Against the Grain:

Accommodation to Conflict in Labour-Capital Relations in Prairie Agriculture 1880-1930

by

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ABSTRACT

Between the 1880s and the Great Depression agriculture emerged and matured as the mainstay of the prairie economy. Farm workers were essential to the developing economy and society, but their place in the rural west was ambiguous.

During the pioneering period, labour shortages and accessible land gave farm workers bargaining strength in the labour market and a niche in prairie society. A cooperative working relationship and a shared ideology resulted in a lack of overt conflict between labour and capital.

But as lands were taken, farm workers faced more and more the necessity of remaining as wage labourers. Their position became institutionalized.

The First World War highlighted the conflict that was fundamental to labour-capital relations, as farm workers and farmers alike bolstered their economic positions. Labour and capital entered the post-war decade recognizing the increasing divergence of their aims. Their relationship became more overtly conflictual.

Throughout this transformation, farm workers used strategies to influence the shape and rate of change in the industry and to maintain significant control over their own working lives. They responded as members of the working class, as active agents in relationships with their employers and with capitalism.

RÉSUMÉ

Entre les années 1880 et la Crise economique des annees 1930, l'agriculture s'est developpee à un rythme tel dans les provinces des Prairies qu'elle est devenue le point d'appui de leur economie. Lors même que les ouvriers agricoles furent indispensables a l'économie et a la société en voie de developpement, leur situation sociale dans l'Ouest rural ne fut pas pour autant moins ambiguë.

Pendant la periode de colonisation, les penuries de main-d'oeuvre et l'acces facile aux terres ont donné aux ouvriers agricoles un pouvoir sur le marche de l'emploi ainsi qu'une niche dans la societe des Prairies. Des rapports de travail fondes dans la cooperation et une idéologie commune peuvent expliquer l'absence de conflit ouvert entre le travail et le capital.

Mais avec l'occupation grandissante du terroir, les ouvriers agricoles ont dû faire face de plus en plus a la necessité de se contenter de leurs conditions de vie en tant qu'ouvriers agricoles. Leur situation des lors s'institutionnalise.

La Premiere Guerre Mondiale a pourtant mis en évidence le conflit essentiel qui caracterise les rapports du travail et du capital, au moment même ou, tour a tour fermiers et ouvriers agricoles amelioraient leurs conditions economiques. Les forces du travail et du capital ont ainsi abordé la période de l'apres-guerre avec une pleine connaissance de leurs perspectives désormais divergentes. Leurs rapports devinrent alors ouvertement conflictuels.

Au cours de cette transformation, les ouvriers agricoles ont usé de strategies pour exercer une influence sur la forme et le rythme du changement dans l'industrie ainsi que pour maintenir un contrôle significatif sur leurs propres conditions de travail. Ils on reagi en tant que membres de la classe ouvriere, en tant qu'agents actifs engagés dans des rapports de lutte avec leurs patrons et avec le capitalisme.

PREFACE

Hired hands in the prairie west have been largely absent from historical studies. This dissertation casts light upon the conditions of their life and labour. It has a two-fold aim. It develops a theory to explain the changes in labour-capital relations during the development and maturation of the wheat economy, and it examines the lives of farm workers to understand how they dealt with the consequences. The dissertation proceeds along three paths. It explores the nature of hired hands' association with their employers, both as individuals and as actors in the labour-capital relationship. It reconstructs the lives of hired hands, examining how their experiences and reactions were refracted through the prism of class. And it situates hired hands in the history of the Canadian working class, both as workers arranging their lives around the realities of class, and as part of a workforce that responded to and effected changes in the industry in which they worked.

An earlier version of material in Chapters 4 and 5 on the Industrial Workers of the World has appeared as "'Showing Those Slaves Their Class Position': Barriers to Organizing Prairie Farm Workers" in David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds. Building Beyond the Homestead Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1985.

Throughout this study the British Imperial System of measurement has been used instead of the International

System of Units, since all historical records consulted used the former system. The metric equivalents are:

1 inch = 2.54 cm. 1 foot = 30.48 cm. 1 mile = 1.6 km.
1 acre = .405 hectares 1 section = 259.2 hectares
1 bushel = .036 cubic metres

Financial assistance for this study is gratefully acknowledged from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Max Bell Foundation. Scholastic support was also received from the FCAC pour l'aide et la soutien à la recherche and the J. W. McConnell Foundation.

In writing this dissertation, I have incurred many scholarly and personal debts. My supervisor, Dr. John Herd Thompson, has provided stringent intellectual direction and unfailing moral support. I wish especially to thank him for continuing his supervision after his move to Duke University. And I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Louise Dechêne for undertaking the task of Co-internal examiner. Colleagues across the country have offered encouragement and have helped me rethink and refine many aspects of the argument. In particular I would like to thank Rod Macleod, Doug Owram, Paul Voisey, John Foster, Ann McDougall, Doug McCalla, John Wadland and Joan Sangster. Bob Beal read the entire dissertation, engaged me in rigorous debate, and provided valuable criticism. I wish also to acknowledge Bob Beal's assistance in compiling the data for the tables and graphs in the Appendix. I thank Yves Thomas for translating the abstract. And last, but far from least, I thank my family and friends for their unwavering encouragement.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

This is a study of hired hands.

Thousands of men worked and lived as paid labourers on the farms of others across the prairie west, assisting in the day-to-day and season-to-season round of activity that constituted the work of running a farm. Employed in the region's major industry, agricultural labourers formed the largest group of wage workers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta. Between 1878, when the first commercial shipment of prairie grain was sent to international markets, and 1930, when the collapse of grain prices signalled the end of the wheat boom, agriculture emerged and matured as the mainstay of the prairie west, shaping not only the economy but the society as well.

Farm workers were essential to the development of the western agricultural economy, and they left their mark on the evolving rural community. Yet they have become forgotten men in history, relegated to the periphery of labour and agricultural studies. Their part in the formation of the economy and society of the prairie west has been largely overlooked and their role in the development of the agricultural industry has been given a single dimension. This study does not intend to resurrect farm workers as neglected heroes of the rural prairies. It does seek to replace them in their historical context, by situating them within the spectrum of the Canadian labour experience.

Work was central to farm workers' lives, and relations within the world of work shaped the contours of their social relations. Labour and capital in prairie agriculture appeared to enjoy a relationship of amicability. The lack of overt conflict created the impression that there was a unity of interest manifesting itself through a cooperative working relationship and a shared ideology in which capital was the only beneficiary. This picture is overdrawn.

Agricultural labourers operated within the framework of capitalism. But they pursued their own aims that were often antithetical to those of capital. This was most evident during the half century in which agriculture became the foundation of the western economy. Between the early settlement period and the onset of the Great Depression, as the agricultural industry developed and consolidated, farm workers had ample opportunity to direct their contribution to the emerging economy and society. They were buffeted by the transformations of capital during this period, but they developed strategies that enabled them to influence the shape and rate of change in the industry and to maintain significant control over their own working lives. How they did so, and with what varying degrees of success, is the subject of this study.

