Burdick told him to stay on his property and not let anyone take his animals, machinery, or wheat crop. Appeal to the McIntosh County Holiday Association, Burdick urged, and if that provides no relief "let me know and I will come down there. If those creditors want a battle they will get it." The NDFU's close ties with New Deal agricultural programs also encouraged German Russians to join. Though they had never been keen on an active government, Depression conditions forced German Russians to participate in AAA and FERA programs, and in the Resettlement Administration, and in doing so they found reason to become NDFU members. Through the bleakness of the Great Depression, German Russians in North Dakota remained grateful for the opportunities for land ownership and farming in the United

⁹⁵ Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1977), 61; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 23; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 287-88.

States. Samuel Fregien told a WPA fieldworker that German Russians were “in America by the grace of God.”⁹⁶

Arthur Link, a North Dakota state legislator, U.S. House member, and two-term governor, illustrates another appeal of the Farmers Union for Germans in the state. Arthur’s father settled near Alexander, in the northwest part of the state, after leaving the German area of what today is the Czech Republic, in 1900. John Link became active in local government and joined the Nonpartisan League, taking Arthur along to meetings. His family’s participation in Farmers Union cooperatives led Arthur to become a local NDFU leader in the 1930s. While playing violin with a local orchestra at a Farmers Union social and dance, he met his future wife. Arthur Link believed his family’s background of poverty drew them to participate in progressive cooperative movements, including the Farmers Union in North Dakota.⁹⁷

Unlike the North Dakota Farmers Union, which operated as an educational, economic, cooperative, and legislative interest group, the CCF first and foremost was a political party. The CCF’s membership, especially at the leadership level, brought into the party decades of experience from the educational and cooperative organizations of the province. Amid-1940s survey revealed that most officials in the CCF also held positions in local or provincial cooperative organizations, and majority had at least twenty years’ experience participating in the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. CCF leaders had been active in the prominent farmers’ organizations in the province: the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, the Farmers Union of Canada, and the United Farmers of Canada. According to one of the foremost scholars of the CCF in

⁹⁶ Gordon L. Iseminger, “The McIntosh County German-Russians: The First Fifty Years,” *North Dakota History* 51 (Summer, 1984): 4-23.

⁹⁷ Francie M. Berg, *Ethnic Heritage in North Dakota* (Washington, D.C.: Attiyeh Foundation, 1983), 111.

Saskatchewan, it was a movement of the whole rural community led by long-established farm leaders.⁹⁸

Thus leaders envisioned the organization as transcending politics and partyism. In a practical sense, however, CCF was a political party, but members could describe it as a “people’s movement” striving to build a new type of cooperative society in which everyone had access food, education, modern conveniences, and security from childhood through old age, in sickness and health. Organizers approached the building of the party as they had when building the wheat pool or the SGGGA, “because Organization is Civilization: Co-operation to form the family. Co-operation of families to form the tribe. Co-operation of tribes to form the nation...Co-operation in government, transportation, roads, health.”⁹⁹

Despite rhetoric suggesting the candidates were above partisanship, the CCF had to get candidates elected to local, provincial, and federal office. Though the political arm of the party employed campaign managers to broadly manage constituencies and polls, the grassroots canvasser represented the most important part of the CCF’s organizing machine. Party literature emphasized the significance of the canvasser in creating a brotherhood and fellowship of socialism. The person-to-person, door-to-door organizer sought to create goodwill for the party, identify potential CCF support in a given area, espouse CCF political doctrine and platforms, secure financial contributions, counteract misinformation, and turn supporters into paying and voting members.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Lipset, “The Rural Community and Political Leadership in Saskatchewan,” 417-25.

⁹⁹ *It’s Up to You!* n.d., Undated Material, CCF Pamphlet Collection, University of Saskatchewan Special Collections; *What Organization Has Done*, n.d., Pamphlet 3.3, Pamphlet Collection, Box 3, SAB Regina.

¹⁰⁰ *Suggestions to CCF Canvassers*, n.d., Undated Material, CCF Pamphlet Collection, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections.

Additional organizational techniques supplemented the grassroots canvassing efforts. Members were urged to hold house meetings in their neighborhoods to introduce CCF candidates in informal settings, including women's afternoon tea parties or lunches. The CCF made frequent use of political advertisements via the radio and newspapers. The party attempted to appeal to potential members by explaining how policy was created at the local and constituency level, and how the local unit had ample space for participation.¹⁰¹

This emphasis on the grassroots meant innovation often occurred at the constituency level. Florence H. Barker, secretary-treasurer of the Pheasant Hills CCF Provincial Constituency pioneered the use of lantern slides and motion pictures for educational purposes. She presented eye-catching ideas such as showing scenes of a cancer victim's funeral to highlight the CCF Health Programme, or presenting images of elderly people working themselves to death without a pension, which the party proposed to provide if elected.¹⁰²

Barker also understood that visuals and motion pictures could be utilized to transcend the language barrier when canvassing ethnic constituencies. The use of pictures of the Old Country and cooperatives, she suggested, could bring foreign voters into the CCF fold.¹⁰³ This approach was important because ethnic minorities were underrepresented in the CCF in Saskatchewan. By the end of the 1930s, the two major ethnic minorities, Ukrainians and Germans, represented about fifteen and ten percent of the Saskatchewan population, respectively, but only about ten and three percent of CCF leaders, respectively. Ukrainian hostility towards socialism, born of their experience as refugees of the Russian Revolution, helps explain this. So does religion.

¹⁰¹ *CCF Organization Guide*, n.d., and *It's Up to You!* Undated Material, CCF Pamphlet Collection, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections.

¹⁰² George H. Williams memo, 21 Apr. 1936, File VIII.31, Folder 2, Records of the SGGGA, FUC, UFC-SS, SAB Saskatoon.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Traditional Catholic suspicion of socialism influenced its members, largely ethnic immigrants such as Ukrainians, Germans, and the French. Furthermore, the Liberal Party in the province had always been the party of the ethnic immigrant and also had the backing of the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁰⁴

CCF leadership and membership came largely from those groups with traditional high social status in the rural community. Scandinavians, the social equals of the British in Western Canada, and Brits themselves predominated at all levels of the party. Scandinavians had always been active in the various cooperative movements in Saskatchewan, given their experience in their home countries. They were also adherents of various Protestant denominations. The United Church of Canada, for example, founded in 1925 as a merger of four Protestant denominations and Canada's largest Protestant church, had a liberal and inclusive worldview and a bottom-up structure and represented over half of the Saskatchewan CCF leadership by the mid-1940s. In 1931, for example, the Saskatchewan conference of the United Church called for the replacement of the capitalist system with a cooperative society that operated in the interest of human need rather than private profit. The Lutheran Church mirrored the outlook of the United Church and harbored a large percentage of the Scandinavian rural community in the province.¹⁰⁵

Youth played a much different role in the CCF than they did in the NDFU. The Saskatchewan CCF did not put much effort into organizing young people, so the youth had to do it themselves and then seek official acceptance by the provincial party. The Communist Party in

¹⁰⁴ Lipset, "The Rural Community and Political Leadership in Saskatchewan," 419-22; Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 209-10.

¹⁰⁵ *The Evolution of a Policy*, 1932. Pamphlet 3.11, Pamphlet Collection, Box 3, SAB Regina; Lipset, "The Rural Community and Political Leadership in Saskatchewan," 420-22.

Canada did more to shape the contours of youth involvement in leftist politics than did the CCF.¹⁰⁶

Young people from Saskatchewan constituted a noticeable presence at the Regina Conference of 1933, which formulated CCF doctrine. The Junior section of the UFC and Regina Young People's Socialist League attended this key CCF convention. In the summer of 1934 the CCYM officially came to be as CCF youth from across Canada met in Winnipeg. At this early date, most CCYM members were jobless youth with little prospects and less money. In Saskatchewan, which had the largest CCYM enrollment, members represented a broad spectrum of society, and included representatives from political, labor, farm, and church groups.¹⁰⁷

The Communist Party of Canada did more to shape the CCYM movement than did the CCF itself. For example, at the first annual convention of the Saskatchewan CCYM in October 1934, delegates refused to sanction cooperation with the Young Communist League during the Popular Front. Announced by Moscow in the mid-1930s, the Popular Front strategy argued that to combat the rising threat of fascism, communists should work with any willing left-leaning groups. The CCYM-SS resolved instead to focus on the education of Saskatchewan youth in socialist doctrine. Despite the reluctance to officially join the Popular Front, there was usually no problem in having CCYM members participating informally in the more action-oriented activities of the Canadian Youth Congress, the arm of the Popular Front in Canada. The communists' militancy and willingness to confront the capitalist state pulled the young socialists

¹⁰⁶ James Naylor, "Socialism for a New Generation: CCF Youth in the Popular Front Era," *The Canadian Historical Review* 94 (March, 2013): 58.

¹⁰⁷ *Western Producer*, 26 July 1934, p. 2; Naylor, "Socialism for a New Generation," 61-76.

into action. For example, the CCYM in Saskatchewan joined forces with communists during clashes resulting from a protest movement that came to be known as the On-to-Ottawa Trek.¹⁰⁸

Beginning in October 1932 the Bennett government created relief camps where single, homeless, unemployed men labored at various government work-relief projects in exchange for basic necessities and a paltry wage. After almost three years of such experience, the camps predictably became centers of disgruntlement and restlessness. In April 1935 hundreds walked out of a Vancouver relief camp and decided to present grievances to the Prime Minister. The men boarded trains and the On-to-Ottawa Trek began, attracting hundreds more of the discontented. CCYM groups across Canada strongly supported the relief strikers.

Bennett labeled the Trekkers communists and ordered the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) to stop the caravan at Regina, which they did in June 1935. The Saskatchewan CCYM group in Regina participated actively on the pro-Trekkers' Citizen's Emergency Committee and openly backed the men and their cause. On 1 July, however, a riot erupted across downtown Regina when the RCMP and local police attempted to arrest the leaders, leading to the deaths of two strikers and injuring hundreds.¹⁰⁹

Though the communists in Canada shaped the CCYM to a large degree, the CCF also created educational and social structures for young people which mirrored but never reached the level of the efforts of the Farmers Union. Summer camps brought teenagers to Crystal Lake, near Canora, beginning in 1936, and winter schools brought younger members of a given constituency together to examine policy and political tactics for the coming year. Many adult

¹⁰⁸ *Western Producer*, 11 Oct. 1934, p. 3.

¹⁰⁹ Naylor, "Socialism for a New Generation," 74-75; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 319-20.

CCF members noted the challenge of getting their own youth to find interest in policy and politics, while young communists were engaging and confronting capitalist.¹¹⁰

Binational Connection and Cooperation Between Agrarian Organizations in North Dakota and Saskatchewan during the Great Depression

Twenty-five years of sustained interaction and the cross-border diffusion of ideas and forms of agrarian organization in North Dakota and Saskatchewan came to an end at the onset of the Great Depression. Since 1905 the forms of organization across the international border had been parallel to each other. Both the Equity Cooperative Exchange and the Grain Growers' Grain Company cooperatively marketed members' grain. As a political entity, the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota and Saskatchewan sought radical reform and public ownership. The western Canadian wheat pools and the North Dakota-Montana Wheat Growers' Association operated identically under Aaron Sapiro's agricultural commodity marketing plan.

In the 1930s, the organizational forms diverged. The North Dakota Farmers Union formed as a body centered upon business cooperatives and became tied to the federal government and federal largesse. While envisioning the creation of a "cooperative commonwealth," the NDFU operated within the capitalist system and financially enjoyed increasing profits as the decade unfolded. The CCF was purely a political party, seeking power through elections and the parliamentary system. As Sidney Tarrow notes, transnational exchange stems from ideological affinity, but also flourish when two organizations have something to gain from the relationship—when they each have something to offer the other. It is not surprising, then, that M.J. Coldwell, leader of the farmer-labor CCF party, did not connect with the Farmers

¹¹⁰ McHenry, *The Third Force in Canada*, 96-97.

Union, but did address the Farmer-Labor state legislature in Minnesota in 1935 and characterize it as “a symbol of the unity of spirit between our two organizations which will inspire us to carry forward the work of building a better world.”¹¹¹

Growing connections did reemerge in the mid-to-late 1930s between two farmers’ movements with similar forms of organization. Looking for ways to combat the wave of farm foreclosures in Saskatchewan, the UFC attended the National Farmers’ Holiday Association Annual Convention in Iowa in May 1933. There, the UFC adopted the Holiday strategy of Councils of Defense, though the Saskatchewan organization referred to them as “Defence Units.” These local bodies met with creditors and government representatives and mediated the adjustment of debts, though they did not intimidate bankers and judges as did some of their American counterparts.¹¹²

The UFC and other cooperative organizations in Saskatchewan regenerated connections with North Dakota farmers during the later 1930s. In 1936, the UFC Board of Directors reported that, regarding cooperative endeavors, “progress is slow” because of the lack of strong local leadership and farmer apathy. By the next year, the UFC had modestly shored up its finances and for the first time since 1929 had cash on hand. In conjunction with various provincial cooperatives, the UFC brought to Saskatchewan Morris Erickson and Glenn Talbott of the Farmers Union to speak on Danish folk schools, the NDFU Co-operative Institute, and the correspondence courses. Gladys Talbott Edwards too visited Saskatchewan to speak to the women’s section of local co-ops. Agrarian cooperation is the same in both countries, Edwards

¹¹¹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 187-88. For the Coldwell quote, see Richard M. Valelly, *Radicalism in the States: The Minnesota Farmer-Labor party and the American Political Economy* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 210, n. 2.

¹¹² Proceedings of 1933 UFC Convention, 37, Folder 1.7; and Proceedings of 1934 UFC Convention, 34, Folder 1.8.

remarked, and only when they sang “God Save the Queen” did she realize she was in a foreign country.¹¹³

The story of the Farmers Union “co-operative tractor” in Saskatchewan illustrates the rejuvenated interactions centered upon cooperation. By 1935, the NDFU worked with engineers to develop an innovative new farm tractor. The co-op tractor, unique to the Farmers Union in North Dakota, boasted five-speed transmission which propelled it to up to forty miles-per-hour, electric headlights and starters, and rubber tires. Throughout 1938 officials of the Farmers Union Central Exchange in St. Paul corresponded with representatives of the Saskatchewan Co-operative Wholesale Society of Saskatoon and with the Consumers’ Co-operative Refinery of Regina, both owned and operated by the same group of cooperative farmers and both affiliated with the Canadian Wheat Pool. R.A. Robinson, a director in both the wholesale co-op and the wheat pool, became interested in the demonstrator cooperative tractor. Robinson and his son Earl visited the Farmers Union plant, purchased the tractor, and drove it the roughly 800 miles back to Regina.¹¹⁴

When they returned to Regina, with Earl driving the tractor, local police ticketed him for speeding. When Robinson showed up in court on behalf of his son, he told the judge about the history of the Farmers Union tractor and their journey in driving it from Minnesota through North Dakota and into Saskatchewan. Several reporters present for the day’s court proceedings picked up on the interesting story, and soon every major news agency in Canada, from Toronto to Vancouver reported on the Farmers Union cooperative tractor and the fact that Earl likely

¹¹³ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 6 Nov. 1939, p. 2; 15 July 1940, p. 3; 6 June 1938, p. 3; 4 July 1938, p. 1; 15 Aug. 1938, p. 8; 19 Sept. 1938, p. 2; 6 Nov. 1939, p. 2; Proceedings of 1936 UFC Convention, 32-33; Proceedings of 1937 UFC Convention, 9.

¹¹⁴ *Farmers Union Herald*, June 1938, p. 4.

represented the first person in Regina, and possibly Canada, to receive a speeding ticket with a farm tractor. After Robinson paid the speeding ticket, he drove the tractor to Saskatchewan University where the Co-operative School put it on display.¹¹⁵

Conclusion

An aging resident of Benson County, North Dakota recalled that during the Great Depression government recognition of the needs of farmers and the various New Deal agricultural programs represented one of the most significant developments of the decade. In fact, the federal government played a major role in the success of the Farmers Union. New Deal support also strengthened local economies, as it created more supportive bonds between businesses and county Farmers Unions. A Ward County Farmers Union member exclaimed, “You bet, the businessmen wanted the farmers to get aid from the Federal Government then!” Significantly, North Dakota received the second largest amount of funding per capita from the AAA, FSA, and Farm Credit Administration. North Dakota also ranked high on per capita basis in FERA relief. Without a doubt, this money solved problems and made farmers and residents grateful for federal assistance.¹¹⁶

In Canada, municipalities, responsible by law for local relief, wilted under the pressure of the Great Depression. For the remainder of the decade this fundamental situation did not change

¹¹⁵ Ibid.; Hanson, *Changing Landscapes*, 17; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 65.

