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## THE COOPERATIVE COMMONWEALTH FEDERATION: A WESTERN CANADIAN SOCIAL MOVEMENT

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The subject of this study is a Canadian social movement that has been in existence since the depression year 1933. It has the official name of Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, but is usually referred to as the C. C. F. The movement is of particular interest because it has established in the province of Saskatchewan the first avowedly socialist state or provincial government in the history of North America. In order to understand fully the origin of the organization one must understand the basic structure of the economy of the prairie provinces and particularly of the province of Saskatchewan.

The Canadian prairie is the north central part of the great American plain. In the last decade of the nineteenth century the price of wheat in the world market began a fairly steady rise, and the stream of settlement into the province of Saskatchewan grew rapidly. The relative disadvantages of the northern prairie for wheat growing were gradually overcome. The shortness of the growing season as the farmer went further north was met by selecting early maturing spring wheats. The other major disadvantage, relatively low rainfall, was met by the development of dry farming methods calculated to conserve the scant supply of moisture. World War I greatly accelerated the development of wheat production in this area and the increase continued in the post-war years. In Saskatchewan 65 per cent of the land annually seeded to field crops is devoted to wheat, and in some regions this rises to 80 and even to 90 per cent. Ordinarily over the whole province 80 per cent of the cash receipts from farming come from the sale of wheat, and in some regions this rises to almost 100 per cent. Wheat acreage in the province grew from half a million acres in 1900 to five and one-half million acres in 1913, and reached a peak of fifteen and one-half millions in 1932.

In addition to the physical hazards faced by these producers there is the economic hazard of price fluctuations in an uncertain world market. During the thirties drought was accompanied by world depression and extremely low prices for wheat. The drastic curtailment of the income of the farmer because of forces beyond his individual control could not be solved on an individual

basis. Old and established practices were inadequate to meet the problems confronting the individual producer. The economic and social system that he had always depended upon, and that had heretofore served him well enough, no longer functioned to meet his needs and those of his family. He found that many of the values to which he had always rendered allegiance now seemed less reliable and less worthy. Individual independence and hard work were no longer enough. These pioneer peoples who had come to Saskatchewan were, like most pioneers, optimistic, selfreliant, and believers in rugged individualism. It was only after several years of depression that they lost faith in the capitalistic system and individual initiative as fundamental social values. Even the first meager relief given them by the Canadian government was considered by all concerned as a loan and not a gift, and the recipients were considered not as indigents, but as producers in need of capital for further productive effort. Thus we have something of the economic background that produced and stimulated the growth of the C. C. O. It is a picture of prosperity and disastrous depression, of optimism turning to despair and pessimism, and the continuous struggle of the pioneer farmer with natural and economic forces before which he was almost completely helpless. The old values were not measuring up to his needs. The social and economic system in which he had always believed no longer seemed to function. After several years of hope and patient waiting the people of Saskatchewan began to seek new values and a new social and economic system. Today, the majority of them seem to think they have found it in the ideas and principles of a cooperative commonwealth.

In 1932 a new organization, The League For Social Reconstruction, made its appearance in the eastern provinces. It was the culmination of a series of meetings that had been held for several years at McGill and Toronto universities. One of the leaders of this group was Frank Scott, a member of the law faculty at McGill University. This small group of intellectuals decided that socialism was a practicable and desirable solution to the problems of the nation, and in 1936 published its views in a comprehensive treatise entitled *Social Planning for Canada*. Similar discussions were taking place among members of the various farmer and labor parties in the west. For some time there had existed a coordinating body known as the Western Labor Conference, composed of the Socialist party of British Columbia, the Canadian Labor Party and the Dominion Labor Party of Alberta, the Independent Labor Party of Saskatchewan, and the Independent Labor Party of Manitoba. In the summer of the year 1932, the Independent Labor Party of Saskatchewan under the leadership of M. J. Coldwell, and the Saskatchewan farmers under the leadership of George H. Williams, formed the Saskatchewan Farmer-Labor Party.