Historical writing about the prairie west includes little about farm workers. It might be expected that agricultural labourers would appear most prominently in historical studies of labour and of agriculture, but in both they are shadowy entities. The classic works of agricultural history examine the industry on a grand scale, providing descriptions and explanations that are economic and political. Emphasis has been placed on establishing improved marketing techniques, introducing new and hardier strains of wheat, agricultural expansion, and innovation and mechanization. Such a "macro" approach assigns little place to the individual. Within this context, the role of the agricultural labourer has been peripheral, especially as agricultural production continued to increase in the face of a steady decline in the amount of labour employed. Hired labour has generally been regarded simply as one more input in agriculture, the costs and efficiency of which must be measured against alternate sources of labour such as animal power or machinery. Historians have limited the role of farm hands to their collective function as labour, one of the economic inputs of production, posing problems of supply and demand, or of cost. In such works as D.A. MacGibbon's The Canadian Grain Trade, farm labour appears only in a discussion of mechanization, in the context of an "unsatisfactory situation with respect to harvest labour."[1] In Charles Wilson's A Century of Canadian Grain, farm labour is not mentioned at all. In Vernon C. Fowke's studies, Canadian Agricultural Policy and The National Policy and the Wheat Economy, the subject of agricultural labour is not examined as a category separate from that of immigration and settlement.[2]

More recent works of agricultural history show a continuation of this tradition. Those that concentrate on economic aspects of the industry, such as Trevor Dick's "Productivity Change and Grain Farm Practice on the Canadian Prairie, 1900-1930" or Kenneth Norrie's "Dry-Farming and the Economics of Risk Bearing", or on political features of the industry such as Norrie's "Agricultural Implement Tariffs, the National Policy and Income Distribution in the Wheat Economy" or William Marr and Michael Percy's "The Government and the Rate of Canadian Prairie Settlement", tend to examine impersonal aspects of agriculture, relegating labour to a category of cost.[3] While this type of work is indispensable for understanding the economic importance of agricultural labour, as in the dialogue between Irene Spry and Lyle Dick over his "Estimates of Farm-Making Costs in Saskatchewan, 1882-1914" and in Robert E. Ankli, H. Dan Helsberg and John Herd Thompson's consideration of farm wages as a factor in the rate of "The Adoption of the Gasoline Tractor in Western Canada", it remains for the researcher to seek elsewhere for a sharper picture of the hired hand.[4]

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[1] Duncan Alexander MacGibbon The Canadian Grain Trade Toronto: Macmillan 1932 p 470

[2] Charles F. Wilson A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951 Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books 1978; Vernon C. Fowke Canadian Agricultural Policy: The Historical Pattern Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1946) 1978; Idem The National Policy and the Wheat Economy Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1957) 1978

[3] Trevor J.O. Dick "Productivity Change and Grain Farm Practice on the Canadian Prairie, 1900-1930" Journal of Economic History 40:1 1980; Kenneth Norrie "Dry-Farming and the Economics of Risk Bearing: The Canadian Prairies, 1870-1930" Agricultural History 51:1 1977;

Labour history might provide such a portrait, but an examination of the literature reveals that farm workers fare little better in studies of western Canadian labour history. Historians have concentrated upon groups of workers that have been better organized or more radical than farm labourers. General studies of labour organizations such as Charles Lipton's _The Trade Union Movement in Canada_, Harold Logan's _Trade Unions in Canada_ and Eugene Forsey's _Trade Unions in Canada_ have not looked at farm workers because

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Idem "Agricultural Implement Tariffs, the National Policy and Income Distribution in the Wheat Economy" _Canadian Journal of Economics_ VII:3 1974; William Marr and Michael Percy "The Government and the Rate of Canadian Prairie Settlement" _Canadian Journal of Economics_ 11:4 1978

[4]. Lyle Dick "Estimates of Farm-Making Costs in Saskatchewan, 1882-1914" _Prairie Forum_ 6:2 1981; Irene M. Spry "The Cost of Making a Farm on the Prairies" _Prairie Forum_ 7:1 1982; Lyle Dick "A Reply to Professor Spry's Critique 'The Cost of Making a Farm on the Prairies'" _Prairie Forum_ 7:1 1982; Robert E. Ankli, H. Dan Helsberg, and John Herd Thompson "The Adoption of the Gasoline Tractor in Western Canada" Donald H. Akenson, ed. _Canadian Papers in Rural History_ Vol. II Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press 1980

trade unions have made few attempts to organize them.[5] Provincial labour histories such as Warren Caragata's Alberta Labour or Doug Smith's Illustrated History of the Manitoba Labour Movement have also concentrated on the organized labour movement which has had no place for farm workers.[6] But even a study such as A. Ross McCormack's "The Industrial Workers of the World in Western Canada," on one of the few organizations which was active in the western Canadian wheat fields, mentions farm workers only in passing.[7] Moreover, monographs about western Canadian labour, such as David Bercuson's Fools and Wise Men, and McCormack's Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries neither consider nor explain the silence surrounding workers in western Canada's major industry.[8]

Nor have farm workers figured largely in the work of the "new" labour historians, who have been concerned to demonstrate the evolution of class consciousness whether through forms of worker resistance or a culture among Canadian workers. Such developments are difficult to measure and have not been obvious among farm workers. Despite their numbers and potential strength, agricultural labourers have been a remarkably silent group, thereby failing to engage the attention of labour historians searching for a more dynamic role for labour in Canada's history. Neither Bryan Palmer's Working Class Experience nor Craig Heron's The Canadian Labour Movement mentions western farm labour.[9]

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[5] Charles Lipton The Trade Union Movement in Canada: 1827-1959 Toronto: NC Press (1967) 1973; Harold A. Logan Trade Unions in Canada: Their Development and Functioning Toronto: Macmillan 1948; Eugene Forsey Trade Unions in Canada, 1812-1902 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1982

[6] Warren Caragata Alberta Labour: A Heritage Untold Toronto: James Lorimer 1979; Doug Smith Let Us Rise! An Illustrated History of the Manitoba Labour Movement Vancouver: New Star Books 1985

[7] A. Ross McCormack, "The Industrial Workers of the World in Western Canada: 1905-1914" Historical Papers/Communications historiques 1975

[8] David J. Bercuson Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson 1978; A. Ross McCormack Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1977

Nonetheless, there are encouraging signs that farm workers may yet be rescued from this historiographical obscurity, for a number of recent articles have examined specific aspects of agricultural labour. Labour organization among farm workers has been examined by John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager in their study of sugar beet workers in southern Alberta, "Workers, Growers and Monopolists," and by Cecilia Danysk in her study of IWW activity in the prairies in "'Showing Those Slaves Their Class Position'".[10] Harvest workers in western Canada have been the subject of several studies, including John H. Thompson's "Bringing in the Sheaves" and W.J.C. Cherwinski's "The Incredible Harvest Excursion of 1908" and "The British Harvester Movement of 1928."[11] Social relations have been portrayed in "The Farm Hand and the Prairie Farm Family" by W.J.C. Cherwinski, and "Custom Threshermen in Western Canada" have been examined by Ernest B. Ingles.[12]

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[9]. Bryan Palmer Working Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980 Toronto and Vancouver: Butterworth 1983; Craig Heron The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History Toronto: James Lorimer 1989

[10]. John H. Thompson and Allen Seager "Workers, Growers and Monopolists: The 'Labour Problem' in the Alberta Beet Sugar Industry During the 1930's" Labour/Le Travailleur 1978; Cecilia Danysk "'Showing Those Slaves Their Class Position': Barriers to Organizing Prairie Farm Workers" in David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds.