¹¹⁶ Untitled interview with Benson Co. resident, Bert M. Salisbury Collection, NDSU; Erickson, *Fifty Years*, 5; William C. Pratt, “Rethinking the Farm Revolt of the 1930s,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 8 (Summer, 1988): 131-39; Pratt, “Rural Radicalism on the Northern Plains, 1912-1950,” *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 42 (Winter, 1992), 51; Leonard J. Arrington and Don C. Reading, “New Deal Economic Programs in the Northern Tier States, 1933-1939,” in ed. William Lang, *Centennial West: Essays on the Northern Tier States* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1991), 228-41.

very much. The federal government never planned or organized its own long-term approach to the catastrophe, and, in contrast to the Great Plains, the problems of relief and unemployment only worsened after 1935. The two Prime Ministers of the decade, R.B. Bennett and Mackenzie King, followed relatively conservative and guarded courses of action.¹¹⁷

On the national stage the responses of political authorities to the challenges from the left created distinctive contours in the U.S. and Canada. Roosevelt incorporated the rhetoric of groups on the left (such as his attacks on big business and wealth concentration, proposed tax reform, and support for unions) and worked to avoid alienating leftist political groups (for example, by providing to progressive third party groups in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and New York access to federal monies). In creating this progressive coalition, FDR won big in 1936. Even the Communist Party supported Roosevelt in the later 1930s.¹¹⁸

The presence of the CCF on the provincial and national political stages pushed the Liberals towards the center. The farmers and laborers occupied the left position in Canada, while the absence of a party left of the Democrats enabled FDR to build a progressive coalition. Furthermore, the parliamentary system provides for even a few third-party MLAs and MPs to enter into public debate and get their message into the public dialogue. CCF MPs, for example, participated in every parliamentary debate from 1935 onward, and CCF leaders shared the platform with the Prime Minister. The parliamentary structure also allows third parties to press minority governments to action. Prime Minister King admitted the CCF served “the valuable function of popularizing reforms so that he could introduce them when public opinion was ripe.”

¹¹⁷ Howard R. Lamar, “Comparing Depressions: The Great Plains and Canadian Prairie Experiences, 1929-1941,” in eds. Gerald D. Nash and Richard W. Etulain, *The Twentieth Century West: Historical Interpretations* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989), 194-95.

¹¹⁸ Lipset and Marks, *It Didn't Happen Here*, 72-78.

In essence, “The young men who became New Dealers in the United States became CCFers in Canada.”¹¹⁹

The New Deal boosted morale and halted the worst conditions of starvation but did not alter the fundamental agricultural problems of the northern plains. The need to preserve land values, pay debts and mortgages, or keep agricultural commodity prices at or around parity, were never structurally addressed by the Roosevelt administration. Conversely, structural change is exactly what the CCF championed. Land policy, socialized health care, and debt restructuring all suggested a new form of cooperative and socialist society. The many decades of provincial government activism left prairie residents with an expectation for the government of Saskatchewan to do something. In North Dakota, less had been expected from the states and more from the federal government, such as the McNary-Haugen bills or Hoover’s Farm Board. The New Deal tempered farmer radicalism, but Ottawa’s weak response had the opposite effect and pushed farmers to create more radical alternatives such as the CCF.¹²⁰

The Farmers Holiday movement was confrontational, aggressive, and could have led the Farmers Union on a more radical, and perhaps political, trajectory. But the New Deal institutionalized contention, leading the NDFU into the embrace of the New Deal and transforming the organization into a powerful interest group and agrarian political lobbying arm. The economic crisis of the 1930s, and the federal and provincial governments’ rejection of the demands of farmers and laborers created a powerful new national third party composed of leftist agrarians and workers. Both the Farmers Union and the CCF used the language of socialism, of

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 79-81; Penner, *The Canadian Left*, 203-204.

¹²⁰ Lamar, “Comparing Depressions,” 180-97; John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies*, 4th ed. (Athens: The University of GA Press, 2008), 133.

the cooperative commonwealth, but gave it divergent organizational forms. And both had to be malleable with regard to the “land question,” though the CCF took longer to clarify its position.¹²¹

It is apparent that the movements of leftist agrarians in the western borderlands of the U.S. and Canada transcended the organizations of the Farmers Union and the CCF. This brings up an old question: Was the CCF movement or a party?¹²² Perhaps CCF members themselves did not have a clear answer. In addition to difficulties of building a strong social, cooperative, education, and youth program, the CCF also had to contend with the real challenges of politics. It also had to deal with sustaining enthusiasm after electoral defeat. The CCF did so with what Mildred Schwartz calls “strategies of persistence.” One strategy is mergers with other party movements and organizations. Nationally, the CCF emerged as an amalgamation with farm groups, labor groups, and intellectuals, all with their own specialties, strengths, and experiences with politics. Another factor in the CCF’s persistence in the face of adversity is leaders’ willingness to be flexible with ideology. Though ideology is certainly important, CCF leaders altered foci in response to changing conditions and in response to electoral failure, especially after the political losses in the 1934 Saskatchewan provincial contest. Persistence, finally, is

¹²¹ Mildred A. Schwartz makes the point that the development of “socialist” agrarian movements in the northern plains borderlands suggest “it is time to come to terms with the fact that it is usually socialism’s substitutes, and not socialism itself, that are pathways for the emergence of politically significant movements in Canada and the United States.” Schwartz, “Political Protest in the Western Borderlands: Can Farmers Be Socialists?” in ed. Robert Lecker, *Borderlands: Essays in Canadian-American Relations* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1991), 47.

¹²² This is an older debate, centered around Leo Zakuta, *A Protest Movement Becalmed* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964) and Young, *Anatomy of a Party* on the “movement” side, and the work of Peter Sinclair on the “political party side,” in “The Saskatchewan CCF” and “The Saskatchewan CCF and the Communist Party in the 1930s.”

found in mobilizing or revitalizing existing organizations. The UFC lived on in the CCF and provided resources and manpower for the party.¹²³

Groups with the characteristics of a social movement, that also believe existing political parties are unable or unwilling to solve their problems and thus seek to influence politics and government directly, is a helpful conceptualization of a party movement. It has certain characteristics. As a party movement, the CCF was able to work outside the established institutional processes, unite leaders and followers through beliefs regarding what is wrong and what actions are needed, and work from the conviction that the two major parties could not adequately address problems, while still seeking to directly influence the course of government through the conviction that democratic elections and legislatures were the accepted means of reform. Such persistence in the CCF as a party movement helps explain the reasons why the party did not dissolve after lackluster political showings in the 1934 and 1938 provincial elections. Despite the disappointment, party leaders could boast after 1934 of becoming the official opposition in the legislature, a parliamentary perch from which to proselytize and legislate. On the ground, the CCF constantly challenged the Liberal Government to provide relief to suffering farmers. In contrast, the Farmers Union dominated North Dakota through the 1930s and faced very little opposition. The NPL-dominated state government of William Langer worked with the organization, as did the federal Roosevelt administration. The NDFU did face some legislative challenges from the farmers' old foe in Minneapolis, the Chamber of

¹²³ In the debate over whether the CCF represented a party or movement, I think Schwartz is right to characterize the CCF as a "party movement." See Mildred Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada: Strategies of Persistence* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 7-12. William C. Pratt also highlights persistence as a key component of third-party success in "Politics in Alberta and Saskatchewan," 54.

Commerce, but these were easily rebuffed. It is telling that such challenges were confined to Minnesota. Opposition to the Farmers Union in North Dakota was almost absent.¹²⁴

During and after World War II, however, the NDFU would face significant challenges in the state, from a conservative state government and the beginning of the Red Scare. So did the CCF in Saskatchewan, though it did so with majority control of the provincial government. All the while, the farmers of North Dakota and Saskatchewan renewed binational contacts on the basis of economic cooperation and mutual respect.

¹²⁴ A Chamber-backed Minnesota state senator accused FUTA of selling incorrectly graded wheat to the Farmers Nation, precipitating the “Elevator M. Case.” After two months of hearings in 1931, the Minnesota legislature and governor uncovered the role of two Chamber employees in tampering with FUTA grain samples. Private grain merchants instigated other minor complaints suggesting cooperative grain marketing bodies received advantages under laws applicable to grain marketing in Minnesota. Knight, *Grass Roots*, 47-48; Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada*, 7-8.

Chapter Six

Farm Organizations and Social Democrats in War and Cold War, 1939-1950

In October 1948 a tour sponsored by the Federal Council of Churches, a socially liberal national organization of Protestant denominations, snaked its way across the cooperative countryside of the North American northern plains. The interested cooperators visited Saskatchewan, the “banner co-operative province” of Canada, which had been governed since mid-1944 by the socialist Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). As the tour had done in past years, it visited and learned about cooperative creameries, oil refineries, and grain elevators, and also attended the annual convention of the CCF.¹

From there the group, headed by Dr. J. Henry Carpenter, Chairmen of the Committee on Cooperatives of the Federal Council of Churches, crossed the international border and visited several points in North Dakota representative of the strong cooperative ethos of the state Farmers Union. The city of Williston, North Dakota, impressed Dr. Carpenter, who called it the most cooperative city he had ever seen. In Williston, Williams County, one do just about anything through a Farmers Union co-op, from eat at a cafeteria to purchase insurance. Before heading back home, the tour also spent time at the wheat pool headquarters in Manitoba and at additional Farmers Union cooperatives in St. Paul. The NDFU had long espoused ideas of the “cooperative commonwealth,” which suggested economic cooperation and social democratic government policies were in harmony with Christian teaching. Liberal church groups such as the Federal

¹ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 18 Oct. 1948, p. 5; *Saskatchewan Commonwealth* (hereafter *Commonwealth*), 26 June 1946, p. 9; Fr. John A. Hardon, “National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.,” *New Catholic Encyclopedia* 10 (1967): 233-36.

Council of Churches proved to be a welcome ally as the Farmers Union fought to protect federal agricultural legislation during World War II.²

During the tour's stop at the North Dakota Farmers Union headquarters at Jamestown, Quentin Burdick, executive-director of the Farmers Union Progressive Alliance (FUPA), addressed the group's great interest in the Saskatchewan CCF. The socialist party had recently won a second straight majority government in the province and instituted a variety of state owned industries. It was popular and provided public services to a degree unknown in North Dakota and the United States. At this time Burdick led the state Farmers Union in its first direct foray into state politics. Previously, the organization met significant success as an agricultural lobbying and pressure group. During the Depression and World War II, the organization successfully allied itself with the New Deal to bring high levels of federal largesse to North Dakota farmers, and pressured successive state governments to enact broad portions of its platform. However, beginning with a tide of political conservatism in North Dakota in the postwar period, the Farmers Union found itself for the first time besieged at home. The 1947 state legislature narrowly avoided passage of a series of anti-cooperative measures aimed squarely at the myriad of NDFU co-ops around the state. Thus the Farmers Union Progressive Alliance, a liberal political force backed by the NDFU and the left wing of the Nonpartisan

² *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 5 Aug. 1946, p. 5; 18 Oct. 1948, p. 5. For the Federal Council's interest in cooperatives, see for example Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, *Annual Report: 1947*, (New York: 1947), 17-18, *Biennial Report: 1948* (New York, 1948), 71-72, and *Annual Report: 1949* (New York: 1949), 17-18. Between 1942 and 1946, church groups such as the Catholic Rural Life Conference and the National Conference of Catholics Charities joined the Farmers Union and labor groups in testimony to Congress advocating the continuation of funding for the Farm Security Administration. The FSA was under attack by the more conservative Farm Bureau and from Republicans and conservative southern Democrats. See Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics: The Rise and Decline of the Farm Security Administration* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1968), 357), and Walter W. Wilcox, *The Farmer in the Second World War* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1973), 382.

League, nominated candidates in the Republican Party state primaries with the main goal to challenge the rise of political conservatism in the state. For FUPA leader Quentin Burdick and other Farmers Union stalwarts in North Dakota, the CCF in Saskatchewan represented agrarian left-liberalism at its strongest.³

The NDFU certainly demonstrated interest in socialism and the CCF. That the Saskatchewan governing party held conferences with U.S. socialist leaders and frequently voiced support for perennial Socialist Party candidate Norman Thomas is indicative of the broad reach of agrarian left-liberalism across the North American northern plains. Soon after taking office in 1944 Saskatchewan CCF vice president Carlyle King traveled across North Dakota to stump for the third-party candidate. Sponsored by the Socialist Party of the United States, King spent time visiting the co-op city of Williston and other landmarks of North Dakota cooperation and spoke widely on the history, program, and goals of the CCF.⁴

Farmers Union leaders in North Dakota had an easy time sympathizing with and supporting the broad goals of the CCF, but when the farmers there attempted similar reforms they faced a more hostile postwar political environment and accusations that the organization represented a communist front. Such pressure forced the NDFU to intervene in state politics for the first time. Red-baiting also pushed the Farmers Union away from left-liberalism and more towards a centrist position regarding foreign policy. To prove their anticommunist credentials and maintain the support of the national Democratic Party, NDFU president Glenn Talbott and national Farmers Union president James G. Patton purged the organization of leftist elements and supported the Korean War. In a less inimical political environment, one not distorted by

³ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 18 Oct. 1948, p. 5.

⁴ *Commonwealth*, 20 Sept. 1944, p. 2; 14 Aug. 1946, p. 1, 6; 27 Oct. 1948, p. 8; 24 Nov. 1948, p. 4.

McCarthyism, the CCF ruled Saskatchewan for twenty years after 1944 and managed to pioneer social welfare legislation in Canada and bring the two major parties further to the left.

In doing so, an interesting juxtaposition developed between North Dakota and Saskatchewan. In the former, the Farmers Union controlled all agrarian organization in the state, from cooperatives, to political pressure groups, to low-cost health services, though it faced a conservative state government. In Saskatchewan the CCF came to power, but maintained a cool relationship with the myriad of unaffiliated cooperatives. The province also fractured into competing farmers' economic, educational, and grain marketing groups. The divided agrarian landscape resulted in Saskatchewan's organized farmers looking south to the business models centralized under the NDFU banner, and the CCF hoping for the rise of a social democratic third party in the United States.

Saskatchewan and Agrarian Organization during World War Two and the Early Cold War, 1939-1950

Canada officially entered World War II about one week after the Nazi invasion of Poland in September 1939. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, as a national party with a number of MPs in the House of Commons, and as the Official Opposition in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly, faced a dilemma as a socialist and pacifist political organization. The party's foreign policy during the 1930s included strong stands for disarmament, world peace, and the diplomacy through the League of Nations. The CCF refused any measures that involved Canada in foreign wars. Essentially, the party's ideology viewed war as a struggle amongst

capitalist nations for raw materials and markets. Many prominent party leaders hoped Canada would remain neutral when Britain declared war on Germany.⁵

Saskatchewan MP Tommy Douglas recognized Hitler as an “international gangster” and understood the threat to democracy. He rationalized his acquiescence, as a socialist and pacifist, to Canada’s involvement in the conflict by claiming Canada should play a part in the restoration of order to the world community. The CCF National Council released a statement about World War II and Canada’s role in wartime. Though the party reluctantly supported Canada’s entry into war, it denounced the abridgement of civil liberties and war profiteering, and called for the nationalization of vital industries. The party’s statement strongly opposed conscription or the dispatch of Canadian troops to Europe, and instead urged the defense of North America and economic aid to Britain and France.⁶

Minor agrarian criticism did emerge over the government’s refusal to consider parity prices, the initiation of an income tax on farmers, and farmers’ belief that there remained insufficient planning for the postwar period. There was no agrarian upheaval as during World War I. Essentially, farmers and farm organizations put forth a moderate tone and sacrificed as did others sectors of society in deference to the nation’s war effort. Farmers and their organizations generally accepted without major protest the agricultural policy of the Dominion government, and these measures did not in a significant way upend western wheat farming. After Germany’s occupation of most of Western Europe closed Canada’s agricultural export markets, legislation such as the Wheat Reduction Act (1941) encouraged diversified farming and

⁵ John Herd Thompson and Stephen J. Randall, *Canada and the United States: Ambivalent Allies*, 4th ed. (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2008), 142; Dean E. McHenry, *The Third Force in Canada: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation, 1932-1948* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1950), 288-91.

⁶ *Commonwealth*, 14 Oct. 1939, p. 1-2, 4-5; McHenry, *The Third Force*, 292-93.

production increases in pigs, dairy, and poultry. Government focus on the maintenance of adequate farm labor generally succeeded as well. Furthermore, farmers and their organizations cheered the reinstatement of the Canadian Wheat Board in September 1943 as the monopoly purchaser of wheat.⁷

As the war continued and the CCF approached its tenth year of existence, it had to face the basic requirements of a political party: victory at the provincial and national polls. The party, since its first lackluster electoral showing in the 1934 Saskatchewan provincial elections, had moved slowly but steadily rightward with a more practical and less radical platform. Gone were references to socialism, the destruction of capitalism, and the use-lease land policy. In their place the CCF spoke simply of security for workers and farmers, debt reduction, socialized health care, and broader opportunities in education.⁸

Though the CCF vote in Saskatchewan increased in the 1940 federal election to 29 percent, this was accomplished wholly without urban and labor support. Party leaders in Saskatchewan addressed this deficiency in the war years leading up to the CCF victory in the province in 1944. Led by Major John Coldwell, M.P. for Rosetown-Biggan in Saskatchewan, the provincial Opposition party crafted legislation in support of trade unions and developed aspects of a welfare state that could appeal to the working class. Coldwell, a bespectacled Englishman and former secondary school teacher and principal, took over the national leadership from an ailing J.S. Woodsworth and explained how farmers in the mechanical age were industrial

⁷ Ian MacPherson and John Herd Thompson, "An Orderly Reconstruction: Prairie Agriculture in World War Two," in ed. Donald H. Akenson, *Canadian Papers in Rural History IV* (Gananoque, ON: Langdale Press, 1984), 11-21, 25-27; *Commonwealth*, 11 Sept. 1940, p. 1, 4.