The cumulative effect of these events was of great importance. The economic and social crisis in Canada had set in motion simultaneous developments in the east and in the west, in university, in Parliament, and in the field. Everywhere there was a probing into the causes of the trouble. Everywhere people banded themselves together into organizations, little and big, for the purposes of study and of political action. The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation was called into existence out of these conditions. Undoubtedly the growth of the New Deal in the United States and the British Labor Party in England were strong forces influencing the origin and ideology of the Canadian Movement.

In August, 1932 the Western Labor Conference met at the Labor Temple of Calgary, Alberta. Farmer representatives met with them to form a nationwide people's political and social movement. Over one hundred delegates were present representing all the labor, socialist, and farmer political organizations of the four western provinces. The Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees was also represented by its president. Members of the national Parliament were there, together with the farmer and labor members of provincial legislatures. Eventually a unity was achieved and a program was formulated. A Resolutions Committee, with M. J. Coldwell as chairman, was

created with instructions to build a final platform of the new party to be presented for consideration at the first convention the following year in Regina. This Regina manifesto was adopted in July, 1933 and has set the pattern for C. C. F. action since that time.

It was not until eleven years later that the movement achieved its first victory in a provincial election. This was in the Saskatchewan election of June, 1944. When the new government under the leadership of Premier T. C. Douglas took office, 47 of the 52 members of the provincial legislature were of the C. C. F. party. Of these, 30 were farmers, 1 a farmer's wife, 6 were trade unionists, and the other 10 represented various small businesses.

They immediately began to put into effect the socialist objectives of the Regina Manifesto. The first legislation provided for the establishment of a system of social ownership of the means of production. This Crown Corporation Act of 1945 has resulted in the creation of five main types of business enterprise operated by the Saskatchewan Government:

1. Those producing consumer goods from primary products — a woolen mill, and a shoe factory.
2. Those producing goods for industrial use — a sodium sulphate development, a brick plant, a tannery, and a box factory.
3. Those processing and marketing primary products — a timber board, a fish board, and a fur marketing service.
4. Public utilities — a power commission, a telephone system, a bus transportation system, and a government airways.
5. Those providing services — housing, the reconstruction corporation, a government seed cleaning plant, and a book bureau.

In addition to these, a Government Insurance Office provides lower cost insurance for the people of the province, and contributes to provincial revenues from its surpluses, and a Government Printing Company substantially reduces government printing costs.

For the fiscal year ending March 31, 1947, net earnings for all crown corporations, including the Power Commission and Department of Telephones, after depreciation and before interest on capital, amounted to \$2,570,000, a return of 10.6% on capital invested.

Reforms beneficial to special interest groups such as farmers and laborers as well as to the general public were soon put into effect. The legislation of most direct effect upon agriculture was the Farm Security Act which provided that no farmer could be evicted from his home quarter section of one hundred and sixty acres under a mortgage agreement, and that farmers operating land under mortgages or agreement of sale should be relieved of making principal payments during crop failure years. The act further stipulated that the debtor should retain sufficient of his crop to meet legitimate harvesting costs, necessary living allowances for himself and his family, and costs of farming operations, including seed grain sufficient to sow all the land he had under cultivation. Other legislation for the benefit of the rural population has provided for an accelerated and expanded rural electrification program, extension of the rural telephone system, an increase in veterinary services, the establishment of agricultural scholarships, and a government seed-cleaning program.

The cooperative movement is an important factor in the lives of the people of Saskatchewan, particularly those of the rural regions. For this reason the C. C. F. government established a new Department of Cooperation and Cooperative Development. The function of this agency was to encourage and assist in the organization of cooperative enterprise. A research service was supplied to assist in this activity.

In the field of education the Saskatchewan government professes to stand for equal educational opportunities for every person. Its program for

reformation of the educational system of the province includes every unit from the rural grade school to the provincial university. Assistance has been in the form of financial grants, free books, and salary increases for the teachers. Larger units of rural school administration have been created by consolidation, and an adult education division has been established.