Historians seeking more information on labour in agriculture must venture beyond both of those fields of scholarship. A fruitful approach is through rural history. Early studies concentrated upon the economic and political aspects of the agricultural industry, the subject of such classic works as A.S. Morton's The History of Prairie Settlement, Chester Martin's 'Dominion Lands' Policy, Seymour Martin Lipset's Agrarian Socialism, W. L. Morton's The Progressive Party, and C.B. Macpherson's Democracy in

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Building Beyond the Homestead Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1985

[11] John H. Thompson "Bringing in the Sheaves: The Harvest Excursionists, 1890-1929", Canadian Historical Review December 1978; W.J.C. Cherwinski "The Incredible Harvest Excursion of 1908" Labour/Le Travailleur 5 Spring 1980; Idem "'Misfits', 'Malingerers', and 'Malcontents', The British Harvester Movement of 1928" in John E. Foster, ed., The Developing West Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 1983

[12] W. J. C. Cherwinski "In Search of Jake Trumper: The Farm Hand and the Prairie Farm Family" and Ernest B. Ingles "The Custom Threshermen in Western Canada, 1890-1925" in David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds. Building Beyond the Homestead Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1985

Alberta.[13] Farm workers are notably absent from these accounts, reflecting their absence from rural political movements and their relegation to a peripheral role in economic development. Examinations of farm work have assumed that most farm labour was performed by farmers and their families. In studies such as Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces by Carl Dawson and Eva Younge, for example, and Canada: Immigration and Colonization by Norman Macdonald, emphasis was placed upon farm owner-operators and the difficulties they faced in their efforts to establish themselves and their families in the agricultural economy.[14] But the field of rural history has undergone recent significant change. The new rural historians endeavour to paint a comprehensive picture of rural life by adding the subjects of "families, social relationships, community institutions and demographic trends" to the traditional focus on "land, crops, marketing and pioneer settlement".[15] They often take a "micro" approach, assigning much greater importance to the individual than that seen in the earlier studies. The principal actors, though, are still the farmers, not their hired hands, and the role of the latter is often overlooked. In Empire of Dust, David C. Jones examines in great detail how the settlement and subsequent abandonment of the dry belt affected the lives of individual farmers and their families. But he says nothing about the hired men who were driven out of the area in their search for farm work.[16]

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[13]. Arthur S. Morton The History of Prairie Settlement and Chester Martin 'Dominion Lands' Policy Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Volume II Toronto: Macmillan 1938; Seymour Martin Lipset Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan, A Study in Political Sociology Garden City: Anchor Books (1950) 1968; W.L. Morton The Progressive Party in Canada Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1950) 1971; C.B. Macpherson Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1968

[14]. Carl A. Dawson and Eva Younge Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces: The Social Side of the Settlement Process Canadian Frontiers of Settlement Volume VIII Toronto: Macmillan 1940; Norman Macdonald Canada: Immigration and Colonization, 1841-1903 Toronto: Macmillan 1966

However, in their detailed examination of farming, and of the social dynamics of rural communities, some rural historians are taking farm hands into account. Paul Voisey's study of Vulcan and Lyle Dick's examination of the Abernethy District both consider the role of the hired hand in the social structure of the farming community.[17] This work is now being synthesized into the general literature. The inclusion of material on farm labourers in Gerald Friesen's comprehensive history of The Canadian Prairies, has given their study a new legitimacy.[18]

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[15] John Herd Thompson and Ian MacPherson "How You Gonna Get 'Em Back to the Farm: Writing the Rural/Agricultural History of the Prairie West" unpublished paper presented to the Western Canadian Studies Conference Saskatoon 1987 p 3

[16] David C. Jones Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 1987

[17] Paul Voisey Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988; Lyle Dick Farmers 'Making Good': The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan, 1880-1920 Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History: National Historic Parks and Sites, Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada 1989

Other fields of history also repay research. Immigration has always been closely tied to labour, and historical accounts of immigration and settlement often provide information about newcomers who sought work in agriculture. Studies of particular groups such as Americans in Harold Troper's Only Farmers Need Apply, or Ukrainians in Charles Young's The Ukrainian Canadians, or the British in Lloyd Reynolds's The British Immigrant, supply some detail about what is usually a temporary stage in the adjustment of immigrants to their new home. But for the most part, immigration and settlement histories concentrate on the newcomers who became farmers themselves.[19]

More recent works about immigration frequently address the issue of waged labour, although this provides no certainty that farm work will be considered as having the same import as that of waged work outside of agriculture, which seems to have been endowed with a greater legitimacy. Jaroslav Petryshyn's Peasants in the Promised Land devotes a chapter to Ukrainians on "The Labouring Frontier", mentioning briefly their work on the farms of others, but concentrating on their work on railways, in mines and in the towns and cities.[20] The monographs about different immigrant groups in the recently commissioned Generations series include only occasional or passing reference to waged farm labour.[21]

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[18]. Gerald Friesen The Canadian Prairies: A History Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1984 p 316

[19]. Harold Troper Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911 Toronto: Griffin House 1972; Charles H. Young The Ukrainian Canadians: A Study in Assimilation Toronto: Thomas Nelson and Sons 1931; Lloyd Reynolds The British Immigrant: His Social and Economic Adjustment in Canada Toronto: Oxford University Press 1935

Still, there are examples of farm workers figuring largely in some recent studies of immigration history. Donald Avery's _'Dangerous Foreigners'_ examines farm labour as one aspect of the work cycle of central European immigrants on the prairies. Farm labour training for British immigrants is the subject of W.J.C. Cherwinski's "Wooden Horses and Rubber Cows", and farm labour is touched upon in studies of immigrant children such as Joy Parr's _Labouring Children_ and Phyllis Harrison's _The Home Children_.[22]

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[20]. Jaroslav Petryshyn _Peasants in the Promised Land: Canada and the Ukrainians, 1891-1914_ Toronto: James Lorimer 1985

[21]. See for example, Henry Radecki with Benedykt Heydenkorn _A Member of a Distinguished Family: The Polish Group in Canada_ Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1976 p 32; Gulbrand Loken _From Fjord to Frontier: A History of the Norwegians in Canada_ Toronto: McClelland and Stewart (1976) 1980 p 72; Herman Ganzevoort _A Bittersweet Land: The Dutch Experience in Canada, 1890-1980_ Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1988 p 19; Anthony W. Rasporich _For a Better Life: A History of the Croatians in Canada_ Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1982 p 67; N.F. Dreisziger with M.L. Kovacs, Paul Bödy and Bennett Kovrig _Struggle and Hope: The Hungarian-Canadian Experience_ Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1982 pp 99, 112-3. The series, entitled _Generations: A History of Canada's People_, was commissioned by the Multicultural Program of the Department of the Secretary of State.