⁸ J.F. Conway, "From 'Agrarian Socialism' to 'Natural' Governing Party: The CCF/NDP in Saskatchewan, 1932-2007," in eds. Murray Knuttila and Bob Stirling, *The Prairie Agrarian Movement Revisited: Centenary Symposium on the Foundation of the Territorial Grain Growers Association* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2007), 216.

workers themselves and thus could sympathize with Eastern labor. The capitalist economic system, he argued, oppressed both farmers and workers.⁹

Coldwell mentored and groomed a young Tommy Douglas to take over the Saskatchewan CCF presidency in 1941. When they met in the early years of the Depression, Douglas had just become an ordained minister and the duo was known as “teacher and preacher.” CCF delegates elected him president because, unlike the rigid and ideological former president George H. Williams, he had no party enemies and thrived on creating an inviting and amicable intra-party atmosphere. Douglas soon became the face of the CCF. Born in Scotland in 1904, his family immigrated to Canada and he grew up in the prairies. The violence of the 1919 Winnipeg Strike shaped his social outlook, as did the Social Gospel movement. When the Depression hit, Douglas, now a Baptist minister, settled in the economically devastated region centered on Weyburn, Saskatchewan. The suffering he witnessed pushed him into politics, and he served from 1935-1944 as an MP in the House of Commons. Everyone, even his most bitter political enemies, recognized Douglas’s exceptional gifts for oratory and debating. His political skills were also unmatched. Undoubtedly the party owed many thousands of votes to their leader’s personal charisma and witty politicking (when a political opponent criticized his lack of farming experience, Douglas replied “I never laid an egg either, but I know more about omelets than most hens.”). And as a preacher, accusations that Douglas was an atheistic communist could not stick.¹⁰

⁹ Lorne A. Brown, “The Early CCF in Saskatchewan as the Political Vehicle of Left Agrarian Populism,” in eds. Knuttila and Stirling, *The Prairie Agrarian Movement Revisited*, 183-84; “Can Coldwell Lead the C.C.F. to Power?” 31 May 1941, p. 8, CCF Pamphlet Collection, File III, University of Saskatchewan Special Collections.

¹⁰ Alan Whitehorn, *Canadian Socialism: Essays on the CCF-NDP* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), 143-51; Ivan Avakumovic, *Socialism in Canada: A Study of the CCF-NDP in Federal and Provincial Politics* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 170. Two

Saskatchewan Liberals did attempt to brand CCF members as cranks and extremists, though this tactic backfired because CCF membership was very high, with some estimates claiming up to one in five farm families in the province as registered supporters. These farmers and workers saw themselves and their leaders as regular people trying to better society, and did not much appreciate the Liberals' slander. This broad-based support in rural and urban areas filled CCF coffers, and allowed the party to run schools for organizers and potential candidates. The timing of the election augured well for the insurgent party. Fearing the CCF challenge, the Liberals pushed the election back one year, an obvious mistake and a blatant attempt to stem their challenger's momentum. In addition, the return of economic prosperity and the government's generally effective wartime planning convinced voters that an efficient welfare state could provide for the common good and stave off a potential postwar depression. The CCF, with its calls for centralized economic planning and state intervention, fit into this general expectation and reached the height of its popularity.¹¹

The Liberal Government had to defend a dismal record in office. Premier William Patterson asserted that no new government programs would be created until pending public debts were paid down. When the Liberals did offer farmers a package providing for seed grain, it came with a lien on future harvests. As the official Opposition since 1938, the eleven CCF MLAs opposed all the major Liberal legislation, and imparted an effective strategy involving the extensive reporting of legislative affairs and roll call votes. This allowed the CCF to incessantly attack the Liberals as insipid and unwilling to look to the future and offer innovative policies.

comprehensive biographies of Douglas are Walter Stewart, *The Life and Times of Tommy Douglas* (Toronto: McArthur & Co., 2003) and Thomas H. McLeod and Ian McLeod, *Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987).

¹¹ Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005), 339-40; Avakumovic, *Socialism in Canada*, 168-69.

This contrasted clearly with the CCF's bold platform of public services. The Liberals had not faced a competitive election since 1929 and they failed to recognize the electorate had changed since the Depression years and that the CCF was a much more formidable opponent than they had been in 1934 and 1938.¹²

The CCF routed all opponents in 1944, winning all but five of the fifty-two seats in the Legislative Assembly. The Liberals became the Opposition with a mere five seats. The CCF platform appealed across the social spectrum, and promised broad protections of civil liberties, the creation of a largely state-owned or -controlled economy, and the extension of health care and other social services. Farmer voters looked to assurances of protection from foreclosure, crop seizure, and crop failure, as well as debt reduction legislation. The labor program of "urban security" comprehensively supported trade unions and collective bargaining rights, paid vacations, better workers' compensation, and stricter enforcement of labor laws. These measures brought into the CCF fold the more conservative farmers, extensive labor support in cities and towns, and professionals and small businessmen. In all, the party demonstrated thorough election preparation, recruitment, and propaganda across the province on their way to winning a convincing mandate in June 1944.¹³

"Seldom has there been such passionate idealism in a party seeking political power," noted one young campaign worker. In cities, on farms, and in dusty living rooms across the province, CCF supporters let loose their excitement and optimism for the postwar world, as it

¹² For an example of how the CCF responded to Liberal and Conservative attacks, see *Conservative and Liberal Objections Answered*, n.d., CCF Pamphlet Collection, File III, University of Saskatchewan Special Collections; David E. Smith, *Prairie Liberalism: The Liberal Party in Saskatchewan, 1905-71* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1975), 245-50; McHenry, *The Third Force in Canada*, 211.

¹³ Lewis H. Thomas, "The CCF Victory in Saskatchewan, 1944," *Saskatchewan History* 34 (Winter, 1981): 1-16; Brown, "The Early CCF in Saskatchewan, 184; Conway, "From 'Agrarian Socialism,'" 218-20; McHenry, *The Third Force in Canada*, 211-14.

was “hard to get out of the way of twelve years’ ardent hoping.” “Regina went wild,” wrote an excited CCF voter. “The streets were jammed; street cars and buses were stopped in their tracks; thousands of people sang and danced as they marched. Regina saw more happy faces that night than have been seen for many a day. The hour of liberation had come.” Throngs of farmers, workers, the elderly, the young, and even businessmen and professions proclaimed the party’s mantra: “Humanity first, and Production for use and not for profit.”¹⁴

Led by Premier Douglas, the party in its first eighteen months implemented its policies and platform, including 196 legislative acts and the creation of four new government agencies and eleven Crown corporations. In addition to agricultural legislation, banner CCF programs included the Hospital Services Plan (1947), the first in North America to provide comprehensive care to all Saskatchewan residents. Also of note, the Government reorganized the education and school system (1945-46), initiated a compulsory auto insurance plan (1946), enacted a series of trade union legislation (1944), and put forth Canada’s first bill of rights (1947). For these measures and others, the Douglas administration created the Economic Advisory and Planning Board to coordinate state industries and programs, guide Crown corporations, and to act as the primary advisory body to the Premier and his cabinet.¹⁵

In the face of this significant growth of the public sector, Douglas and his cabinet worked to reassure the business community there were no plans for nationalization of private companies. The new CCF government also sought to demonstrate administrative proficiency and financial

¹⁴ *Commonwealth*, 21 June 1944, p. 2, 7.

¹⁵ *Humanity First!*, 1945, CCF Pamphlet Collection, File III, University of Saskatchewan Special Collections; *Review of CCF Legislation*, June 1949, File 3 (CCF-SS), Pamphlet Collection of Various Political Parties, UFC-SS Ltd. Collection, Saskatchewan Archives Board, Regina; A.W. Johnson, *Dream No Little Dreams: A Biography of the Douglas Government of Saskatchewan, 1944-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 24-66, 121-22, 145.

responsibility, and it did so via balanced budgets, a high credit rating, and the increasing support of the commercial sector. With no chance of federal monies coming from Mackenzie King's Parliament, and the excessive risks of implementing high taxes, the Douglas government successfully lobbied for loans from lenders, and even raised funds on Wall Street in New York City. Existing and new tax revenues, profits from the government corporations, and the elimination of graft and inefficiency financed these massive alterations.¹⁶

The CCF government in Saskatchewan was an early representation of the postwar social democratic state. The party's growing popularity in other provinces, and nationally in Canada, pressed the Tories and Liberals to embrace elements of liberal democracy. In addition to a majority government in Saskatchewan, the CCF in Ontario narrowly missed taking control of the province in 1943, though it did enjoy the status of the official Opposition. These victories, and good showings elsewhere in the Dominion, were made more menacing for the two major parties when Canada's rapidly growing union, the Canadian Congress of Labor, sided with the CCF on many issues and offered the party tacit support.¹⁷

Thus, as the war seemed to legitimize state planning, the Liberals and Conservatives claimed they could spearhead Canada's welfare state, though without the CCF's doctrinaire, bureaucratic, and socialist hues. King's ruling Liberals took the first steps with the inauguration of social security in 1943 and the creation of a new cabinet ministry to oversee and guide the nascent but enlarging social service state. And in the run-up to the 1945 federal elections, Conservatives joined Liberals in claiming they would provide a social safety net while retaining

¹⁶ Avakumovic, *Socialism in Canada*, 171-73.

¹⁷ *C.C.F. Handbook* (1948), 8-17, CCF Pamphlet Collection, File III, University of Saskatchewan, Special Collections; Donald Creighton, *The Forked Road: Canada, 1939-1957* (McClelland and Stewart, 1976), 80-89.

the major contours of free market capitalism and political democracy. The electorate returned King's Liberals, narrowly, followed closely by the Tories. The CCF made a good showing and earned the third largest number of votes. Canada's welfare state—universal health care, pension plans, unemployment insurance, and the like—came to full fruition in the 1960s, but in many ways the CCF pioneered the policies and pressed the two major parties to adopt the broad assumptions of social democracy. The Grits sometimes called CCF politicians “Liberals in a hurry,” and in doing so paid the “highest tribute...to a party of pacesetters.”¹⁸

In the late 1940s and 1950s, the CCF in Saskatchewan reached the pinnacle of its popularity and political power. After victory in the 1948 provincial elections, the CCF Government shifted emphasis from health and social services to economic development. Crown utility and resource development corporations stabilized, and in agriculture the party focused on conservation and irrigation projects. By the 1952 provincial elections, the CCF could boast of a myriad of accomplishments: government health care, public auto insurance, welfare programs, education reform, farm security measures, public debt reduction, infrastructure improvement, rural electrification, labor programs, and growing resource and industrial sectors of the economy.¹⁹

The party continued to win elections and form majority provincial governments in Saskatchewan, buoyed by the general economic prosperity of the postwar period. After victory in a fifth election in a row in June 1960, Premier Douglas soon stepped down as leader of the Saskatchewan Party to head the successor to the national CCF, the New Democratic Party

¹⁸ Creighton, *The Forked Road*, 102-155; Avakumovic, *Socialism in Canada*, 187-88.

¹⁹ Johnson, *Dream No Little Dreams*, 150-180. For a contemporary account of the position of the CCF in the late 1940s, see G.V. Ferguson, “Parties of Protest,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 253 (Sept., 1947): 32-39.

(NDP). Though there was a tense confrontation with provincial doctors in the early 1960s over the issue of government health care, the Saskatchewan CCF and later NDP remained a powerful force in provincial politics throughout the twentieth century.²⁰

This narrative might seem to suggest that the CCF and its members and leaders had an easy time winning and holding power and justifying their leftist program to the public. But in fact, fears of domestic communism and concerns about the expansion of Soviet domination challenged the party's rise during World War II and the early Cold War in the 1940s. United States and Canadian policy makers shared during and after the war a commitment to a new, stable world order, collective security, and the economic restructuring of Europe. They also, along with Prime Minister MacKenzie King and President Harry Truman shared apprehensions about a growing communist menace within their respective borders.²¹

Much of the attack on the CCF conflated the party's leftist, socialist ideology with fears of communism and totalitarianism, and came from powerful private interests, rather than from McCarthy-type figures in the government. The criticism and fear mongering began in 1943, at the height of the CCF's power, and also just as the party had publicly repudiated any connection with communism or communists in Canada or in the Soviet Union. Though less widespread and ineffective in Saskatchewan, where the CCF had formed a government and shown itself competent and non-ideological in stewardship of the political economy, anti-socialism/CCF propaganda did affect the party's performance at the polls in the late 1940s and 1950s. Led by promoters of the free market, such as the Property Owners of Ontario, the Toronto Board of Trade, and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, and augmented by large businesses and

²⁰ Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 373-386.

²¹ Thompson and Randall, *Ambivalent Allies*, 167-75.

corporations representing the oil, mining, auto, transportation, financial, and industrial sectors, literature and propaganda warning of a communist takeover found its way into provincial and national political contests. These entities worked behind the scenes and funneled money mostly to two fervent anti-socialist crusaders. Gladstone Murray, the former head of the Canadian Broadcast Corporation, made dozens of appearances and speeches annually for almost twenty years between the mid-1940s and the 1960s. Gladstone and B.A. Trestrail, a prominent businessman, fear-mongered their way across the country as they variously referred to the CCF as communist, socialist, and even fascist, and characterized the party as a threat to democracy and free enterprise.²²

The CCF received more subtle resistance from the Catholic Church. Beginning with the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, the Church weighted in on social issues and attempted to pave a middle path between liberalism/secularism and socialism. From then through the 1930s, Catholicism's official position included an unambiguous denunciation of socialism and affirmation of private property. In Canada in 1943, however, the archbishop of Quebec had read about national CCF leader M.J. Coldwell, and requested a meeting, from which the archbishop found no major fundamental disagreements between CCF doctrine and Catholic social teaching. The timing was perfect, and the CCF entered the 1944 Saskatchewan elections disseminating pamphlets that reprinted Canadian bishops' tacit permission to Catholics to vote for the CCF. At the same time, the bishops criticized communism, thereby drawing a clear line between Marxist revolutionary thought and Canadian-style social democracy.²³

²² John Boyko, *Into the Hurricane: Attacking Socialism and the CCF* (Winnipeg: J. Gordon Shillingford Publishing, 2006), chapters 1-3, and Appendix 2.

²³ Charles E. Curran, *Catholic Social Teaching, 1891-Present: A Historical, Theological, and Ethical Analysis* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 5-10; Gregory

The CCF in Saskatchewan exploited this opportunity and nominated a slate of Catholic candidates and courted Catholic spokesmen. One of the most remarkable was Father Eugene Cullinane, who joined the party in the 1940s. Cullinane had begun an academic study on the CCF, and came to conclude it represented the best ideals of Catholic social teaching, and, instead of promoting tyrannical government intervention as its critics charged, the party was a Canadian blend of Christian cooperation and British Fabianism. Shaped by the Depression experience, Cullinane saw his role in the party as a brother to farmers and workers who fought against the concentration of wealth and struggled to wrest democratic control from powerful businesses and financial interests. Catholic CCF candidates and spokesmen such as Father Cullinane contributed to the party receiving thirty-five percent of the provincial Catholic vote in 1952, a high point.²⁴

In comparison to the intense anticommunist fervor in the U.S. during the early Cold War period, the CCF in Canada confronted a political atmosphere with fewer constraints. Both the Liberals and Conservatives accepted, to varying degrees, the new active role of the government in socioeconomic affairs. Welfare-state measures in Canada were not considered evidence of communism as they often were in the U.S. The left-liberal Farmers Union had to create new frames of action and developed innovative tactics to maneuver in a political environment increasingly characterized by red-baiting. Such anticommunist extremism certainly did exist in Canada during the early Cold War, but not to the extent or degree to which it dominated the

Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism: Political Thought in the Thirties and Forties* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Co., 1980), 128-29.

²⁴ S.M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan: A Study in Political Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968 ed.), 457; Baum, *Catholics and Canadian Socialism*, 159-71.

landscape in the United States, and thus created more political opportunities for the CCF than were available to their left-liberal counterparts across the international border.²⁵

With the CCF dominating the political sphere in the province, cooperative, educational, and economic agrarian organizations clashed over their roles in postwar Saskatchewan and attempted to find a niche in their relationship with the new government. The ravages of the Great Depression had made their mark on the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, which was deeply indebted to the provincial government due to the overpayments of 1929-30. The grassroots spirit that animated the marketing organization faded and many were apathetic about the pool's place in provincial society. Members needed a focal point around which to rally, and war conditions provided it.²⁶

In 1940 and 1941 the Wheat Board initial payment, set by federal policy, never broke eighty cents per bushel. For Saskatchewan pool leaders and members this was unacceptable. Farmers had watched as the effects of low wheat prices destroyed their communities through deteriorating schools, infrastructure, and social and religious life. The pool, in late 1941, began to hold mass meetings across the province to mobilize farmers for a confrontation with Ottawa to raise the initial Wheat Board price to at least one dollar per bushel. Pool fieldmen began reporting back from the road that members were once again excited about their organization and eager to press Ottawa for higher prices. In February 1942, almost 200,000 pool members, farmers, businessmen, clergymen, and teachers in Saskatchewan made their way to the capitol during the "March on Ottawa" to deliver a petition demanding a "one dollar wheat" initial payment through the Wheat Board. Though not completely successful, the McKenzie King

²⁵ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 71-72.