By the passage of the Trades Union Act and the Annual Holidays Act the C. C. F. government immediately indicated a willingness to render strong support to the laborers in the province. The purpose of the first of these, the Trades Union Act, was to prevent all forms of interference by employers or others with the efforts of employees to form organizations of their own, or to join unions of their own choice. Every employer is required to bargain collectively with any trade union which represents a majority of his employees. A Labor Relations Board of seven members was appointed as the administrative agent. It has wide powers to prevent unfair labor practices and to determine which trade union should be recognized as the bargaining representative in any unit of industry. This act in behalf of organized labor was the only one of its kind in Canada and for that reason was unusually significant, particularly since it was created in a province that is overwhelmingly rural.

The other enactment which was of considerable importance to the worker was the Annual Holidays Act. This law required that every employee, with the exception of farm workers, be given an annual vacation of two weeks. The employee receives his regular rate of pay for the vacation period and it must be given him on the day before the vacation is to begin.

On January 1, 1947, under the C. C. F., government began the first province-wide, government sponsored, prepaid hospitalization plan on the North American continent.

Broadly speaking, the plan provides residents of the province with basic hospital services on payment of the annual per capita tax of \$5, with a maximum of \$30 for a family, regardless of how large it is. A few categories, comprising less than 10% of the total population, are not included in the plan because they are already covered for free hospitalization by other government services or institutions. Old age and blind pensioners, and mother's allowance recipients, together with their dependents, have their taxes paid by the government as part of the complete medical care they receive.

Services provided under the plan in approved hospitals and nursing homes, when a part of in-patient services, include: public ward accommodation with general nursing care, meals and special diets, operating and case rooms, surgical dressings and casts, most drugs and medicines in general use, anaesthetic agents, x-ray and laboratory examinations, x-ray and radium treatments and physiotherapy. There is no limitation of time spent in hospital other than that considered necessary by the attending physician, and there are no restrictions of benefits because of previous illness.

While outside the province or country, Saskatchewan residents who are beneficiaries of the plan may receive, when hospitalized in officially recognized institutions, hospital benefits to an average daily maximum of \$4 and for a maximum of 60 days during any calendar year.

Newborn infants receive free benefits for the remainder of the year for which the mother's tax is paid.

Some idea of the scope of the plan may be gained from the fact that during its first ten months of operation 116,000 persons received benefits averaging \$48 for 10 days' stay, and more than \$5,000,000 was paid out to hospitals by the plan.

Central in Saskatchewan's expanding health program are the developments taking place under the terms of the Health Services Act, first passed in the fall of 1944 and reenacted in amended form in 1946.

The Act provides for health regions, 14 of which have been proposed for the province, with a possibility of consolidation into a smaller number of regions. Six regions are in operation and one more is in the process of being established. The health region is administered by public health personnel and a regional health board representing residents of the region.

With the financial assistance and collaboration of the Department of Public Health, each region first of all provides its people with fundamental public health services. These include communicable disease control, immunisation, sanitation, pre-natal and post-natal care, well-baby clinics, and health education of all types. In addition, a region may provide medical, dental, and other personal health services on a prepayment basis.

At present, Swift Current Health Region Number 1, the most advanced, is supplying medical services for the entire population, and dental care for children on a tax supported basis. It is the largest area in Canada providing such services.

Each of these persons receives a card which entitles him to all necessary medical, hospital, dental, and optical services, including prescribed drugs and appliances, at the expense of the government.

Completely free diagnosis, treatment, and hospitalization has been provided by the Saskatchewan government since May, 1944 for cancer patients receiving treatment at provincial cancer clinics and, in a few types of cases, for those who receive treatment otherwise.

Established in early February, 1946, Saskatchewan's unique Air Ambulance Service recorded a total of 299 mercy flights during the first year of operation, and flew a total of 100,000 miles. More than 800 patients have been carried by the air ambulance planes. This service is especially valuable during the winter months when many patients can not be transported to hospital by other means because of snow, ice and the great distances involved in the isolated rural areas.