[22]. Donald Avery _'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932_ Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1979; W.J.C. Cherwinski "Wooden Horses and Rubber Cows: Training British Agricultural Labour for the Canadian Prairies, 1890-1930"

The researcher of prairie farm labour must thus travel well beyond the bounds of region and time and field of enquiry. Studies of rural life in Quebec or in the middle western United States can help to extend the framework of analysis. Louise Dechêne's masterly study of *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle* provides methodological direction and theoretical insight to the study of rural life.[23] John Shover's *First Majority, Last Minority* provides useful parallels to the prairie experience.[24] More specific examinations of farm labour elsewhere are equally valuable. Frank Sturino's examination of "Italian Immigration to Canada and the Farm Labour System" deals with immigration to Ontario, but provides useful insight.[25] Joy Parr's study of "Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Comparative Perspective", Gordon Hak's examination of the "Harvest Excursions and Young Men" from Ontario, Timothy Demetrioff's investigation of the "Migration of English Agricultural Labourers to Ontario", David Gagan's *Hopeful Travellers*, and Alan Seager's cryptic

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Historical Papers/ Communications historiques 1980; Joy Parr *Labouring Children: British Immigrant Apprentices to Canada, 1869-1924* London: Croom Helm 1980; Phyllis Harrison, ed. *The Home Children: Their Personal Stories* Winnipeg: Watson and Dwyer 1979

[23] Louise Dechêne *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle* Paris et Montréal: Plon 1974

[24] John Shover *First Majority, Last Minority: The Transforming of Rural Life in America* DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press 1976

[25] Franc Sturino "Italian Immigration to Canada and the Farm Labour System through the 1920's" *Studi emigrazone/Etudes migrations* 22:7 marzo 1985

enquiry about "Captain Swing in Ontario?" all deal with issues that have relevance to prairie farm workers.[26]

The researcher is also rewarded by venturing beyond the discipline. Economic studies can supply valuable information. The movement out of agriculture by farm workers in the years following the depression has been examined by David McGinnis in "Farm Labour in Transition: Occupational Structure and Economic Dependency in Alberta, 1921-1951".[27] George Haythorne's Labor in Canadian Agriculture provides much useful data on prairie farm workers, and his earlier Land and Labour, although dealing with the farm labour market in central Canada, provides a useful framework of enquiry.[28]

Sociology also has much to say about the dynamics of class, labour and rural society. Although the position and conditions of farm workers are seldom addressed at length, sociological studies can provide data and insight. The length of time a man worked as a farm labourer before he began farming on his own might be measured, as in R.W. Murchie's Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier, or the involvement of immigrants in agricultural labour might be examined, as in Carl Dawson's Group Settlement. Studies of rural sociology, such as Jean Burnet's Next Year Country, while providing little direct information about farm workers, nonetheless shed light on the dynamics of rural society.[29]

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[26] Joy Parr "Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Comparative Perspective" Labour/Le Travail 15 Fall 1985; Gordon Hak "The Harvest Excursions and Young Men in Rural North Huron-South Bruce, Ontario, 1919-1928" MA University of Guelph 1981; Timothy L. Demetrioff "Joseph Arch and the Migration of English Agricultural Labourers to Ontario During the 1870s" unpublished paper Queen's University September 1982; David Gagan Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West Ontario Historical Studies Series Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1981; Allen Seager "Captain Swing in Ontario?" Bulletin of the Committee on Canadian Labour History 7 Spring 1979

[27] David McGinnis "Farm Labour in Transition: Occupational Structure and Economic Dependency in Alberta, 1921-1951" in Howard Palmer, ed. The Settlement of the West Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1977

[28] George V. Haythorne Labor in Canadian Agriculture Harvard Studies in Labor in Agriculture, Harvard Graduate School of Public Administration. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1960; George V. Haythorne with Leonard C. Marsh Land and Labour: A Social Survey of Agriculture and the Farm Labour Market in Central Canada McGill Social Research Series 11 Toronto: Oxford University Press 1941

Examinations of questions important to labour studies owe a debt to sociology. Theoretical insights into the labour process can be found in such diverse sources as The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies by Craig Littler, "Domination and Hegemony in the Capitalist Labour Process" by Andrew Herman, Know-How on the Job by Ken Kusterer, and "Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance" by James Scott.[30] The construction of masculinity has been the subject of such studies as "Shop Floor Culture, Masculinity and the Wage Form" by Paul Willis and Brothers by Cynthia Cockburn.[31] That Canadian historians are finding these insights useful is evident in such works on the labour process as Ian Radforth's Bushworkers and Bosses and Craig Heron's Working in Steel and in works on gender such as Mark Rosenfeld's "Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rythms of a Railway Town", Joy Parr's The Gender of Breadwinners, and Nancy Forestall's "Gender Construction in the Porcupine Mining Camp".[32]

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[29] R.W. Murchie Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier Canadian Frontiers of Settlement, Volume V Toronto: Macmillan 1936; C.A. Dawson Group Settlement: Ethnic Communities in Western Canada Canadian Frontiers of Settlement, Volume VII Toronto: Macmillan 1936; Jean Burnet Next-Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1951

[30] Craig Littler The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies: A Comparative Study of the Transformation of Work Organization in Britain, Japan and the USA London: Heineman Educational 1982; Andrew Herman "Conceptualizing Control: Domination and Hegemony in the

It is also evident that the search for studies relevant to the history of prairie farm workers must go beyond Canadian boundaries. Agricultural labour has received much

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Capitalist Labour Process" Insurgent Sociologist XI:3 Fall 1982; Ken C. Kusterer Know-How on the Job: The Important Working Knowledge of "Unskilled" Workers Boulder: Westview Press 1978; James Scott "Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance" Journal of Peasant Studies 13:2 January 1986

[31]. Paul Willis "Shop Floor Culture, Masculinity and the Wage Form" in J. Clarke, C. Critcher and R. Johnson, eds. Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory New York: St. Martin's Press 1979; Cynthia Cockburn Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change London: Pluto Press 1983

[32]. Ian Radforth Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987; Craig Heron Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935 Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1988; Mark Rosenfeld "'It Was A Hard Life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950s" Historical Papers/Communications historiques Windsor 1988; Joy Parr The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1990; Nancy Forestall "The Rough and Respectable: Gender Construction in the Porcupine Mining Camp, 1909-1920" unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting Kingston 1991

greater attention in Europe and the United States. In Great Britain, for example, farm workers have been studied by such noted historians as Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé in Captain Swing, and J.P.D. Dunbabin in Rural Discontent in Nineteenth-Century Britain.[33] Historical attention has been focused especially upon protest and organizing activities of farm workers, and the agricultural labour movement from Captain Swing and the Tolpuddle Martyrs to Joseph Arch has been well-documented.[34] The period since the decline of farm workers' unions in the 1920s has attracted less historical attention.