²⁶ Garry Lawrence Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots: The Remarkable Story of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1984), 145.

Liberals raised the price to 90 cents, and, more importantly, ended private grain trading when the Wheat Board became compulsory in 1943.²⁷

Due to the return of prosperity in the 1940s, and the return of monopoly marketing powers to the Wheat Board, in the postwar period the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool experienced massive commercial growth and experienced the type of influence and success it had enjoyed in the 1920s. In 1949 an era in the pool's history happily closed when it paid over \$450,000 to the Saskatchewan government, the last remnant of its debt incurred eighteen years earlier as result of the onset of the Great Depression. Fieldmen of the resurgent pool took to spearheading cooperative educational campaigns across the province. This, along with the pool's forays into agricultural policy, encroached into the United Farmers of Canada—Saskatchewan Section (UFC) traditional arenas of provincial influence.²⁸

The UFC emerged from the Depression financially destroyed. The organization was forced to beg for money from the various consumer and producer co-ops in Saskatchewan, to no avail. During the war years, it clashed with Pool leadership over marketing policy and pricing. The leaders engaged in a public reflection regarding the identity of the organization and its reason for existence: Was the UFC an educational body? The Pool seemed to be taking over that role. Should the UFC act as a political pressure group? The CCF was already in power. What role does it have in terms of economics and cooperation? The pool dominated marketing, and various co-ops blanketed the rural areas of the province. The UFC re-styled itself as a militant farm organization, free from political and commercial control, willing to protect the interests of Saskatchewan farmers. Despite the CCF's growing social service state and the end of the worst

²⁷ *25 Years with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool*, n.d., n.p., File II.3, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Collection, SAB Regina; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 145-51.

²⁸ *25 Years*, n.p.; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 158-64.

of the Depression conditions, the small farmer suffered from stagnant or declining wheat prices coupled with rising consumer and industrial prices. Thus the UFC made the issue of parity pricing its major postwar goal.²⁹

The focus on parity and cost of production returns led the UFC away from consensus with the CCF, the wheat pool, and the cooperative community in Saskatchewan. UFC and pool leadership clashed over aspects of their overlapping membership, and did not agree on the preeminence of the parity issue. Since the cooperative community's refusal to shore up the finances of the United Farmers in the late 1930s and early 1940s, the UFC did not enjoy cordial relations with the cooperatives. Later, UFC presidents suggested the co-ops were not equipped to deal with the increasing complexities of postwar agriculture. And though the UFC supported the CCF in general, it felt no political party or government should take the place of a robust and active agrarian organization that served to protect the economic interests of agriculture. When CCF measures were deemed to protect parity pricing, the UFC mobilized its lodges in support. Other CCF agricultural measures received little to no support from the United Farmers.³⁰

Instead, the UFC focused its parity campaign at Ottawa. During the war, the UFC remained dissatisfied with, in their view, insufficient prices set by government policy. Leaders emphasized the difficulties placed upon small wheat farmers by federal agricultural diversification legislation. When the federal Liberals removed in 1946 the wartime price controls, and signed a wheat agreement with the United Kingdom setting a ceiling below the current world price, UFC spokesmen considered the farmers' position in great danger. President

²⁹ UFC 1942 Convention Report, 13, Folder 1.15, and 1947 Convention Report, 35, Folder 1.20, Annual Conventions—Reports, 1927-1949, UFC-SS Ltd. Collection, SAB Regina; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 373.

³⁰ UFC 1942 Convention Report, 21, Folder 1.15; UFC 1943 Convention Report, 9-10, Folder 1.16; UFC 1945 Convention Report, 9-16, Folder 1.18. Regarding an issue on which the CCF and the UFC worked together, see McLeod and McLeod, *Tommy Douglas*, 137-39.

Frank Appleby proclaimed farmers were in a “vice of rising costs and fixed and falling prices. The situation was desperate.”³¹

UFC struck in September 1946 for federal parity legislation and initiated a non-delivery movement in solidarity with the Alberta Farmers Union. In northern Saskatchewan, a newly settled region of comparatively smaller farmers, the UFC mobilized blockades of 750 delivery points with over 30,000 farmers withholding their wheat from the market. The strike had support in the west-central portion of the province, but in not many other areas. In terms of sheer numbers, the strike was impressive. The Saskatchewan wheat pool, however, roundly criticized the action, claiming it hurt their own marketing operation, and that UFC dissatisfaction with Ottawa’s pricing policies was better handled through the national farmer organization, the Canadian Federation of Agriculture. Saskatchewan cooperatives did not lend support to the UFC. The Douglas government, too, treaded carefully, and proposed a mild solution of the appointment of a commission to handle the disagreements between the Alberta and Saskatchewan organized farmers and Ottawa.³²

Nevertheless, the massive strikes in Saskatchewan and Alberta put pressure upon McKenzie King’s Liberal Government. UFC and AFU leaders went to Ottawa in October and reached an agreement with federal Minister of Agriculture Jimmy Gardner to end the non-delivery movement in the two provinces. The Liberals agreed to raise the participation payment

³¹ *Rural Romance*, n.d., File 3.6, Pamphlet Collection, UFC Collection, SAB Regina, 8; UFC 1945 Convention Report, 27, Folder 1.18; UFC 1946 Convention Report, 15, Folder 1.19; James Napier McCrorie, “The Saskatchewan Farmers’ Movement: A Case Study” (PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1972), 295-97; C.F. Wilson, *A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), 850.

³² *Rural Romance*, 8-9; Untitled Pamphlet, n.d., n.p., File 3.45, Pamphlet Collection, UFC Collection, SAB Regina; David Monod, “The End of Agrarianism: The Fight for Farm Parity in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1935-48,” *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (Fall, 1985): 130-37; McCrorie, “The Saskatchewan Farmers’ Movement,” 301-4.

on wheat pool certificates and address the deviation between export and domestic wheat prices. This was a minor victory that provided the UFC some publicity and a membership jump for a brief moment in late 1946 and early 1947. This could not be sustained. In 1949, at the annual UFC convention, delegates and members engaged in serious soul-searching. There seemed not to be a place for the UFC in Saskatchewan's farm community. A attending delegate remarked, "We were unhappy with the state of the UFC and the state of the farm movement...The Pool was not doing the job we felt should be done. The co-operatives and the CCF, although they had done a lot, had obviously not succeeded in solving all our problems. We needed something new to replace and do the job the UFC did in the twenties." They agreed that that "job" should be a new organization, free of commercial and political entanglements.³³

The new organization, the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union (SFU), elected a younger group of leaders, along with former CCF Minister of Natural Resources Joe L. Phelps as president. Though the SFU continued the fight for parity prices, it also advocated a cornucopia of issues, including combating rural depopulation, keeping farm machinery prices down, the need for adequate boxcars for wheat shipments, and demands for more elevator space and payments for stored grain. The organization even kept alive the perennial wheat farmer concerns regarding dockage and grades. This brought the SFU into continued conflict with the Pool, as the two organizations clashed over policy. The Farmers' Union, too, sought a path independent of the CCF and of the province's cooperative movement. Unlike in North Dakota, where during the 1930s and 1940s all cooperative, marketing, and interest group elements were under the control of the North Dakota Farmers Union, in Saskatchewan farm community consensus broke down

³³ UFC 1949 Convention Report, 13-14, Folder 1.22; Monod, "The End of Agrarianism," 139-40; McCrorie, "The Saskatchewan Farmers' Movement," 307.

during the same period. The CCF dominated politics, the wheat pool dominated marketing, the cooperatives dominated purchasing and consumption, while the UFC and later the SFU attempted to find their own niche in a crowded agrarian field.³⁴

The North Dakota Farmers Union during World War II and the Early Cold War, 1939-1950

Most residents and politicians of the Great Plains in general and North Dakota in particular met the rising tensions in Europe during the 1930s with a strong isolationist sentiment. They supported the Neutrality Acts and believed a truly neutral America could avoid entanglements across the Atlantic. Many agreed with Gerald Nye, U.S. Senator from North Dakota, that bankers and munitions manufacturers goaded the United States into war in 1917 in order to reap economic benefits. After the Nazi invasion of Poland and then France, and after the Battle of Britain, isolationist sentiment shifted toward noninterventionist neutrality. North Dakota Senators Nye and Lynn Frazier, for example, opposed the 1941 Lend-Lease policy.³⁵

The agrarian organizations in North Dakota as well exhibited a strong strain of isolationism and advocated neutrality during the 1930s and up until the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. The national Farmers Union and the North Dakota state chapter were both extremely isolationist before the war. The North Dakota Farmers Holiday Association and the Nonpartisan League also advocated strict neutrality during the early years of the war. The Farmers Union across the plains sold peace bonds, protested Roosevelt's rearmament program,

³⁴ Stuart Thiesson, "The Saskatchewan Farmers Union Transition to the National Farmers' Union," in eds. Knuttila and Stirling, *The Prairie Agrarian Movement Revisited*, 76; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 354-55, 373; Monod, "The End of Agrarianism," 142-43; McCrorie, "The Saskatchewan Farmers' Movement," 307-317.

³⁵ R. Douglas Hurt, *The Big Empty: The Great Plains in the Twentieth Century* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2011), 125-26.

spoke against the growing militarism of American society, and vocally called for the conscription of wealth. In 1940 the NDFU opposed the enactment of a peacetime draft.³⁶

This changed after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Isolationism and neutrality ceased and Americans, North Dakotans included, sought retribution. As during the First World War, those in North Dakota bought a record number of war bonds, and national Farmers Union president James G. Patton, close confidant of NDFU president Glenn Talbott, assured Roosevelt of the organization's full support for the war effort. Still close to the Roosevelt administration due to the New Deal, the NDFU saw the economic advantages to be had from America's entry into war, namely federal appropriation dollars and the positive impact of defense industries on the state.³⁷

Farmers of all stripes benefitted from the war. In general, the Roosevelt administration sought to remove New Deal-era restrictions of agricultural production and provide the incentive of higher prices. Because of agriculture's importance to the war effort, and organized farmers' political clout, government farm policy during World War II operated favorably towards agriculture. The Emergency Price Control Act (1942) and the Office of Price Administration placed a relatively high ceiling on agricultural commodity prices, while they simultaneously kept prices in other sectors of the economy comparably low. The Stabilization Act (1942) imposed wage controls for farm labor. In October 1942 federal government policy gave skilled farm

³⁶ John A. Crampton, *The National Farmers Union: Ideology of a Pressure Group* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965), 24-25; Robert P. Wilkins and Wynona Huchette Wilkins, *North Dakota: A Bicentennial History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 1977), 172-73; Elwyn B. Robinson, *History of North Dakota* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995 ed.), 423. For an overview of the NPL's foreign policy during both World Wars, see Robert P. Wilkins, "The Nonpartisan League and Upper Midwest Isolationism," *Agricultural History* 39 (Apr., 1965): 102-109.

³⁷ Hurt, *The Big Empty*, 127; Crampton, *The National Farmers Union*, 28; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 420.

workers a deferment from conscription. In all this agriculture benefitted. Farmers heeded the call for increased production. Farm wage rates rose from 200-300 percent from 1939, while in North Dakota they were up 375 percent. Between 1939 and 1945 general agricultural commodity prices increased 95 percent.³⁸

Through the 1930s, the Farmers Union became wedded to New Deal agricultural programs and to the Roosevelt administration. This relationship continued and strengthened during the war years, and contributed in part to a significant growth in the membership and reach of the NDFU, which developed into a powerful and ubiquitous presence in the northern plains. The federal war agencies relied upon and utilized the Farmers Union co-op and marketing entities to ship agricultural commodities overseas. But it was through the Farm Security Administration that the Farmers Union had its closest ties with Roosevelt. By the early 1940s, the NDFU had attached itself to the Farm Security Administration (FSA) and controlled FSA appointments in North Dakota. The NDFU also had the clout to convince local FSA supervisors to press rural rehabilitation clients to use relief money to buy stock in the Farmers Union Grain Terminal marketing entity at St. Paul.³⁹

The rise of a conservative bloc in Congress, and opposition from the right-of-center Farm Bureau, threatened this relationship. In contrast to the more liberal Farmers Union, the Farm Bureau promoted less government intervention and free markets, and represented larger, more

³⁸ Murray R. Benedict, *Farm Policies of the United States, 1790-1950* (New York: The Twentieth Century Fund, 1953), 431-50; Hurt, *The Big Empty*, 167-172; Danbom, *Born in the Country*, 229-30.

³⁹ Michael Johnson Grant, *Down and Out on the Family Farm: Rural Rehabilitation in the Great Plains, 1929-1945* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 186; St. Paul *Pioneer Press* clipping, n.d., Oliver Rosenberg Collection, NDSU Special Collections. On the origins and details of NDFU connections with New Deal agricultural programs, see the previous chapter.

commercial agricultural interests, especially cotton and corn in the South and Midwest, respectively. During the war, as the Farmers Union called for government subsidies for farmers and price controls, the Bureau worked to end government payments and reduce price fixing. The two organizations had clashed over AAA policy during the Depression years, and by 1942 came into conflict over the FSA. In numerous congressional hearings and through propaganda battles, each farm organization made its case. The Farm Bureau argued the FSA spent extravagantly on “socialistic” collectivization schemes, duplicated the functions of the AAA, destroyed individual initiative, catered to special interests such as the Farmers Union, and represented communism. National Farmers Union president James G. Patton, NDFU president Glenn J. Talbott, and FUGTA head M.W. Thatcher responded that the FSA protected the small, family farm, allowed poorer farmers to realize farm ownership and avoid tenancy, and mitigated the shift towards corporate ownership of farm land and the increase in wage labor on large commercial farms.⁴⁰

Though Roosevelt and the Farmers Union fought to maintain FSA funding, conservative opposition overwhelmed their defense, and the program’s funding dropped precipitously between 1943 and 1945. Gutted, the FSA gradually dissolved, and with it went the resettlement project, loans to cooperatives, and government land leases. The Farmers Home Administration took its place, and focused not on “socialistic experiments” (in the words of FSA opponents) but on making farm owners of returning war veterans. The dissolution of the FSA was not a complete loss for the Farmers Union. The Roosevelt administration appreciated the organization’s support, and the Farmers Union became the president’s favored farm group. Farmers Union support for the FSA also set the stage for the postwar period in which the

⁴⁰ Thatcher to Secretary of Agriculture Claude Wickard, 23 Jan. 1943, Folder 5, Box 11, Ole Olson Papers, North Dakota State University Special Collections; Sidney Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 352-58; Wilcox, *The Farmer in the Second World War*, 382-83.

organization became tied to the broader leftist movement and developed a distinct form of liberalism.⁴¹

The defense of the FSA resulted in the Farmers Union giving central emphasis to the maintenance of the family farm. The small farm became the predominant cultural focus of the postwar Farmers Union, and the organization rallied its members and supporters by appealing to that ideal. Highlighting the preservation of the small farm also juxtaposed the Farmers Union with the Farm Bureau, an organization that supported larger and more commercial agricultural interests. In presenting the family farm as under attack—from the dissolution of the FSA, decreased federal funding for agriculture, or the Farm Bureau—the Farmers Union adapted to the post-Depression period with an effective cultural symbol.⁴²

Despite the significant clout of the Farmers Union at the federal level, the Farm Bureau remained most influential in the halls of the capitol, and rode the wave of 1940s conservatism to challenge the NDFU in North Dakota. Due to the Farmers Union's close association with the FSA and the Roosevelt administration, in 1941 prominent and wealthy farmers met at Fargo to create a conservative organizational counterweight to confront the more progressive NDFU. The North Dakota Farm Bureau (NDFB) existed in ideological opposition to the Farmers Union. The NDFU viewed government as a positive force for good, while the NDFB saw in government socialistic tendencies and instead the Bureau promoted free enterprise and individual initiative. These ideological differences manifested themselves in a variety of conflicts during the 1940s,

⁴¹ Michael W. Flamm, "The National Farmers Union and the Evolution of Agrarian Liberalism, 1937-1946," *Agricultural History* 68 (Summer, 1994): 68-69; Baldwin, *Poverty and Politics*, 398-402.