Perhaps at this point something should be said as to the structure and organization of this social movement. Membership seems to be open to anybody who accepts and subscribes to the movement's program and philosophy. There seem to be no barriers of religion, race, language, or occupation. All citizens are invited to join the movement, and most provincial organizations have separate youth sections organized under the name of Cooperative Commonwealth Youth Movement or, as it is commonly called, the C. C. Y. M. The only restriction is that members of this organization cannot be members of any other political party whose principles conflict with those of the C. C. Y. M. The function of the youth groups is both propagandistic and political, with the emphasis on the former. Each unit has an Education Committee, which is an active working group composed of the leaders of the organization. Much time is spent in discussing the fundamentals of Socialism, contrasting it with other theories in such a way as always to make it seem to be the superior system. Considerable time is spent in discussing current events with every opportunity taken to point out the advantages of socialism as contrasted with the many disadvantages of the capitalistic system. Each unit is very strongly urged to subscribe to the official propaganda sheet of the movement, the *News Comment*, and usually some member at each meeting gives a short account of the leading articles in the newest issue. The Provincial Educational Secretary annually prepares study courses for the use of the various C. C. Y. M. groups. Educational films may also be obtained from provincial headquarters in Regina.

The local C. C. Y. M. organizations also carry on many purely social activities such as parties, picnics, dances, and skating parties. Political activities are confined mainly to active cooperation with the C. O. P. This means the distribution of literature, canvassing for subscriptions and memberships, and arranging for public meetings. The Provincial Executive sends to each

unit a recommended book list for the reading of the members. These books are free of charge and are obtained from the headquarters in Regina. C. C. Y. M. membership is often publicized by the wearing of jewelry such as pins or rings or by monograms on sweaters and jackets etc.

This discussion of the C. C. F. would not be complete without some word as to the opposition to the movement. As the struggle between the growing forces of a new social order and the entrenched forces of the old order increases in bitterness, it becomes possible to distinguish with some clarity the form of the opposition. To this observer it seems that there are four main sources from which comes the attack against the movement: (1) The Liberal and Conservative political parties in Canada; (2) other leftist groups, particularly the communists; (3) proponents of economic liberalism operating through the privately owned newspapers of the Dominion; (4) individuals who have a grievance against the movement, or who feel called upon personally to defend the capitalistic system. The opposition forces are now beginning an organized and consistent attack; in the recent elections last June the C. C. F. seats in the provincial legislature dwindled from 47 to 31, and its percentage of the popular vote cast fell from 52% to 47%. There is probably good reason to believe that, now that the war is finished, the potential opponents will give more attention to the new movement. Undoubtedly the main forces in the battle will be composed of the large business interests which have become well entrenched in the Dominion's economic structure. On the political scene, these interests will very likely continue to work, through the Liberal and Conservative parties. The Communist party is small in numbers and seems to be indifferent to a large mass membership. Its attacks will probably continue to make up in bitterness what they lack in size.

In conclusion we see that a preliminary advance toward a cooperative and socialized commonwealth has been made in Saskatchewan; undoubtedly the goal of all future efforts of the movement will be in the direction of creating such a social system for the entire dominion of Canada. What the future will bring is not clear at this time. Certainly the economic situation, national and international, will have considerable bearing on the growth or decadence of the movement. The question of the effect of a severe post-war depression upon the C. C. F. is yet to be answered. Theoretically, economic dislocations produce social movements similar to the C. C. F. and the return of prosperity tends to weaken them and undermine their strength. Whether or not this will actually happen in the case of the C. C. F. will be answered only in the light of future events. Another factor influencing the course of Canadian socialism is the possible power and aggressiveness of the opposition, when it finally becomes organized at full strength for the battle.

For the United States there are some important implications in the existence and growth of the Canadian movement. The people of Canada are quite similar to us in cultural background and possess a social and economic system containing most of the values present in our own. Many regions of the United States have the same geography and one-crop economy as are found in the western provinces of Canada. In our history we find a record of several social movements similar to the C. C. F. If severe economic depression should occur again in this nation it is not improbable that certain organizations would appear in much the same manner and with the same purpose. There are certain groups in the United States who are doubtful of the ability of our institutional system to meet the social and economic requirements of the nation. This unrest might eventually be channeled into a social movement seeking to build a cooperative socialist state. It seems likely, however, that this could happen only under the stimulus of a general condition of economic maladjustment comparable to the situation during the 1929-39 decade.