In the United States, farm workers have been the subject of a number of extensive and systematic studies, even though North American notions of upward mobility have made it hard to accept the existence of a large group of landless labourers. A wealth of government inquiries have provided a statistical framework for examining farm labour conditions, and there now exists a large body of literature on the subject.[35] General studies include Carey

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[33] Eric Hobsbawm and George Rudé Captain Swing London: Lawrence and Wishart 1969; J.P.D. Dunbabin Rural Discontent in Nineteenth-Century Britain London: Holmes and Meier 1974

[34] Joyce Marlowe The Tolpuddle Martyrs London: Deutsch 1971; Reg Groves Sharpen the Sickle: The History of the Farm Workers Union London: Porcupine Press 1949; J.P.D. Dunbabin "The Incidence and Organization of Agricultural Trade Unionism in the 1870s" Agricultural History Review XVI 1968; Pamela Horn Joseph Arch: The Farm Workers' Leader Kineton: Roundwood Press 1971

[35] See the bibliographies published occasionally since 1915 by the United States Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Labor in the

McWilliams's Ill Fares the Land and LaWanda Cox's Agricultural Labour in the United States, as well as more recent works such as David Schob's Hired Hands and Plowboys and Stephen Sosnick's Hired Hands.[36] Among the wide variety of topics that have come under special examination are "The Theory of the Agricultural Ladder" by Shu-Ching Lee, Seasonal Farm Labor in the United States by Harry Schwartz, "Tenancy in the United States" by LaWanda Cox, Labor Relations in Agriculture by Varden Fuller, and an important study which asks new questions about American farm labour, "The Machine Breakers: Farmworkers and Social Change" by Peter Argersinger and Jo Ann Argersinger.[37]

As in Great Britain, however, the subject that has

United States; other titles dealing with special issues include Migratory Agricultural Labor in the United States (USDA Library List 59, May 1953)

[36]. Carey McWilliams Ill Fares the Land: Migrants and Migratory Labor in the United States (1942) New York: Barnes and Noble 1967; LaWanda Cox Agricultural Labor in the United States, 1865-1900, With Special Reference to the South" PhD University of California 1941; David E. Schob Hired Hands and Plowboys: Farm Labor in the Midwest, 1815-60 Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1975; Stephen Sosnick Hired Hands: Seasonal Farm Workers in the United States Santa Barbara: McNally and Loftin, West 1978

[37]. Shu-Ching Lee "The Theory of the Agricultural Ladder", Agricultural History 21 April 1947; Harry Schwartz Seasonal Farm Labor in the United States, Columbia Studies in the History of American Agriculture, No. 11 New York: Columbia University 1945; LaWanda Cox "Tenancy in the United States, 1865-1900, A Consideration of the Validity of the Agricultural Ladder Hypothesis" Agricultural History July 1944; Varden Fuller Labor Relations in Agriculture Berkeley: University of California Press 1955; Peter H. Argersinger and Jo Ann E. Argersinger "The Machine Breakers: Farmworkers and Social Change in the Rural Midwest of the 1870s" Agricultural History 58:3 July 1984

received greatest attention has been agricultural labour organization. Stuart Jamieson's Labour Unionism in American Agriculture laid the groundwork for such studies as Alexander Morin's The Organizability of Farm Labour in the United States and Philip Taft's "The I.W.W. in the Grain Belt". The recent success of farm labour organizers in California has resulted in histories of agricultural labour there, such as Bitter Harvest by Cletus Daniel.[38] Another topic of concern in the United States has been the condition and supply of migratory workers. This has been reflected in the large body of literature on the subject, including such studies as Mexican Contract Labor in the United States by Irving Sabghir, "Migratory Labor in the Wheat Belt" by Paul Taylor and Anne Loftis, and The Migratory Worker and Family Life by Maria Hathaway.[39]

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that unless agricultural labourers were involved in labour struggles or were constituting a visible social or economic problem, they will fail to attract the attention of historians. Certainly this has been the case in Canada. This study will look beyond the emphasis on overt conflict, examining the way hired hands experienced their lives and work through the prism of class.

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[38] Stuart Jamieson "Labour Unionism in American Agriculture" PhD University of California 1943; Alexander Morin The Organizability of Farm Labor in the United States Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1952; Philip Taft "The I.W.W. in the Grain Belt" Labour History Winter 1960; Cletus E. Daniel Bitter Harvest: A History of California Farmworkers 1870-1941 Ithaca: Cornell University Press 1981

[39] Irving Howard Sabghir "Mexican Contract Labor in the United States, 1848-1953: A Political and Economic Analysis" PhD Harvard University 1956; Paul S. Taylor and Anne Loftis "Migratory Labor in the Wheat Belt: Early Twentieth Century" in Agriculture in the West edited by Edward L. Schapsmeier and Frederick H. Schapsmeier Manhattan, Kansas: Sunflower University Press 1980; Maria Hathaway The Migratory Worker and Family Life New York: Arno Press 1972

Hired hands have left few accounts of their world, so their story must be extracted largely from records that are not their own. It has been pieced together from diverse sources: government reports, private agency records, manuscript collections, pioneer memoirs and farm journals.

Useful government records are those from the Departments of Immigration, of Agriculture, of Labour and of the Attorneys General. Records of businesses with interests in immigration and farming, such as the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Canadian National Railway, and various colonization companies, have yielded data on farm employment. Specific collections on labour, such as the papers of the Alberta Federation of Labour, the Industrial Workers of the World, and the Communist Party of Canada, have only occasionally turned up useful material, although this in itself is a telling comment on the place of farm workers in the labour movement, or rather, their absence from it. While statistical compilations have been used wherever possible, they are in short supply and often of limited usefulness, as in the case of census records. Hard data have in places provided the bare bones of evidence, but have been fleshed out by textual sources. Manuscript collections at the Public Archives of Manitoba, the

Saskatchewan Archives Board, the Public Archives of Alberta, and the Glenbow-Alberta Institute have been most helpful, containing a wealth of papers on rural life and the farming community. Farmers' journals and unpublished memoirs, farm account books and records of farm organizations have provided much indirect information.

Seldom does the story come from the men themselves. Typical is the diary of prairie settler Geoffrey Yonge, who homesteaded near Mortlach, Saskatchewan. He carefully recorded the daily details of running his farm, but when he departed every spring and fall to take up waged farm work, his diary fell silent. His entry on 14 July 1908, the first to appear after three months, provides much for the researcher's imagination: "My time up with Cudmore, last night after a term of three months toil, from 4 AM to 9 PM almost every day. So I am glad to be free once more."[40]

The rare occurrences of diaries and letters by farm workers provide details unavailable in the quantitative sources. But textual sources must be handled carefully, for they present experience through linguistic, cultural, and personal filters. Nonetheless, to reach a better understanding of farm workers, it is necessary to discover their hopes and ideas, to learn what they found serious or humorous, to explore as much as they choose to show us about themselves. In this way, this study strives to reconstruct the lives of prairie hired hands.