⁴² Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements and Contentious Politics*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 19, 110.

including disagreements on parity pricing, hydroelectric development, health care, and of course the FSA and the broader role of government in agriculture.⁴³

The wartime and postwar conservative shift in state politics intensified the clash in North Dakota between the more liberal Farmers Union and the conservative Farm Bureau. The NDFB had the support of the Republican Organizing Committee (ROC), which came to dominate state politics in the postwar period. This conservative faction of the state Republican Party (the Nonpartisan League was the leftist faction) gained power with the gubernatorial election of Fred G. Aandahl, who served from 1944 to 1951. In addition to the executive branch, the ROC dominated the legislature and state government on a platform of repudiation of William Langer's NPL state political machine. Though the ROC accepted the state industries created by the NPL, they sought an end to the creation of more government projects, to reduce inefficiencies in government, and promoted a free market worldview. The ROC, along with the Farm Bureau in North Dakota, also privileged the goal of economic diversification over a singular focus on agricultural marketing co-ops. Rain and prosperity kept the ROC in power throughout the 1940s as the organization solidified its support from all those Republicans opposed to William Langer.⁴⁴

⁴³ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 6 May 1946, p. 8; 3 Jan. 1949, p. 11; Ross B. Talbot, "The Politics of Farm Organizations in North Dakota," (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1953), 70-90; Samuel R. Berger, *Dollar Harvest: The Story of the Farm Bureau* (Lexington, MA: Heath Lexington Books, 1971), 102-103; G.J. Stafne, *History of the North Dakota Farm Bureau, 1942-1965* (Fargo: North Dakota Farm Bureau, 1967), 11-13. A comprehensive statement of the NDFB ideology can be found in the minutes and resolutions in Farm Bureau Annual Meetings, 1942-1951, Folder 6, Box 1, North Dakota Farm Bureau Records, State Historical Society of North Dakota (SHSND), Bismarck.

⁴⁴ Dan Rylance, "Fred G. Aandahl and the ROC Movement," in ed. Thomas W. Howard, *The North Dakota Political Tradition* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1981), 151-178; Stafne, *History of the NDFB*, 22-23; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 436-42.

Together, the ROC state government under Governor Aandahl and the NDFB conspired to weaken the Farmers Union in North Dakota. The Governor appointed Otto Krueger Commissioner of Insurance, and he allied with ROC lawmakers to draw up legislation that targeted and emasculated the NDFU cooperative insurance companies. The confrontation between the legislature and Glenn Talbott became heated when the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee threatened to jail the NDFU president for his refusal to release the organization's membership rolls. Glenn responded brashly by called the senate totalitarian and the senator a fascist.⁴⁵

The narrow defeat of the anti-cooperative and anti-Farmers Union legislation in North Dakota convinced Talbott that the political stakes were high and the conflict with conservative state forces severe. Under his leadership, the NDFU advanced a bridging strategy to expand its political network of relations with the Nonpartisan League and tap into the League's existing resources as a faction of the state GOP. With well over half of the NDFU's members overlapping with that of the League's, in June 1947 Talbott helped create the Farmers Union Progressive Alliance (FUPA), which would, along with the NPL, link with state labor groups to support and nominate liberal candidates on the League ticket. This represented a major tactical shift in repertoire of the NDFU. Long operating as a political pressure group, Talbott altered significantly the organization's approach with its direct entry into state politics. Though voters reelected the incumbent Governor Aandahl in 1948, the ROC had only a one-seat majority in the

⁴⁵ Ross B. Talbot, "The North Dakota Farmers Union and North Dakota Politics," *The Western Political Quarterly* 10 (Dec., 1957): 879-882.

upper house, and the FUPA-NPL coalition controlled the lower house and the positions that gave it control of the Industrial Commission and thus the state industries.⁴⁶

The state political results in 1948 convinced Glenn Talbott that the FUPA-NPL alliance had neutralized for the moment the conservative challenge in Bismarck. It remained unlikely that a spate of anti-NDFU legislation could make it out of the legislature. Talbott ordered FUPA, as an official organization, disbanded, as he did not want to alienate NDFU members who had varied political backgrounds. He understood there were pockets of Farmers Union members who did not support the organization's liberal platform. Despite the strong showing of the FUPA-NPL political coalition, it remained only a stopgap measure against the growing conservative tide. As the 1940s gave way to the Eisenhower era, the Farmers Union in North Dakota still sought to develop a long-term political strategy in the state.⁴⁷

In the meantime, the Farmers Union turned much of its attention to federal agricultural legislation under a new Democratic administration. Roosevelt's death brought Harry Truman to the White House, and the Farmers Union worked for a continuation of its influence in Washington, D.C. In doing so, the organization developed and pioneered the ideology of postwar agrarian liberalism, which endeared it to the liberal wing of the Democratic Party and to many elements of the American left-liberalism that emerged after 1945. It also set the Farmers Union in stark opposition to much of the national GOP and the more conservative Farm Bureau. Led by the youthful and flamboyant national president James G. Patton, with whom North Dakota leaders such as Glenn Talbott and M.W. Thatcher had immense influence and close personal

⁴⁶ Mildred A. Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada: Strategies of Persistence* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006), 66; Talbot, "The North Dakota Farmers Union and North Dakota Politics," 882-86; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 30-31.

⁴⁷ Talbot, "The North Dakota Farmers Union and North Dakota Politics," 886; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 450.

relations, the Farmers Union agrarian liberalism proceeded from the foundational belief of the need for government agricultural support programs to keep small- and mid-sized farmers on the land and avoid the takeover of agricultural by large corporate agribusinesses. From this premise, Patton and Talbott believed consumer demand was the key, not the cost-of-production debate from the 1930s. The organization fought for demand-oriented fiscal policies to sustain the agricultural purchasing power of American consumers, rather than advocating for higher farm prices. Agrarian liberalism emphasized parity—the necessity of maintaining the purchasing power of small farmers. For the Farmers Union, the development of agrarian liberalism represented the maturity of the new, post-1930s framework, and marked a new intellectual and policy phase in American agrarian radicalism, distinct from that that came before.⁴⁸

The New Deal agricultural programs had institutionalized government farm subsidies, and the postwar debate focused on the level of price supports, not whether price supports were necessary. Stemming from wartime legislation, high price support legislation remained in effect through 1948, when a new comprehensive agricultural program would need to be developed. Until that time, discussions on federal farm policy centered upon whether government subsidies should be fixed at 90% of parity or whether they should be flexible and able to change in response to altering conditions. On the eve of the 1948 election, Congress passed compromise legislation that carried fixed price supports into 1949.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ Flamm, “The National Farmers Union and the Evolution of Agrarian Liberalism, 1937-1946,” 54-60, 75. On the broad wartime and postwar ideological differences between the Farmers Union and the Farm Bureau, see for example *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 21 Sept. 1942, p.2, and 6 May 1946, p.8.

⁴⁹ Virgil W. Dean, *An Opportunity Lost: The Truman Administration and the Farm Policy Debate* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2006), 11-18; *Farmers Union Herald*, March 1942, p. 8, offers an overview of the rationale for the organization’s support for parity legislation.

The Democrats' big 1948 electoral victories in the executive and legislative branches emboldened Secretary of Agriculture Charles F. Brannan to present a long-term, comprehensive farm plan. The Brannan Plan of 1949 provided for direct payments to farmers of the major agricultural commodities, including wheat. This was designed to offer parity to farmers without raising agricultural, and thus consumer, prices. Politically the plan was designed to distance Truman and Democrats from the growing unpopularity of the flexible price support system, and to garner increased support from both farmers and workers with promise of lower food prices and higher farm income. The national Farmers Union and the North Dakota state chapter both enthusiastically supported the Brannan Plan while the Farm Bureau opposed it, as they had direct subsidy proposals in the past. The Bureau also accused Brannan of issuing the plan for purely political reasons. In the end, Cold War foreign policy events came to dominate the congressional and national consciousness, and the Brannan Plan never became law. National legislators eventually passed another stopgap agricultural measure. The Agricultural Act of 1949 allowed the Agriculture Secretary to apply direct subsidies to three farm commodities of his choosing, while providing for high and rigid price supports for all remaining major crops, including wheat. The Act also raised the flexible price scale and extended fixed government supports for another year. Thus the search for a long-range and comprehensive federal agricultural policy carried on into the Eisenhower years.⁵⁰

Farmers Union support for direct federal subsidies reflected its central ideological tenet: support for the family farm, for its maintenance and preservation. The continued growth of the North Dakota chapter during the postwar period reflected farmers' backing of this belief and the

⁵⁰ William P. Tucker, "The Farmers Union: The Social Thought of a Current Agrarian Movement," *Social Science Quarterly* 27 (June, 1946): 45-53; John Mark Hansen, *Gaining Access: Congress and the Farm Lobby, 1919-1981* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 115-26.

emphasis on it as a unifying cultural symbol. In addition to the organization's support of the Brannan Plan, the NDFU operated as a pressure group in the state legislature to institute various anti-corporation, anti-mortgage, and anti-deficiency judgment bills, together designed to safeguard the small farm and prevent the corporate takeover and consolidation of farming in North Dakota.⁵¹

Cold War issues and the Red Scare in the United States put agrarian liberalism on the defensive, threatened the legislative efforts of the Farmers Union, and drew Glenn Talbot, James Patton, and the NDFU deeper into partisan politics. It represented a major political constraint for the organization and for agrarian liberalism in general, and forced the Farmers Union to adapt with new tactics, effective cultural symbols, and innovative political maneuvering. The first major political issue confronting the Farmers Union was Henry Wallace's 1948 third-party bid on the left. Since 1945, Patton, Talbot, labor and civil rights organizations, and the left-liberal movement in general, recognized Wallace as the leader of the liberal wing of the national Democratic Party. The Farmers Union had close relations with Wallace going back to the New Deal years, and had publicly supported Wallace when in 1946 Truman dismissed him from the cabinet, and the NDFU hosted Wallace as speaker at a major meeting in North Dakota the following year. Running as the Progressive Party's presidential candidate in 1948, Wallace hoped to put political pressure upon the Democrats to move left on a host of issues, including less hostile relations with the Soviets, the expansion of the welfare state, and civil rights legislation.⁵²

⁵¹ Talbot, "The Politics of Farm Organizations," 75-78.

⁵² *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 6 May 1940, p.1, 4-5, 12; Richard J. Walton, *Henry Wallace, Harry Truman, and the Cold War* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 30; Michael Kazin,

Though Wallace considered both Talbott and Patton as a potential running mate, the two Farmers Union leaders decided that to support the Progressive Party was too politically dangerous. Despite the Farmers Union's long and amicable history with Roosevelt's former Secretary of Agriculture and vice president, Cold War pressures intervened. Patton did not want to open up the Farmers Union to red-baiting, so he privately urged Wallace to purge communist supporters from the Progressive Party. As NDFU president, Glenn Talbott was in the middle of the FUPA-NPL/GOP alliance in North Dakota at the time, attempting to push back against conservative Republicans. It would hurt the FUPA cause to publicly back an insurgent Democrat in 1948. Finally, Patton and Talbott had made their peace with President Truman. Though they opposed much of Truman's hardline anticommunist foreign policy, the Farmers Union leaders understood that if Truman lost, the federal farm program would go down with him. A Wallace insurgent campaign also could negatively affect the election of liberal Democrats to Congress. For all these reasons, Patton and Talbott unified the Farmers Union in support Truman's candidacy in 1948, with a commitment to the Fair Deal and mild criticism of some of the President's major foreign policy approaches. When Truman won, the Farmers Union celebrated his victory as their own.⁵³

As Cold War suspicions deepened and the McCarthy Era dawned, the noninterventionist and antiwar positions of the Farmers Union opened it up to charges of anti-Americanism and to red-baiting. These positions on the postwar world included a rejection of the Truman Doctrine, the Marshall Plan, NATO, universal military training, and the peacetime draft. Talbott and

American Dreamers: How the Left Changed a Nation (New York: Knopf, 2011), 202-4; Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 71-72.

⁵³ Glenn J. Talbott, "A Note of Caution," *Antioch Review* 6 (Winter, 1946): 621-22; William C. Pratt, "Glenn J. Talbott, the Farmers Union, and American Liberalism after World War II," *North Dakota History* 55 (Winter, 1988): 3-8, and Pratt, "The Farmers Union and the 1948 Henry Wallace Campaign," *The Annals of Iowa* 49 (Summer, 1988): 349-70.

Patton argued these militaristic and foreign adventures funneled money away from domestic and agricultural needs, and gave big agricultural firms a foothold overseas at the expense of the family farm. The NDFU position mirrored that of North Dakota's Congressional delegation and that of the state's population at large. As had North Dakotans, Equity, and the Nonpartisan League in 1914-1917 and 1935-1941, the Farmers Union and majority of citizens in the 1940s saw war as benefitting big business and munitions manufacturers, and as a poor man's fight that benefitted the rich. The state's reaction to the Korean War was intense: the legislature urged the federal government to remove American troops, the Governor demanded the withdrawal of army recruiters from North Dakota, and both the state senate and U.S. Senator William Langer favored resolutions calling for the conscription of wealth.⁵⁴

More damning in the growing Cold War atmosphere was the Farmer Union's effort to downplay the perceived Soviet threat to world peace, by instead emphasizing international cooperation and diplomacy through the United Nations. These views, especially after President Truman's initiation of a loyalty program for federal officials, put the Farmers Union at odds with the administration and the country's growing hard-line stance toward leftism in general and communism in particular. Beginning in the postwar period the NDFU faced charges of socialism, communism, or at minimum communist sympathizers. The NDFU headquarters came under attack as the "Kremlin in Jamestown."⁵⁵

The NDFU, of course, was not a communist front, but it and North Dakota did have experience with a small band of rural communists throughout the 1930s and into the early Cold

⁵⁴ Bruce E. Field, *Harvest of Dissent: The National Farmers Union and the Early Cold War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 1-2; Robert P. Wilkins, "The Non-Ethnic Roots of North Dakota Isolationism," *Nebraska History* 44 (September, 1963): 205-22.

⁵⁵ Field, *Harvest of Dissent*, 1-2; Wilkins and Wilkins, *North Dakota*, 119.

War period. Glenn famously said he knew of at least three “personal friends of mine and good members” of the NDFU who were communists. And there had been several prominent NDFU members who had been part of the Communist Party in the 1930s and early 1940s. Talbott defended this by citing American protections of free speech and association, and reiterating the Farmers Union constitutional right to allow any farmer, teacher, or minister to join the organization. One North Dakotan remarked, “Mud throwers of today...link us with ‘commie fronts.’ Yesterday we were pro-Nazi and before that pro-Huns.”⁵⁶

In 1950, a McCarthy-style attack against Talbott, Patton, and Farmers Union placed the organization on the defensive, forced it to abandon much of its left-liberal tenets, and brought it into Truman’s foreign policy fold. That year, New Hampshire Senator Styles Bridges, a staunch McCarthy supporter and anticommunist, gave a floor speech in the U.S. capitol. Bridges unambiguously labeled Talbott and Patton as communists, and the Farmers Union as a communist front. He suggested the Brannan Plan could be called the “Talbott Plan” or even the “Stalin Plan.” Though North Dakota Senator Langer, and several additional prominent Congressmen, including Hubert Humphrey, publicly came to the defense of the Farmers Union, Bridges’s accusations had serious repercussions. The Farm Bureau in North Dakota, which by the late 1940s developed a dynamic anticommunist outlook, disseminated pamphlets and reproductions of the red-baiting speech.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ William C. Pratt, “Farmers, Communists, and the FBI in the Upper Midwest,” *Agricultural History* 63 (Summer, 1989): 62-67; Robert P. Wilkins, “The Nonpartisan League and Upper Midwest Isolationism,” *Agricultural History* 39 (April, 1965): 102-109.

⁵⁷ Sen. William Langer, “The Farmers Union—A Bulwark Against Monopoly and Against Communism,” *Congressional Speech in the Senate of the United States, Thursday, Sept. 7, 1950, and Wednesday, May 2, 1951*, 4-19, Oliver Rosenberg Papers, NDSU Special Collections; Pratt, “Glenn J. Talbott, the Farmers Union, and American Liberalism after World War II,” 9-10; Talbot, “The Politics of Farm Organizations in North Dakota,” 100-102.

The NDFU president had to navigate a careful balancing act. Talbott could not repudiate all the long-standing progressive views of the organization, but he also had to respond forcefully to the charges. Talbott attacked Bridges's accusations and McCarthyism in general. He also had the NDFU reaffirm some Cold War positions, such as the call for the recognition of China and opposition to Universal Military Training. The Farmers Union also successfully sued for libel a Farm Bureau newspaper article that labeled the FU a communist front. Despite this, issues stemming from Senator Bridges's speech did not go away, and this pushed the organization in a more conservative direction.⁵⁸

Talbott and Patton decided to assume a conventional anticommunist stance and squelch more liberal elements in the Farmers Union which had begun forcefully opposing Truman's foreign policy. Iowa Farmers Union president Fred Stover emerged as a vocal left-liberal advocate in his full-throated support for the 1948 Wallace campaign and harsh criticism of the Korean War. Talbott and Patton now moved to publicly support the Korean War, and worked to push Stover out of the Farmers Union. In 1951 Stover formed the Farmers Union Rank and File Committee in an attempt to pressure the national body to adopt more liberal stances. Talbott and Patton quickly revoked the charter of both Stover's Iowa chapter, and other left-leaning Farmers Union affiliates. By 1952, the pressures of the Cold War shaped the Farmers Union and its leaders into more conventional and conservative mold, one that uncritically supported Truman, adhered to a conventional anticommunist tack, and lost its radical left-liberal edge.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ William C. Pratt, "The Farmers Union, McCarthyism, and the Demise of the Agrarian Left," *The Historian* 58 (1996): 329-42; Pratt, "Glenn J. Talbott, the Farmers Union, and American Liberalism after World War II," 10.

Cooperatives and Cooperation, Healthcare Initiatives, and Transnationalism between Farmers' Movements in North Dakota and Saskatchewan, 1939-1950

Many of Talbott's contemporaries, and some recent historians, believe Glenn "may have been the single most influential figure" in the entire Farmers Union national structure. Talbott's friendship with Patton and his sincere and tireless devotion to the farming community of North Dakota and the United States certainly contributed to this, as did his long-standing ties with national Democratic figures going back to the New Deal years. For other reasons Talbott could not be ignored by the national leadership. He headed the largest state chapter of the Farmers Union, with over 40,000 members by 1952, and this provided the NDFU president with a powerful base of support. Much of this membership, and thus much of Talbott's base, developed from the robust cooperative structure and cooperative businesses affiliated with the North Dakota Farmers Union.⁶⁰

Farmers Union cooperatives brought tangible material benefits to members, who were both owners and users of the various services. At the apex of Farmers Union businesses sat the Farmers Union Grain Terminal Association (FUGTA), by the 1940s the largest cooperative wheat marketing entity in the world through which farmers sold their crop and received patronage dividends in return. The 1940s witnessed a massive expansion of FUGTA facilities: the construction of a 4.5-million-bushel terminal elevator at Superior, Wisconsin, and half-million- and three-quarters-million-bushel sub-terminals in Montana. FUGTA leased another terminal in Spokane to ship the grain of western farmers. In 1944 the net margin of profit alone

⁵⁹ "Statement of Principles: Farmers Union National Rank and File Committee," Folder 9, Box 11, Olson Papers, NDSU; Pratt, "The Farmers Union, McCarthyism, and the Demise of the Agrarian Left," 340-42.

⁶⁰ See Table 1, p. 64, for NDFU membership figures, 1934-52, in Talbot, "The Politics of Farm Organizations in North Dakota"; Pratt, "The Farmers Union and the 1948 Henry Wallace Campaign," 350.

paid for the two-million-dollar construction and leasing costs of the terminal and sub-terminal elevators. Affiliates of FUGTA owned dozens of lumber and coal yards, and FUGTA Mills, Inc. owned and operated in Minnesota the largest durum mill in the United States. Other co-op subsidiaries ran poultry and feed/seed services in both North Dakota and Montana.⁶¹

In addition to this major regional wheat marketing cooperative, the Farmers Union Central Exchange sold via mail order a variety of farm supplies and other goods. The Farmers Union Livestock Commission shipped members' livestock. The Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Company in North Dakota offered automobile, fire, hail, life, and other types of insurance. Various cooperative credit unions fulfilled the financial needs of members.⁶²

NDFU cooperative oil businesses saved members millions of dollars in the 1930s and 1940s, and provided a reliable supply of petroleum products during the wartime shortages. In addition to its acquisitions and operations during the Great Depression, the Farmers Union Central Exchange purchased for one million dollars the largest oil refinery in Montana, as well as a five-million-dollar refining system and oil pipeline from Kansas to Iowa. Working in petroleum provided the NDFU with a large savings margin, which derived from the organization's ability to refine and distribute its own oil. By 1946, FUCE oil business reached

⁶¹ Harold V. Knight, *Grass Roots: The Story of the North Dakota Farmers Union* (Jamestown, ND: Inter-County Cooperative Publishing Association, 1947), 135-36. On the general boom in wartime cooperatives, see Joseph G. Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise: 1920-1945* (Danville, IL: The Interstate Printers and Publishers, Inc., 1973).

⁶² William P. Tucker, "The Farmers Union Cooperatives," *Sociology and Social Research* 31 (July-Aug., 1947): 435-445; Talbot, "The Politics of Farm Organizations," 132; Robinson, *History of North Dakota*, 442.

twenty million dollars in volume with a commensurate two million dollars in members' savings.⁶³

Thus, material benefits were one reason why members patronized and supported the Farmers Union. An anecdote from the 1940s illustrates this point. A NDFU organizer asked a farmer, a non-member, to consider assisting him in setting up a Farmers Union local. The farmer asked the organizer how much it would cost him to do so. An annual two-dollar membership fee, the organizer replied. Then the farmer asked the organizer, essentially, what do I get out of the Farmers Union? The farmer recalled the remainder of the conversation: “Do you carry insurance?” he asked. ‘Yes, I pay \$31.50 premium.’ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘for your two dollars you will get about \$15.00 per year.’ Then I said, ‘Let me talk. Do you mean to say that if I will become a member of the Farmers Union at two dollars per year, I will be able to save fifteen dollars per year on my insurance premium?’ ‘That is what I mean to say,’ he replied. ‘Well, I’ll be there on the front seat,’ and I was.’⁶⁴

Through the dues check-off system and the direct profits of the cooperatives, the Farmers Union financed a broad educational system. Children, teenagers, and young adults in Farmers Union families experienced years of cooperative education. Such education produced adults who became leaders in the organization, patronized NDFU co-ops, expanded the cooperative businesses, and created and lived in a truly cooperative society whereby they then educated their children through Farmers Union Cooperative Institutes, seminars, and recreation programs. It was a self-contained feedback loop of cooperative education, business, and social development, all of which built upon itself over successive generations. “Farm youth who have grown up in the

⁶³ Knight, *Grass Roots*, 136-38.

⁶⁴ Gladys Talbott Edwards, *This Is The Farmers Union* (Denver: National Farmers Union, 1951), 132.

Farmers Union are taking their places as leaders,” observed one member. NDFU farmers saw in the creation of cooperatives the manifestation of their teachings. One Farmers Union educator noted, “I had to prove the things that I taught. That meant to work, educate and build cooperatives. To build co-ops seemed to prove our teachings.” Cooperative teaching pervaded all aspects of the Farmers Union: “We teach cooperation in play; we teach it in work.”⁶⁵

Farmers Union cooperatives transformed communities. The county of Williams and its county seat Williston, North Dakota, garnered national attention in this regard. The Great Depression and drought of the 1930s severely scarred the communities in Williams County, and Farmers Union members became determined to protect themselves from future economic disruptions, and, as a media reporter noted, “the badge of their resolution [was] the shield-like trademark of the Farmers Union Co-ops.” Williston and the surrounding townships boasted cooperative lumberyards, creameries, stockyards, egg incubators, cafeterias, electric power companies, and funeral homes, in addition to the more traditional wheat marketing, credit, and consumer co-ops. All of these farmer-owned and -operated business fed off one another, as many co-ops bought their supplies from other co-ops, and vice versa. One local farmer and NDFU cooperator marveled, “You can do anything cooperatively here...except go to the movies, buy a new car, or get drunk.” A national correspondent studying Williams County cooperatives reported, “A beat, gray, old wheat farmer in patched overalls and a worn out straw hat eats...at the [Farmers Union] co-op cafeteria, signs his slip, and puts it into the box for accounting. There

⁶⁵ Gladys Talbott Edwards, “Farmers Union and Rural Youth,” *The Phi Delta Kappan* 25 (Apr., 1943): 174, and *The Live Oak Tree* (Jamestown, ND: Farmers Union Education Service, 1941); *The Handbook for Farmers Union* (Jamestown, ND: 1941); *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 3 Mar., 1941, p. 1, 6, 8; 1 Dec. 1941, p. 4; 15 Dec. 1941, p. 6; Edwards, *This Is The Farmers Union*, 74-75; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 168.

is a gleam of pride in his eye that says—“This place is mine, I own part of it. It’s good and I like it.”⁶⁶

As in the past, the material benefits of the Farmers Union co-ops could not be superseded by the very real social benefits of the organization. The family focus, the comradeship, and basic social intercourse were vital and central aspects that animated and motivated the farmers to work for the Farmers Union. In the early 1950s, Gladys Talbott Edwards compiled personal testimonies from members, regarding their reasons for maintaining active engagement in the organization. Of the almost 200 pages individual stories, one theme is often repeated: that of the importance of the Farmers Union to families as a place to develop and learn together, and an organization that connected small farmers. “In getting to know their neighbors” in the Farmers Union, one member wrote, “they learn that the problems they have, are shared by others. Why not organize in order to solve these problems?” Another farm wife explained how her husband first joined to receive through the co-ops discounts on consumer goods. But then they started attending “family night” at their Farmers Union local. “That is one night I shall never forget, for that is when my Farmers Union schooling began. Family night has continued, every meeting night being family night.” To energize the grassroots members, she concluded, “We found this works remarkably well.”⁶⁷

In North Dakota, the NDFU and the cooperatives were one and the same. To speak of cooperation in the state meant to speak of the Farmers Union. The co-ops were unified under the

⁶⁶ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 21 Aug. 1944, p. 8; 7 July 1947, p. 11; 20 June 1949, p. 2-5, 9, 12. See also a similar investigation of the community and cooperative impact of the NDFU in Wells County, North Dakota, in A.H. Anderson and Glen V. Vergeront, “Rural Communities and Organizations: A Study of Group Life in Wells County, North Dakota,” *Agricultural Experiment Station Bulletin* 351 (June, 1948): 37-72.

⁶⁷ Edwards, *This Is The Farmers Union*, 29-31.

Farmers Union banner, and there existed unity in purpose and a shared ideal. This contrasted sharply with the disorganized and, at times, antagonistic relationships between the fractured cooperative movement, the Wheat Pool, the United Farmers, and the CCF government in Saskatchewan during the 1940s. The province was undoubtedly pervaded by cooperative business, but there existed so many unaffiliated co-ops that there was no centralized control or common direction. The Co-operative Union of Saskatchewan ostensibly coordinated the varied and multi-faceted cooperative movement in Saskatchewan, but it mostly focused on the operations of consumers', wholesaling, manufacturing, and general marketing co-ops. Thus there existed the Credit Union League to manage the various unaffiliated credit cooperatives and the Federation of Production Co-ops to deal with the production side of the cooperative businesses. A simple list of the dozens of various and unaffiliated cooperatives incorporated under provincial and federal law gives proof to the diverse and decentralized nature of Saskatchewan's cooperative situation in the postwar period.⁶⁸

During the Douglas years, the CCF government in Saskatchewan had, in the words of a doyen of Canadian cooperative studies, an "uneasy" relationship with the province's cooperative movement. The Government's Department of Co-operation and Co-operative Development offered education, statistical analysis and research, and extension work for new co-ops, and

⁶⁸ The Wheat Pool, Canadian Co-operative Implements, Saskatchewan Federated Co-operatives, Consumers Co-operative Refineries, Saskatchewan Women's Co-operative Guild, Co-operative Trust Co., Saskatchewan Co-operative Credit Society, Saskatchewan Co-operative Creamery Association, Co-operative Hail Insurance Co., Co-operative Fidelity and Guarantee Co., Southern Saskatchewan Co-operative Stock Yards, Northern Saskatchewan Co-operative Stock Yards, and Saskatchewan Co-operative Superannuation Society all operated under provincial law. The Canadian Co-operative Wool Growers, Co-operative Life Insurance Co., Co-operative Fire and Casualty Co., Canadian Co-operative Processors, Interprovincial Co-operatives, and the United Grain Growers all operated under Dominion law. Jim Wright, *Prairie Progress: Consumer Co-operation in Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1956), 48, 54-55.

many CCF MLAs served as officers or were members of the various Saskatchewan cooperatives. However, efforts such as the Co-operative Union of Saskatchewan's call for joint work with the CCF on matters of cooperative health, oil development, insurance, and marketing yielded little fruit, and throughout the Douglas years there did not manifest an especially close relationship between the CCF and the cooperative community. Part of this involved the CCF's social democratic tendency to seek direct control over forms of economic activity, control not forthcoming from the independent-minded cooperatives. As well, the Government was concerned about the uneven membership across the cooperatives, which was especially thin among the co-op stores and credit unions. Some of those co-op members, furthermore, maintained support for Conservative or Liberal policies—they were not social democrats or ideological British Fabians. One area of direct CCF involvement, cooperative farms, failed definitively, and discouraged further hands-on approaches by the Government. Finally, Premier Douglas, who also took over the cabinet position as head of the Department of Cooperation and Co-operative Development, preferred policies that created crown corporations and social welfare legislation, rather than the more locally-oriented cooperatives. For those reasons, the CCF maintained the traditional role of government vis-à-vis cooperatives: producing favorable legislation, promoting research, and acting in an advisory role. Saskatchewan cooperatives and the CCF, then, by mutual agreement, maintained their separate spheres of influence and activity through the Douglas years.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Ian MacPherson, "The CCF and the Co-operative Movement in the Douglas Years: An Uneasy Alliance," in ed. William J. Brennan, *"Building the Co-operative Commonwealth": Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985), 182-99; Brett Fairbairn, "A Century of Prairie and Saskatchewan Farm Co-operatives: Philosophy, Organization, and History," in eds. Knuttila and Stirling, *The Prairie Agrarian Movement Revisited*, 102-104; Wright, *Prairie Progress*, 47-48, 53, 194-98. The CCF Government's foray into cooperative farming proved a fiasco. Beginning in 1945, the experiment

The return to prominence of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool complicated the agrarian picture in the province. In the postwar period the pool broadened its commercial reach. A merger with the Saskatchewan Livestock Producers brought the pool into the livestock marketing business, and the creation of an industrial division led to the construction of a vegetable oil plant in 1947 and a flourmill in 1949. The pool entered the insurance business in 1945 with the founding of the Co-operative Life Insurance branch of the Wheat Pool. This expansion, however, duplicated many functions of the cooperative movement, and provided for conflicted terrain between farm and cooperative groups.⁷⁰

“Our whole farm economy staggers in a bog of co-operative confusion,” exclaimed UFC George Bickerton in 1942. Bickerton was perhaps sour that the Co-operative Union of Saskatchewan refused to provide financial assistance to the UFC during the 1930s and the war years. However, the UFC proved to be the most vocal critic of the diverse and varied agrarian field in the province, and some of its executives’ and directors’ complaints illustrate the problems therein. Bickerton’s laments suggest how the functions of the Wheat Pool and the cooperatives bled into each other and into the traditional arenas of the UFC. The pool claimed the farmers did not require the services of the UFC because the co-ops had been acting as educational and political pressure groups, two activities from which the United Farmers drew its identity. At the Saskatchewan Co-operative Conference in 1942, the major co-ops even

faced a variety of challenges, including management problems, disagreement regarding sales policy and agricultural practices, and the fundamental struggle to convince private property-oriented and individualistic farmers to embrace shared property ownership and cooperative farm operation. See John W. Bennett and Cynthia Krueger, “Agrarian Pragmatism and Radical Politics,” in Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, revised ed. (1968), 354-56.

⁷⁰ *The Wheat Pools and Western Community Life* (1940), File III.6, and *25 Years with the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool* (1949?), n.p., File II.3, both in Saskatchewan Wheat Pool Collection, SAB Regina; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 158-64.

attempted to organize and promote a new educational and economic organization to take the place of the UFC, though it never came to fruition.⁷¹

This antagonism led Bickerton to admonish the cooperatives to stick to cooperative ventures and to stay out of the traditional areas of UFC concern. The co-ops and the Wheat Pool had divided the farmers, he suggested, and made them overlook the crucial educational and economic functions of the UFC. The UFC-cooperative relationship was also ambiguous, with times of conflict and times of agreement. In 1945, for instance, the UFC protested to a Royal Commission the proposal to tax the earnings of the cooperatives. Essentially, however, the myriad of agrarian organizations in Saskatchewan resulted in interorganizational tensions, the blurring of lines of organizational responsibility, and disagreement over the goals and direction of the farmers' movement in general. In 1949, as the UFC dissolved, president Bickerton offered his final thoughts on the matter: "How can we expect our organization to have any power?...It does not matter that I do not have a vacation or that I drive my own car, feed myself to try to bring them a report on the true facts of the organization. I have done this for the last time."⁷²

In the 1940s, the issue of taxes and cooperatives, on which the UFC offered a rare defense of the co-ops, illustrates a situation that put the cooperative movement on the defensive in both the Canada and the United States. Cooperatives in both North Dakota and Saskatchewan came under attack for alleged avoidance of tax payments. The rise in the corporate tax rate during the war years led the Northwest Line Elevator Association in Canada and the National Tax Equality Association in the United States to highlight the cooperatives' avoidance of income

⁷¹ UFC 1941 Convention Report, 22, Folder 1.14; UFC 1942 Convention Report, 9, 13, 21, Folder 1.15; and UFC 1943 Convention Report, 9-10, Folder 1.16.