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[40]. SAB R-E 191 Geoffrey Yonge Papers, diary 13/7/1908

CHAPTER 2

"bargaining ability, stubbornness or bluff"*: Labour-capital relations in prairie agriculture

Conflict was inherent in the relations between labour and capital in late nineteenth-century Canada. In 1889, the Armstrong Report of the Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital in Canada, citing an anonymous observer, recognized that the relationship was reducible to a single premise: "To treat it (labor and wages) as a simple exchange between equals is absurd. The laborer must sell his wages or starve." [2]

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* The title of this chapter is from a description of the way farm hands and their employers decide upon a wage: "both meet in the dark and the rate of wages agreed upon by them is generally decided by the superior bargaining ability, stubbornness or bluff of either party." SAB M6/X-11-0 Charles Dunning Papers: Labour p 14562 "Farm Wages" March 1922

[2]. "Armstrong Report" in Greg Kealey, ed. Canada Investigates Industrialism: The Royal Commission on the Relations of Labor and Capital, 1889 (Abridged) Toronto:

But in the agricultural world of the prairie west the equation was much more complex. An unemployed labourer there did not have to starve. The western prairie was a bountiful mistress, according to popular conception, and any man could at least put a roof over his head and food in his stomach. Indeed, no man even had to be a labourer if he chose not to. Government generosity meant that any man could leave the ranks of wage labour and become an independent landowner. But with the abundance of land went a paucity of both capital and labour. Acutely aware that each was in extremely short supply, and that the employee of one day might be an employer the next, capital and labour eyed each other as equals pondering the barn door balance sheet. Volatile bargaining strengths led to an uneasy alliance, marked more by accommodation than by conflict. Yet the "laborer must sell his wages or starve," a kernel of truth in the Armstrong Report, was hidden more by the chaff of popular interpretation than by prairie west economics.

This chapter examines the relationship between labour and capital in prairie agriculture, delineating the differences between perception and reality. This shows how the particular circumstances of agriculture and labour in the prairie west, and the two-tier operation of the relationship, resulted in contradiction: the mitigation of the basic antagonism between labour and capital simultaneous with an exacerbation of the tensions between them.

University of Toronto Press 1973 p 48

I

Relations between labour and capital in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were marked by open hostility and stormy confrontation. But in prairie agriculture the relations appeared to be amicable. Hired hands were a valued part of the economy and society, according to popular perception, and were warmly welcomed into farm households and communities. Their economic position was a little straitened, perhaps, but it was just as secure as any agricultural endeavour could be. Their relationships with their employers were generally good, often excellent. The two shared a common interest not only in the farm's well-being but in the same work routine, the same meals, and the same home. Resistance to poor wages and working and living conditions was usually limited to walking off the job. This action was seldom seen as anything more than disgruntlement. As workers in other industries pursued strategies for strengthening their position and improving their lot, agricultural workers appeared content. The marked dissimilarity from labour-capital relations in other industries reflected the common purpose and interest between labour and capital in agriculture. This is misleading. Labour and capital have fundamentally antithetical aims. However, the relationship is complicated, and often mitigated, by time and place and circumstance. All were significant considerations in the relations between labour and capital in prairie agriculture.

As the basis of the western economy and a principal sector of the Canadian economy, agriculture provided not only the economic impetus but also the ideological rationale for the developing prairie society. Agriculture could rely upon the practical support of governments and upon the ideological support of the western community, and it retained its political and social importance long after other industries challenged its economic hegemony. This rendered it extremely powerful in its dealings with its labour force, and ensured that the conflict would be muted.

Even so, the struggle was not one-sided. Labour in agriculture wrested important concessions from capital and influenced the shape and rate of change in the industry. Throughout, labour pursued its own aims. The relationship between labour and capital in agriculture, despite its apparent amicability, was in fact oppositional, conflictual and complicated.

Major components of the superstructure of the labour-capital relationship in prairie agriculture were innovations. There were important differences between agriculture and other industries and between prairie agriculture and that of other regions. First, prairie agriculture involved no ordinary exchange of labour for wages. Farm workers did not simply take a job. They entered a community containing complex and subtle socio-economic dimensions. Second, the line between labour and capital was very unclear; the positions often overlapped. Farm workers often were farm owners themselves, or were soon to be. They thus played the roles of both labour and capital. Third, the ideology underlying the relations played a vital part in determining the nature of the relations. In prairie agriculture, the opportunity to move from labour to capital was perceived as a realizable goal, and thus a potent ingredient in the relationship itself.

Prairie farm workers found themselves in a complex situation, seen most clearly in the apparent dichotomy between an abstract or theoretical perception and a concrete or practical application of the relations of labour and capital. In prairie agriculture the line separating the two is never very clear-cut. But the relations can be understood if they are studied at two levels. The first level is theoretical, examining the general relationship between labour and capital in agriculture. The second level is empirical, examining how these implications were worked out for the men involved. Here we have a further subdivision. Labour and capital in the agricultural industry are represented in the aggregate by the workforce and the owners of the means of production, and individually by hired hands and farmers. It is at this individual level that we can see and define the particular relations that developed between hired hands and farmers on prairie farms.

The distinction is important. While the industry itself operated according to a capitalist rationale, the men involved, whether employers or employees, were motivated by non-economic considerations as well. They wanted to farm. Their aspiration was not to become capitalists who derived their wealth from the mere ownership of the means of production, but to be working operators of the farms they owned.

The distinction is thus not a dichotomy. Farmers who worked as farm labourers as well as farm labourers who hoped to become farmers, even while deploring the most competitive aspects of expanding capitalism, sought their success within a capitalist framework. The result was an uneasy peace. Farm workers and their employers did not confront each other as pure labour and pure capital. Rather, the differences between them were muted by their common aspiration to an intermediary position between labour and capital, and they saw their interests as converging rather than diverging. This is one key to the relations between labour and capital in prairie agriculture, but it does not alone explain the particularities of the relationship.

Equally important in the prairie west is the basis of the relationship. Most significant is the fact that its foundation was laid just as the industry itself was developing and at the same time that a new prairie society was being established. This gave inordinate influence to the conditions that existed at the inception of the development, both in the shape of the relations themselves and of the unevenness of subsequent adjustments to changing circumstances. The economic and social relations of labour and capital reflected the conditions of the establishment of the agricultural economy and the milieu of the pioneering period. Subsequent developments in the agricultural economy and in prairie society were very slow to be mirrored in these relations, resulting in a persistence of their initial nature long after the conditions which had shaped them were changed.