⁷² UFC 1942 Convention Report, 21-22, Folder 1.15; UFC Convention Report 1945, 26, Folder 1.18; UFC Convention Report 1949, 13-14, Folder 1.22.

taxes due to their patronage structure of returning profits to members. These organizations, composed of private grain companies and other businesses, resented the co-ops' tax breaks and their ability to usually provide services for less money. In North Dakota more so than in Canada, tax proponents branded Farmers Union co-ops as unpatriotic, un-American, and communist.⁷³

This situation ended more amicably in Saskatchewan when in 1946 a royal commission brokered a compromise by which cooperatives agreed to taxes on some dividends and new co-ops were exempt from taxes for the first three years. Cooperatives in Saskatchewan were freed to enjoy significant progress in the postwar period, but in North Dakota the tax controversy resulted in anti-Farmers Union cooperative legislation in 1947, which in turn triggered the entry of the NDFU, through FUPA, into state politics. It also put cooperatives on the defensive as they felt compelled to explain their status under federal tax law, rebut charges of leftism, and make the case for cooperatives' importance to agriculture.⁷⁴

Attacks on cooperatives across the forty-ninth parallel, also played a role in producing a feeling of North American cooperative solidarity. "Canadian organized farmers," said Morris Erickson of the NDFU during his address to a cooperative conference in Saskatchewan in 1940, "are cultivating [a] closer relationship with organized farmers in the...[American] states closest to the Canadian border." The CCF newspaper recognized "when you cross the international border from Saskatchewan to North Dakota the weather doesn't suddenly change. There is no abrupt break in the terrain. The small towns and the people...are very much the same. It is not surprising, therefore, that cooperation is just as important in North Dakota as it is in

⁷³ *Western Producer*, 1 Oct. 1942, p. 7; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 123; Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 522-23; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 154.

⁷⁴ *Grainmen's Mirror*, Jan. 1944, p. 9-11, clipping, Folder 6, Box 11, Olson Papers; Fairbairn, *From Prairie Roots*, 154-55; Knapp, *The Advance of American Cooperative Enterprise*, 542.

Saskatchewan.” After a brief interregnum during the darkest years of the Depression in the early 1930s, North Dakota and Saskatchewan organized farmers renewed the international interaction that by 1950 had existed for more than forty years. As in the past, this relationship centered upon broad ideas of agrarian economic cooperation—but for the first time, Saskatchewan cooperators looked to North Dakota for inspiration.⁷⁵

Canadian cooperators operated in a fractured and disorganized agrarian atmosphere, and sought to share information with the centralized and focused Farmers Union in North Dakota. National Farmers Union president James G. Patton and NDFU president Glenn Talbott were in demand in Saskatchewan and the prairies as a speaker on agrarian cooperation, and they often emphasized the successes of the Farmers Union co-ops. Much of this stemmed from the fact that organizations such as the UFC remained far behind the integrated functioning of the NDFU system of cooperatives and education. For instance, only in 1945 did the UFC begin to inaugurate a dues check-off system, something pioneered successfully by the Farmers Union during the Depression years. Similarly, it took until 1947 for the UFC set up the beginnings of an educational institute to teach young members about the basic tenets of the organization. By this time, the NDFU had long made these elements the connective tissue of the symbiotic relationship between education and the development of cooperative businesses.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ “Canadian Cooperatives,” Folder 5, Box 42, NDFU Collection, SHSND; *Farmers Union Herald*, Feb. 1940, p. 1; *Commonwealth*, 5 Feb. 1947, p. 10; *Western Producer*, 19 June 1941, p. 7.

⁷⁶ UFC 1945 Convention Report, 17, Folder 1.18; UFC 1947 Convention Report, 33, Folder 1.20; *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 7 Oct. 1940, p. 7; 16 Dec. 1940, p. 10; 19 Oct. 1942, p. 11; 17 Jan. 1944, p. 6; 22 Nov. 1948, p. 1; *Farmers Union Herald*, June 1940, p. 2; Dec. 1940, p. 3; Feb. 1941, p. 2; Sept. 1941, p. 2; Feb. 1942, p. 6; Apr. 1943, p. 1; *Western Producer*, 4 July 1940, p. 5, 29.

The most effective forms of organization build upon local links coordinated by formal structures. Thus the myriad of NDFU co-ops, managed and centralized in the Farmers Union structure, created a formidable agrarian economic front in North Dakota. The Farmers Union controlled and unified the complex networks of marketing, oil, consumer, and other business co-ops, gave them unity in purpose and ideology, and provided a forum for their development. Saskatchewan agrarian organizations lacked such networks linked by a formal structure. The myriad farm groups, co-ops, educational bodies, coupled with the CCF, created a confused landscape of unaffiliated organizations with no central goal, ideology, or focus.⁷⁷

Ultimately, the binational connections between farmers' organizations in North Dakota, Saskatchewan, and Western Canada centered upon cooperatives because the cooperative form of organization lent itself to ideological affinity across national borders. In addition, the UFC and Canadian cooperatives could garner valuable lessons from NDFU business experience, and Patton, Talbott, and others could in turn demonstrate the reach and success of the Farmers Union to an international audience. Due to the CCF's different form of organization—a parliamentary party in the British Fabian mold—and its cool relations with cooperatives in Saskatchewan, the party did not develop close ties to the Farmers Union, but instead looked to make connections with socialists and other left-liberal elements in the United States.⁷⁸

In the United States, several socialist, labor, and left-liberal groups sought to create a third party based on the CCF model. This tendency began in the 1930s with the formation of the Washington Commonwealth Federation (WCF). With a coalition of socialists, Popular Front communists, and labor, the WCF sought control of the Washington state Democratic Party.

⁷⁷ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 124.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 187-88.

Though the Federation did elect some leaders to the US Congress, it informally merged with the Democrats in 1944. Based on the WCF and the Canadian CCF, the Oregon Commonwealth Federation was a farmer-labor party of the late 1930s that advocated public ownership of industry, government health initiatives, civil rights, old-age pensions, and protective agrarian legislation. The party elected a sufficient number of Oregon state representatives to influence some legislation, but by the early 1940s Roosevelt and the Democrats co-opted the Oregon Commonwealth and it disappeared.⁷⁹

In the 1940s, the Socialist Party of the U.S. sought to build upon the efforts of the Washington and Oregon Commonwealth Federations and build a national third party centered on the Canadian CCF example. In 1946, representatives from the Farmers Union, including national president James G. Patton, the National Farm Labor Union, the Socialist Party, and labor and civil rights groups met in Chicago and formed the National Educational Committee for a New Party. The group sought to form the foundation of a national farmer-labor left-liberal party. Later that year, Henry W. Laidler, director of the American-based League for Industrial Democracy, attended in Regina a meeting of Canadian, British, and American socialist parties hosted by the Saskatchewan CCF and CCF national leader M.J. Coldwell. Leading into the 1948 American elections, it looked as though a new social democratic, farmer-labor third party might emerge.⁸⁰

It was not to be, and anti-communist hysteria began to build. Founded in 1947, Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), an anti-communist liberal group, undercut the idea of

⁷⁹ See Albert Anthony Acena, "The Washington Commonwealth Federation: Reform Politics and the Popular Front" (PhD diss., University of Washington, 1975) and Jill Hopkins Herzig, "The Oregon Commonwealth Federation" (M.A. Thesis, University of Oregon, 1963).

⁸⁰ *Commonwealth*, 14 Aug. 1946, p. 1, 6; William C. Pratt, "The Socialist Party, Socialist Unionists, and Organized Labor, 1936-1950," *Political Power and Social Theory* 4 (1984): 83-85.

a farmer-labor leftist third party. When the CIO gave its backing to the new group, the ADA reinforced ties between liberal elements and the Democratic Party, and hopes for an American CCF party dissolved. When Henry Wallace's Progressive Party purged communists from its ranks and failed to inspire meaningful support, and after Truman's 1948 victory, the Saskatchewan CCF newspaper proclaimed there no longer existed a social democratic alternative in the United States. Instead, Americans had put "all their eggs in one basket—the basket of monopoly capitalism." American Socialist Party leader Harry Fleischman lamented in the Saskatchewan *Commonwealth* how Truman had co-opted labor and liberals into the Democratic Party, when those groups should have formed a party of their own. "In the meantime," the *Commonwealth* editorialized, "Canada's social democrats have no choice but to continue courageously on their way toward a better social order."⁸¹

In the realm of government health care, both the CCF and the NDFU sought similar objectives. Saskatchewan CCF legislation paved the way for universal health care in Canada, and offered a powerful model for NDFU health reformers, though the political situation in the US precluded the creation of a large role for government in the health sector. Since the inception of the province in 1905, Saskatchewan had always encountered difficulties drawing in qualified medical professionals at an affordable cost. Even with skilled doctors, the vast rural stretches and thin population made the job of health care difficult, especially during the difficult travel of the winter months. As early as the pre-World War I period, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association passed resolutions calling for free, government-funded health services. In the 1930s, the State Hospital and Medical League promoted the concept of socialized medicine and pressed municipal councils for funding. The UFC offered to members general health services, and year

⁸¹ *Commonwealth*, 30 July 1948, p.1, 4, 12; 27 Oct. 1948, p. 8; 24 Nov. 1948, p. 4; Pratt, "The Socialist Party, Socialist Unionists, and Organized Labor," 83-85.

after year organizational resolutions demanded the Liberal governments provide taxpayer-funded medical care. Elsie Hart, Woman President of the UFC and member of the State Hospital and Medical League, recalls visiting a farm family with eight children. The husband had a limp, and Hart said to the wife, “‘Something should be done, what’s wrong with your husband?’ She said, ‘It doesn’t matter, we haven’t got the money to do it.’ We felt something should be done, and that was repeated many times over across the province.”⁸²

The promise of affordable health services drew many CCF supporters to the polls in 1944. Premier Douglas, as health minister, sought to build upon this basis to provide compulsory province-wide medical care to all Saskatchewan residents. Douglas recalled as a minister in the Depression performing funeral services for young men and women who had died of preventable illness because health services were sparse, underfunded, or absent. A contributory health plan based on employment taxes was not feasible, given the majority of farming residents were legally self-employed. Thus the universal hospital services plan of 1947 represented a banner CCF program and Canada’s first universal and compulsory hospital insurance program. It involved the creation of health regions with central hospitals and services, and the expansion of local hospitals and health centers, all managed by the Health Services Planning Commission or the Department of Public Health. Through the CCF plan all Saskatchewan residents received hospital benefits with low annual insurance premiums and the remainder of costs provided by taxation.⁸³

⁸² Janet Walker Gouldner, “The Doctors’ Strike: Change and Resistance to Change in Saskatchewan,” in Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism* (1968 ed.), 394; Mrs. Elsie Hart, “Recollections: The CCF in Saskatchewan,” in ed. Donald C. Kerr, *Western Canadian Politics: The Radical Tradition* (Edmonton: NeWest Institute for Western Canadian Studies, 1981), 44, 110-11. For UFC health care efforts, see the following Annual Convention Reports: 1930, 45-46; 1931, 146-47; 1932, 116; 1933, 66; 1936, 33; 1937, 13; 1938, 11-12; 1943, 13; 1944, 15-16.

The CCF health program became one of the most popular reforms of the 1940s. Thousands of provincial residents wrote to the party about their experiences. Many, such as John M. Evans of Somme and A.J. Quintaine of Hawarden noted their lengthy stays in the hospital did not leave them deep in debt, as it would have before the hospital plan. Annie E. Moore of Kelfield concurred: “A great many people... would rather die than go to the hospital and mount up a big debt it would take them all the rest of their lives trying to pay.” Automobile wreck survivor Edward W. Sager of Prince Albert spent eleven days under medical care, and praised the CCF government for the new health plan.⁸⁴

The hospital services plan also inaugurated the government Air Ambulance Service, which traveled to remote locations during blizzards and other inclement weather to address medical emergencies. Led by former Royal Canadian Air Force pilots and nurses with the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, the Air Ambulance usually landed near residences in snowy, unprepared fields. The air service saved the life of Mrs. A.H. Quintaine, a diabetic, when snow precluded a trip to the hospital for treatment. “No other government in the North American continent,” one recipient of the CCF health plan remarked, “has equaled this record.”⁸⁵

The experience of the North Dakota Farmers Union in seeking the same objective met with very little success. The state lacked the historical foundation of even small-scale public health programs, though it had embraced for a long time the cooperative ethos. Nonetheless, intense opposition to the NDFU’s efforts for government health care came more from powerful and entrenched national and state interests than from a relatively small group of doctors as in

⁸³ Stan Rands, “Recollections: The CCF in Saskatchewan,” in ed. Kerr, *Western Canadian Politics*, 61; McHenry, *The Third Force in Canada*, 249-51; Johnson, *Dream No Little Dreams*, 66, 145; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 381.

⁸⁴ *The Big Question...Answered about the CCF in Saskatchewan* (n.d.), 1-16, File III, CCF Pamphlet Collection, University of Saskatchewan Special Collections.

⁸⁵ *Commonwealth*, 13 Feb. 1946, p. 1; *The Big Question...Answered*, 4-5, 7-8.

Saskatchewan. The charge of “socialized medicine” also hampered the creation of public health efforts.

North Dakota faced serious challenges in terms of access to rural health provisions. After World War II, twenty-one counties had no hospital facilities, and residents in counties with medical service were commonly as much as sixty miles distant from a doctor and in some cases over 100 miles from a hospital. NDFU Director of Education and head of its Human Resources department Lulu Evanson recognized the challenges to rural health in North Dakota and served at the forefront of the Farmers Union fight for some type of public medical program. Evanson faced the effort’s first challenge when in 1943 North Dakota doctors’ organizations refused participation in a federal program that provided maternal and infant care to dependents of soldiers. Evanson and other NDFU leaders recognized that North Dakota represented the only state in the country that did not participate in the federal program, and the Farmers Union placed significant pressure upon the state’s doctors. Evanson and the NDFU succeeded and North Dakota doctors joined the federal program in March 1944.⁸⁶

Evanson and the NDFU took another step closer to government health coverage soon after World War II. In the summer of 1945 the Farmers Union inaugurated the Triangle Hospital and Medical Insurance Plan through which NDFU locals enrolled and gained access to broad coverage and surgery and death benefits. By the end of the 1940s the NDFU locals in Eddy County led the state with thirty percent of its residents signed up. Members viewed the Triangle health insurance as a part of the overall Farmers Union protection of the family farm. From this tentative step towards improved community health care, the NDFU chartered the Farmers Union Community Clinic of Williston, in the cooperative county of Williams, North Dakota. Through

⁸⁶ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 2 Dec. 1946, p. 5; Knight, *Grass Roots*, 122-23; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 104, 114.

lifetime memberships of fifty dollars and annual dues of twenty-five dollars, the NDFU hoped to create a modern medical facility with top professionals. The organization approached the funding of the community clinic as they had a regular membership drive.⁸⁷

The Williams County Farmers Union and many locals supported the clinic with vigor and money. By the late 1940s they purchased fourteen acres for facilities and constructed four on-site homes for potential physicians and surgeons. The project was underfunded, but there was grassroots momentum to sell two million dollars' worth of life insurance to finance the project. The North Dakota Medical Association (NDMA), which controlled the licensing of doctors in the state, made the licensing process extremely difficult if not impossible for potential physicians at the Williston clinic. For example, doctors from Montana and Texas toured the facility and expressed interest in joining the clinic but had their licensing applications rejected by the NDMA-controlled Board of Medical Examiners. A Farmers Union electrical co-op eventually purchased and converted the land, leaving the Williston community clinic a failed experiment.⁸⁸

Faced with the failure of cooperative health services, Lulu Evanson turned to the federal government for public health assistance. In late 1945 and into 1946, President Truman presented his Fair Deal legislative proposal to Congress, which included a national health insurance plan. Evanson sought to build upon this momentum at the federal level, and in September 1946 she headed and U.S. Public Health Service and Children's Bureau federal officials attended the Dakota Health Workshop. Though the discussion centered on pre-paid government health insurance, E. Forsythe Engebretson, secretary of the North Dakota Medical Association, testified

⁸⁷ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 4 Sept. 1944, p. 7; 16 Oct. 1944, p. 7; 4 June 1945, p. 3; 15 Oct. 1945, p. 2; 7 Feb. 1949, p. 8; 16 May 1949, p. 5.

⁸⁸ "Rural Health Cooperatives," Folder 5, Box 86, NDFU Collection, SHSND; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 138.

to a U.S. House committee on behalf of the American Medical Association that the Dakota Workshop sought socialized medicine and federal employees were complicit.⁸⁹

In the postwar period the NDFU and Lulu Evanson, put on the defensive, had to continuously rebut charges that any type of public or government health program represented socialism or communism. Much of the attacks came from the American Medical Association and the NDMA. Evanson frequently spoke before various Congressional panels in support of compulsory health insurance and refused to be cowed by redbaiting. Nonetheless, as the 1940s came to a close and the Cold War deepened, it became clear that a CCF-style universal health program would not take root across the international border in the United States.⁹⁰

Postscript

During the 1950s, the Farmers Union on the national scene and in North Dakota moved more toward the political center. Though the organization continued to advocate many of its traditional stances, such as maintenance of the family farm, high government price supports, and the promotion of civil rights and civil liberties, it had connected itself to the national Democratic Party during the tenures of Presidents Roosevelt and Truman and became less ideological. After the red-baiting of the late 1940s and early 1950s, NDFU leaders no longer called loudly for the creation of a “cooperative commonwealth,” but instead gave increasing focus to its diverse business, insurance, and cooperative entities. And partisan politics became significantly more important.

⁸⁹ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 18 Nov. 1946, p. 5, 7; 21 July 1947, p. 1; Conrad and Conrad, *50 Years*, 127-28; Edwards, *This Is The Farmers Union*, 135; Jason Scott Smith, “The Fair Deal,” in ed. Daniel S. Margolies, *Blackwell Companions to American History, Vol. 67: Companion to Harry S. Truman* (Somerset, NJ: John Wiley, 2012), 212-18.

⁹⁰ *North Dakota Union Farmer*, 6 June 1949, p. 5; 21 July 1947, p. 1, 5; 18 July 1949, p. 5; 1 Aug. 1949, p. 3.

NDFU president Glenn Talbott had conferred with President Truman about ways to strengthen the Democratic Party in North Dakota. With Eisenhower's election and the appointment of Ezra Taft Benson as Agriculture Secretary, farmers in North Dakota worried that the federal farm programs, born in the New Deal, were under threat. With NDFU active support, the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota considered a strategic political move: a break with the state GOP and merge with the state Democratic Party. With assistance from the national Democrats and with powerful NDFU representatives given positions on the NPL executive committee, the NPL filed in the Democratic column in the 1956 state elections. The Farmers Union used all resources at its disposal to build political support for the League, through radio programs, newspapers, and co-ops. Though the North Dakota GOP won in 1956, the North Dakota Farmers Union and the Nonpartisan League had brought to the state something that never existed: a two-party system. In 1958 NDFU counsel Quentin Burdick became the first Democrat from North Dakota to be elected to the House of Representatives, and in 1960 the League formally merged with the Democratic Party. "I should be less than honest with you," Glenn Talbott explained in 1956, "if I did not say that I am personally most happy that this has been done—and that I sincerely hope and believe that this state will henceforth be a two-party state."⁹¹

Red-baiting and the need to preserve federal agricultural programs pushed the Farmers Union into making calculated political decisions in a constraining political environment. Glenn Talbott and other leaders realized that the Republican Party, once the party of the left in North Dakota, was no longer amenable to political cooperation. The recognition that the NDFU shared a sizable portion of its membership with the NPL offered an opportunity to expand its relations

⁹¹ David B. Danbom, "A Part of the Nation and Apart from the Nation: North Dakota Politics Since 1945," in ed. Richard Lowitt, *Politics in the Postwar American West* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995), 179; Talbot, "The North Dakota Farmers Union and North Dakota Politics," 894-901.

with another organization in its field. This strategy based on factions allowed the NDFU to tap into existing political resources, what Mildred Schwartz calls “bridging strategies.” Farmers Union leaders understood this would alienate the more conservative “Old Guard” Leaguers, but working with the NPL to merge with the state Democrats was judged as a worthy strategy to combat ROC control and to make North Dakota a two-party state. However, such a strategy paralleled the disintegration in the late 1950s of the leftist wing of the American agrarian movement. NDFU president Glenn Talbott became vice president of the national Farmers Union in 1958, and moved from North Dakota to the national organization’s headquarters in Denver. Talbott’s exit from a state in which his father, Charley, had experienced Equity, the NPL, the wheat pool, and then headed the Farmers Union until his untimely death in 1937, heralded the end of an era of agrarian radicalism in the northern plains.⁹²

The growth of conservative political sentiment in the Canadian prairies after 1950, unaccompanied by a Red Scare, also affected the fortunes of the CCF. Though the party won a fourth consecutive victory in the province in 1958, the election was tight. Economic prosperity had returned to the prairie West and especially to Saskatchewan, but Premier Tommy Douglas and his cabinet mused that “people wanted something more, or perhaps something different.” Evidently, the people did, indeed. In 1958, former Saskatchewan Tory leader John Diefenbaker led the federal Progressive Conservatives to a resounding electoral win and a large majority in Parliament. Diefenbaker’s promise to make agriculture a federal priority garnered his party forty-

⁹² Mildred Schwartz, “Interactions Between Social Movements and U.S. Political Parties,” *Party Politics* 15 (Mar., 2010): 1-21; Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada*, 66, 198. For a sympathetic look at Glenn Talbott’s career in the Farmers Union, see National Farmers Union Convention, “Distinguished Service to Agriculture Award,” (1966), Glen J. Talbott Collection of Papers, NDSU Archives.

eight of forty-nine prairie seats, and his Government produced price support legislation in addition to other agricultural measures.⁹³

While conservatism spread across the prairies, the federal CCF officially became the New Democratic Party (NDP) in 1961. The NDP moved away from the CCF's original focus on agrarianism and courted more heavily labor unions and other left-liberal groups in Canada, and continued to exercise a powerful third-party role. Though Tommy Douglas settled in Ottawa and became NDP federal leader in 1964, he left an unforgettable legacy in the province. In 1960, with Saskatchewan enjoying full prosperity due to oil and mineral revenue and the decision of the federal government to subsidize half the cost, then Premier Douglas declared it was time for the CCF government to expand medical care significantly in terms of prepayment, universal coverage, high quality service, public administration, and acceptance by both providers and patients. In opposition to what they deemed government overreach and control, the Saskatchewan College of Physicians and Surgeons went on strike in July 1962. After a few weeks, the doctors and the government ended the strike through a compromise, which retained universal coverage but ensured doctor freedom from government control. Three years later, in 1965, the federal government inaugurated Canada's first universal health program, the Medical Care Act.⁹⁴

Political leaders in both the U.S. and Canada first proposed a national health insurance plan in the 1940s. Prime Minister McKenzie King offered federal money to provinces for public health services, and President Truman in 1945 proposed a comprehensive federal health system, with the strong support of the Farmers Union. While the CCF kept universal national health

⁹³ Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 376-78.

⁹⁴ Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, 288-91; Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 382-87; Schwartz, *Party Movements in the United States and Canada*, 158-61.

coverage at the center of the debate through the 1950s, and as the Saskatchewan CCF implemented significant steps towards provincial comprehensive coverage, the cry of “socialized medicine” in the U.S. connected federal compulsory health plans to communism, and doomed such proposals. In the 1960s, the U.S. created a public-private health system, while Canada implemented universal health care. The CCF-NDP had much to do with making this possible: by publicizing the issue for decades, through the Saskatchewan example, and through a parliamentary system that allowed the CCF-NDP to continually press the ruling party for legislative action.⁹⁵

In all this, the constraints imposed by the Second Red Scare severely circumscribed the Farmers Union and its advocacy on behalf of nationalized health care, but also its leaders’ desire to remain divorced from direct political action. The anticommunist hysteria forced the organization to choose political sides, temper its Depression-era call for a cooperative commonwealth, and focus more squarely on business and cooperatives. That the Farmers Union purged itself of left-liberal elements in the early Cold War period speaks volumes. A less hostile political atmosphere in Canada, and the parliamentary system, allowed the social democratic CCF party to play a role in shaping national policy and experiment with socialism in Saskatchewan and in other provinces. The divergent trajectories of farmer-labor politics and agrarian organizations muted the types of cross-border organizational connections that had been common from 1905 through 1930.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Antonia Maioni, *Parting at the Crossroads: The Emergence of Health Insurance in the United States and Canada* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 60-152.

⁹⁶ Mildred Schwartz notes that the CCF did maintain communication with the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party through the World War II period. See “Cross-Border Ties Among Protest Movements: The Great Plains Connection,” *Great Plains Quarterly* 17 (1997): 119-130.

Apart from the political arena, an early 1960s survey of rural municipalities in Saskatchewan concluded that the countryside was “over-organized” with a myriad of Saskatchewan Farmers Union locals, wheat pool affiliates, and various cooperatives. Despite this, the pool prospered in the second half of the twentieth century, bolstered by the monopoly marketing powers and price-setting ability of the federal Wheat Board. In the 1950s, the Saskatchewan Farmers Union, like its North Dakota namesake, remained focused on the preservation of the family farm through price supports and parity legislation. Some Farmers Union members feared that they, as small farmers, might become serfs on their own land, taking orders from government-subsidized corporate agricultural executives and absentee investors and stockholders.⁹⁷

There were truths in such worries. The small, family farm did become rare after 1950, replaced by large commercial enterprises referred to as “agribusinesses.” In 1950, however, the small farm remained predominant, but changes were occurring, inexorably. Men and women of the land foresaw a different rural world in their future. An old-timer in Saskatchewan remarked in the early 1960s how,

“In the old days, you had no trouble getting farmers out to meetings. Today, things have changed. There are too many distractions. People aren’t interested in their farm organization like they used to be.” Years earlier, a North Dakota farmer remarked, “I believe that the government programs should be based on family sized farms...People used to try to do good farming because it paid to farm good; now in too many cases people summerfallow, strip farm, plant trees, sweet clover or potatoes in order to collect government payments. A year ago I saw potatoes being dug and piled in bins made of snow fence quite late in the fall when potatoes would freeze. When I asked why this was being done, I was told that this was necessary in order to collect from the government, and that after the potatoes were dug, picked and piled and measured, they would be spread on the land for fertilizer. I could not help but think that they would have made quite acceptable fertilizer without going to the expense and labor digging, picking, piling, measuring and spreading.”

⁹⁷ Herbert Schulz, *Betrayal: Agricultural Politics in the Fifties* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2004), 1-3; McCrorie, “The Saskatchewan Farmers Movement,” 404-12.

Both of these old farmers were wise beyond their years.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ Interview with Benson Co., ND resident (n.d.), n.p. Bert M. Salisbury Papers, NDSU; McCrorie, "The Saskatchewan Farmers Movement," 412.

Chapter Seven

Conclusions

During the Great Depression the trajectories of agrarian protest in the northern plains of North America diverged. The New Deal muted farmer radicalism in the United States, wedded the major farm organizations to federal largesse, and allowed President Roosevelt to create a liberal Democratic coalition that headed off third-party challengers. The actions of Roosevelt left little room for leftist agrarian insurgency. As Robert C. McMath notes, “Whatever the New Deal meant, at least there was one.” In Canada, Prime Minister R.B. Bennett’s initial disinterest in such a federal program, and belated half-hearted attempt to create a Tory “New Deal” in 1935, created the political openings for third-party challenges, the farmer-labor Cooperative Commonwealth Federation being the foremost among them. Canada developed a robust social democratic political tradition, and Saskatchewan in particular spearheaded the creation of the nation’s social welfare state in the decades after World War II. The single liberal farm organization in the United States, the Farmers Union, became irrevocably tied to the national Democrats in the Truman era and moved to the center in a hostile red-baiting political environment.¹

If the Great Depression set organized and politicized farmers in different directions in North America, it altered—but did not completely rupture—the long history of cross-border connections and interactions between agrarian organizations in North Dakota and Saskatchewan. In fact, the North Dakota Farmers Union and the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool joined together for

¹ Robert C. McMath, Jr., “Populism in Two Countries: Agrarian Protest in the Great Plains and Prairie Provinces,” *Agricultural History* 69 (Fall, 1995): 543.

family weekends well into the 1970s and 1980s.² The Depression certainly had a role to play in altering binational connections as people and organizations retrenched, focused on immediate needs, and looked to their neighbors and family and their own local, state, and national governments for assistance. But the Depression does not fully explain the divergence. Students of this period in transnational history overlook a commensurate and equally important explanation for the changes in the nature of connections between farmers and farm groups across the forty-ninth parallel. After thirty years of similar, if not identical organizational forms in North Dakota and Saskatchewan, the 1930s produced incongruence in the types of farm groups in the two countries. Binational institutional equivalence increases the probability and instances of cross-border interactions and as organizational forms develop in divergent ways, transnational contact is altered and often weakened.³

From 1905 to 1930, the farm associations in North Dakota and Saskatchewan were practically interchangeable in form and function. The prairie Grain Growers' Grain Company cooperatively marketed wheat on a large scale. It sought access to and control of the terminal market. In North Dakota and Minnesota, the Equity Cooperative Exchange cooperatively marketed wheat on a large scale and sought access to and control of the terminal market. During the World War I period and into the early 1920s, the Nonpartisan League in North Dakota utilized political insurgency at the subnational level in an effort to promote and expand public services related to agriculture. The Nonpartisan League in Saskatchewan did so as well, though less successfully. With agrarian politics in decline, the 1920s became the decade of the wheat

² See information on the family weekends in Folder 3, Box 148, NDFU Collection, State Historical Society of North Dakota, Bismarck.

³ Doug McAdam and Dieter Rucht discuss the importance of such institutional equivalence in cross-border interactions in "The Cross-National Diffusion of Movement Ideas," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 528 (July, 1993): 56-74.

pools, whereby farmers contractually delivered grain and allowed the pool to market it at intervals throughout the crop season, in return for payments throughout the year, not just at harvest time. The prairies and the northern plains states in the U.S. formed identical pool systems based on the model devised by Aaron Sapiro.

This organizational parallelism changed in the 1930s. The North Dakota Farmers Union focused squarely on building up business cooperatives and buttressing them with educational and youth programs. Saskatchewan farmers, laborers, and Social Gospelers built the CCF. Though certainly sympathetic to the NDFU's cooperative and liberal goals, CCF leaders such as M.J. Coldwell and Tommy Douglas—who were not farmers—paid more attention to American social democrats such as Henry Wallace or the Minnesota Farmer-Labor Party, or socialists like Norman Thomas.

The United Farmers of Canada—Saskatchewan Section might have maintained close relations with the Farmers Union if it had not been dealing with financial collapse and the loss of its agrarian identity in a crowded field of farm organizations in the province. The UFC fought and lost the struggle for survival, and when it disappeared in 1949, the Saskatchewan Farmers Union replaced it but still clashed with other farm groups. This left the various provincial cooperatives to maintain connections with North Dakota farmers. In the late 1930s and through the 1940s, president Glenn Talbott and other leaders in the Farmers Union made frequent forays into prairie Canada to talk co-ops, and Canadian cooperators reciprocated. Without the broad institutional equivalents of the pre-Depression period, the equally broad transnational connections narrowed, but remained.

Within and around such binational interactions it is clear that politics—and political boundaries—matter. They create opportunities and constraints within which movement actors

must navigate. The power given to subnational units in Canada's federal system allowed the types of political experimentation and economies of scale not possible in the United States. The Saskatchewan Liberals as the "farmers' party" certainly influenced the maneuverings of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association and the failures of the Nonpartisan League and other political insurgents. Of course, the New Deal/no New Deal dichotomy produced divergent outcomes. The difference in intensity of the political Red Scare in the U.S. and Canada shaped the developments of agrarian liberalism and social democracy.

Such forces help the historian explain broad developments over time, but individual leaders must not be overlooked. Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association leader J.B. Musselman played as large a role as the Liberals in staving off agrarian insurgency in the post-World War I period. George Loftus did more than anyone to vilify the Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce, and died a martyr in the heat of the battle. John McHugh, as a common enemy, drew Equity and the Grain Growers' company together in the 1910s. Aaron Sapiro directly shaped the agricultural commodity pool movement in the U.S. and Canada, and indirectly in Australia and the Soviet Union. The Talbott family ran the Farmers Union in North Dakota for almost forty years. And Tommy Douglas is a household name in Canada, and is lauded as the "Father of Medicare." Arthur Townley made the Nonpartisan League into socialist powerhouse, remained politically and organizationally active for the next forty years, and eventually became a rabid red-baiter and in the 1950s attacked the North Dakota Farmers Union as communist.⁴

The persons who sacrificed daily to lead farmers to a better life should not be ignored. Nor should the individual farmers, their families, or their communities be forgotten. It is important to remember that the Grain Growers' organizations, Equity, the Nonpartisan League,

⁴ Larry R. Remele, "The Lost Years of A.C. Townley (after the Nonpartisan League)," *North Dakota Humanities Council Occasional Paper* 1 (Feb., 1988): 1-27.

the wheat pools, the Farmers Union, and the CCF were animated by working farmers. These associations meant a great deal to their members. In the sparsely populated stretches of the northern plains, such groups often represented the farmers' most significant link to others and to the outside world. North Dakota Farmers Union president Glenn J. Talbott movingly explained in 1940 the importance of the agrarian organization:

“I know a lot of farmers think the Farmers Union is an elevator...[or] an oil station; they think the Farmers Union is a creamery; some place else they think it is a shipping association or a turkey pool or a life insurance company, an automobile or a truck insurance company. I've tried to tell you what the Farmers Union is—a group of people perfecting and improving a way of life...If the Farmers Union never did anything beyond this one thing, that it does and can do, to provide the machinery through which you and your neighbors may become articulate, so that you can speak authoritatively about your problems, it has justified itself.”⁵

⁵ Speech by Glenn J. Talbott, at Moorhead, MN, 25 Oct. 1940, *The Future and Past Of The Co-operative Farm Organizations of The Northwest* (St. Paul: FUGTA, 1940), 8-9, Folder 13, Box 11, Ole Olson Papers, NDSU Archives, Fargo.

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