II

To understand how this situation came about, it is necessary to understand the complex interplay of central Canadian purposes behind developing the prairies and the federal policy for its western lands.

The economy of the British North American colonies in the 1860s was insecure. Britain had withdrawn her mercantilist protection, and the 1854 reciprocal trade agreement with the United States had collapsed. To an important group of central Canadian capitalists, the west lay waiting, ready to provide the markets necessary to ensure the continued prosperity of central Canada.[3]

The acquisition of a territory five times the size of the rest of Canada presented the opportunity for a massive agricultural industry. Yet despite glowing federal propaganda about the fertility of western Canadian soil, a large portion of the region was still condemned as semi-arid.

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[3]. Doug Owram Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1980 pp 38-58; J.M.S. Careless Brown of the Globe: The Voice of Upper Canada, 1818-1859 Vol I Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1959 p 229

Palliser's Triangle, a sixteen thousand square mile block of the prairies, had been assessed in 1859 by Captain John Palliser as unfit for cultivation, the northern extension of the "Great American Desert". Henry Youle Hind, commissioned by the Province of Canada, agreed with this assessment of the triangle, but painted a glowing picture of the wide belt of parkland upon which it bordered. It was to this area, extending from Red River northwest to the North Saskatchewan River, then heading south to the Rocky Mountains to form a wide fertile arc across the prairies that expansionists in central Canada turned their attention. The size and fertility of the belt grew steadily in the minds and in the literature of the promoters of western settlement.[4] Throughout the 1860s, the soil was reassessed as among the richest in the world, and the climate and topography as ideal for agriculture.[5] When botanist John Macoun carried out exploratory surveys during the 1870s, his reports of the enormous agricultural potential of the prairies were welcomed.[6] The new optimistic impression was as unrealistic as the old one had been, but by the 1870s, even the northern part of the prairies had come to be regarded as

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[4]. R. Douglas Francis Images of the West: Responses to the Canadian Prairies Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books 1989 pp 73-86

[5]. Owram Promise of Eden pp 59-78, esp 60, 67-69, 76

[6]. W. A. Waiser The Field Naturalist: John Macoun, the Geological Survey, and Natural Science Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1989 pp 16-54

"the future garden of the west."[7]

This perception helped lay the foundation for the west's particular economic development. At its simplest, increased primary production would help fuel the economy, a larger economic base would result in a stronger economy. The emphasis was on scale of production rather than diversification or economic independence. Just as Canada had been part of the colonial empires of France and Britain, the west would be the colonial empire of central Canada, producing raw materials for export and providing markets for goods and services from the centre.

Westward expansion provided tangible political benefits as well. Capitalist support for a government which would provide such a lucrative market was the most obvious political reward, but votes in central Canada could be garnered from a wide range of groups, from financiers to farmers. Industrial workers, promised more jobs and security through expanded markets, were enthusiastic in their support. Ontario farmers regarded the west as a patrimony for their sons who were unable to take up farms in an overcrowded province. Beyond a simple collection of votes, the acquisition of the prairies would ensure Canadian sovereignty in the northern part of the continent, protecting it from America's grasp.

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[7]. Charles Horetzky Canada on the Pacific, being an Account of a Journey from Edmonton to the Pacific by the Peace River Valley Montreal 1874 cited in Gordon E. Bowes, ed. Peace River Chronicles Vancouver: Prescott 1963 p 86

Out of this economic and political interplay came a comprehensive plan for western development. An agrarian economy and society was to replace the fur trade. Small-scale family-sized units of production would provide a market large enough to absorb eastern manufactured goods. Single-crop production would provide the volume of grain necessary to establish secure international markets. Small landowners and their families would provide a conservative foundation for a stable population. The agricultural industry designed for the west was to provide the basis not only for the economy but for the society as well.

The plan was to carry this out as rapidly as possible. In 1872, the Dominion Lands Act followed the lead of the United States in encouraging agricultural settlement expansion.[8] One hundred and sixty acres of prairie land was offered to any adult male willing to wager ten dollars that he could bring forty acres under cultivation and throw up a building or two within three years. The dual purposes of the policy -- to establish both an agricultural economy and an agrarian social structure -- meant that compromises were necessary. As a result, the homesteading policy was geared more to rapid and massive population expansion than to efficient agricultural production. The low filing fee attracted settlers who lacked the money to buy the equipment necessary for grain growing on a large and efficient scale. Continuous readjustments in the homesteading regulations allowed cash-poor farmers to spend long periods of time away from their own farms.

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[8]. For an explanation of the homestead system in western Canada and a comparison with the American system see Chester Martin 'Dominion Lands' Policy (1938) Lewis H. Thomas, ed. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1973 pp 140-142, 124-127

The effectiveness of the Dominion Lands Act as an instrument of western settlement has been the subject of considerable study.[9] But the Act's influence on the relations between capital and labour in prairie agriculture has yet to be considered. The system of 160-acre free homesteads and the regulations that implemented the system both created and solved some of the problems of labour demand and supply. Critics of the scheme argued that the giveaway of western lands would drive up the price of labour. This was certainly correct, and farmers constantly complained that they were unable to afford or even to find hired help. This is hardly surprising - what man would choose to work for wages when he could choose from hundreds of thousands of acres open for homesteading? But the promise of free land was critical to attract labour. Without the hope of eventual ownership, there would have been no labour force at all.

The synthesis of labour and capital resulted in a shortage of both. The rationale behind the establishment of the agricultural industry in this manner was the assumption of the traditional nature of small-scale agriculture in which owners are expected to be their own labour force. Agriculture under these conditions has limited potential for growth, but the prairie west was not prepared to accept any limits. The contradiction in the agricultural industry was that despite its small-scale organization, it was filled with ambitions for large-scale production. In most industries, such grandiose plans can be achieved through greater appropriation of the surplus value of labour. But in the agricultural prairie west, labour would not comply.

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[9] See for example Ibid.; William Marr and Michael Percy "The Government and the Rate of Canadian Prairie Settlement" Canadian Journal of Economics 11:4 1978; James M. Richtik "The Policy Framework for Settling the Canadian West, 1870-1880" Agricultural History 49:4 October 1975; John Langton Tyman By Section, Township, and Range: Studies in Prairie Settlement Brandon: Assiniboine Historical Society 1972

There was little economic incentive and limited opportunity for men to work full-time as agricultural labourers. Even large-scale commercial farms could not compete with other primary industries for labour, and the emphasis on grain crops meant that employment in agriculture was restricted to planting and harvesting. On the other hand, most men neither needed nor sought full-time work, since they could file for a homestead. The small filing fee meant that men with very little capital could take up land. The costs of the first year -- provisions, seed, implements, putting up a shack to live in -- could be earned by working for wages for an established farmer. Homesteading regulations made explicit provision for this; a homesteader was never required to live on his quarter-section for more than six months of each year. Immigration pamphlets spoke in glowing terms of employment opportunities available to undercapitalized homesteaders.

The ideological contradictions this system generated were striking. Free land gave labour the opportunity to be extremely independent, but at the same time it created a land-owning class of small-scale capitalists. Often, the two coincided. A farmer might alternately play the role of both employer and employee, working on another farm during the summer once his own crops were sown, and hiring extra help at harvest. He occupied the positions of both labour and capital and faced the contradiction of playing dual and oppositional roles. It was a circular process: the independence which could have resulted from the shortage of labour was undercut by the availability of land that caused the labour shortage in the first place. In principle, labour was invisible, or at least did not exist as a separate category because the industry owners were also its labour force.

This type of labour force provided distinct advantages to governments as well as to railway interests, manufacturers and suppliers. As owner-operators of small units of production, the homesteaders could be relied upon for political stability. Unlike transient agricultural workers, whose characteristic seasonal unemployment created hardships for themselves and headaches for governments, these workers went quietly back to their homesteads once their work was finished. Their vested interests in the region could be translated into a rapid and orderly development of social institutions. Their needs for goods and services were much greater than those of mere wage-earners. They were engaged in much more than simple survival; they were building farms and communities, and a niche for themselves in the west. Labour in agriculture was thus expected to play a significant part in the social as well as the economic development of the agrarian west. But it was not to do so in its role as labour. Unlike other industries, in which labour must be coerced into supporting the interests of capital, labour in agriculture was expected to be capital, either in the present or in the immediate future. The longer-term implications of this blurring of the lines between labour and capital lies in the ideological sway it held in the prairie west.

III

The relationship between labour and capital was also shaped by the particular characteristics of the prairie agricultural industry: the nature of the product, the method of production and the organization of the industry. Agriculture is a mass-production industry, in that raw materials are transformed into finished products on a large scale. Yet it does not enjoy the controls and precision of factory production. It is a resource extraction industry, in that natural products are harvested. Yet these products do not occur naturally, but must be carefully tended and continuously replenished. To be commercially successful, the industry must employ large-scale efficient methods of production, while adapting itself to the many variables of production which lie beyond its control.

Agricultural products establish their own schedule. They do not grow according to laws of supply and demand. It is both the charm and the bane of farm products that they need long sunny days, and rain at just the right moments, and favourable weather as the crop ripens. Seasonal variations are an integral part of agriculture, and capital's response to seasonality is to make extremely fluctuating demands on labour. In a grain-growing economy, for short, very specific periods, demands are urgent and high. For most of the year, labour demands are low. The seasonal rise and fall in labour demand can be at least partly overcome by agricultural diversification. Mixed farming exhibits less fluctuation in its labour needs. A variety of crops spreads the planting and harvest seasons over a broader period, and the production of livestock evens out the peaks and valleys in labour demand, since it requires daily care. Nonetheless, seasonality remains one of the most striking features of all agriculture.

As winter ends and the soil begins to thaw, the land must be ploughed and sown to a crop. The short growing season of the prairie west dictates that this be done quickly to take full advantage of every growing day. Spring planting offers workers their first regular employment of the year. The length of this period depends on the weather and on the variety of crops; in prairie grain-growing, it rarely extends beyond a month. Through the summer, labour requirements remain low, but fairly steady. There is always farm work to be done: cultivation of the growing crops, repair of buildings and equipment, care of livestock, cutting brush or breaking new ground, ploughing summerfallowed fields. Late summer sees another rush as the crops begin to ripen. Harvest brings the highest and most urgent demand for workers. The early frosts of a prairie autumn demand that crops be harvested during a very brief period. The fall operations are divided into two parts: the actual harvesting or cutting of the crops, then the threshing, removing of the grain kernels from the stalks. Good weather is vitally important; a wet spell or an early frost is a disaster. For the labour force, harvest work is easy to find, and wages at harvest are the highest that farm workers receive, higher than those in other industries, and sometimes high enough to bankroll workers for the coming winter. After the crops are cut, there is less urgency. Once bound into sheaves, the grain can be left to ripen, and threshed under a less demanding schedule. Grain unthreshed before winter can be stacked under cover to protect the sheaves from the rain and snow. Labour requirements and wages are somewhat lower during this period. It is an important period for workers, the last chance to fill-out the winter's stake. Once the crops are in and after freeze-up, there is seldom any need for hired labour. For those who spend the winter doing chores for a farmer, wages commonly consist only of room and board and a bit of tobacco money. With a new spring, the cycle begins again.

The method of agricultural production is particularly important in understanding the relations between labour and capital because it is here that the overlap between the two is particularly striking. For the labour force, what is important is the work process itself: the actual tasks performed and the level of skill needed to perform them. This is an area in which there can be greater variation in the marketability of a worker's labour. It adds a dimension in which labour can exercise some control, and another area of conflict in its relations with capital.

Work in agriculture is extremely varied, is usually physically demanding and repetitious, but can be challenging and fulfilling. Agricultural tasks range from the backbreaking boredom of picking rocks to the finesse required in caring for brood sows, from long dusty days plowing fields to fragmented days filled with numberless chores, from the isolation of stringing a fence to the teamwork of raising a barn. The skills required range from nothing more than physical strength and stamina, as when clearing brush or shovelling out the stables, all the way up to highly developed skills, as when handling a recalcitrant team of horses or repairing delicate machinery. Yet agricultural work is not highly specialized. The labour force is expected to be able to perform each and all of the tasks. At the same time, the necessary skills are not the exclusive property of the labour force, but are also the province of capital. Unlike other industries in which labour is hired to perform the tasks that the owners or managers of capital cannot perform, in agriculture the employers are able to do the work themselves.

Labour and capital in prairie agriculture thus shared the same skills and performed the same tasks. There were exceptions of course, and examples of farm hands instructing their employers, but by-and-large farm hands were expected to reproduce the skills possessed by their employers. There was no mystique to the skills that a hired hand possessed, and no special proficiency that was the exclusive property of labour. As a result, capital sought a labour force that could duplicate its own skills rather than provide new or specialized skills, while labour was hired not to provide basic production, but rather to increase productivity.

The organization of the industry moulded the relations of labour and capital. On the prairies, as throughout Canada, agriculture was based upon the small owner-operated unit of production. There were large farms, and there were farms which were not operated by their owners, but they were the minority. For most of the year, labour requirements could be met by the owner-farmer and his family. Moreover, particularly in western Canada, farmers were capital-poor. This meant that farmers frequently sought waged labour themselves, and that when they did hire a worker, most did not hire year-round, full-time help. The few who did seldom engaged more than one hired hand. The broad result was that the ratio of labour to capital was very low, and the proportion of the agricultural population which was waged labour was also very low. Unlike the situation in most other industries, the workforce of the prairie agricultural industry was greatly outnumbered by its employers.

The situation for labour in prairie agriculture was thus quite different from that of other industries. Although capital most frequently holds the upper hand in its dealings with labour, it must nonetheless make concessions because it relies upon labour's skills and numbers. In prairie agriculture, labour's skills were not its exclusive property, and workers could not often rely upon their numbers to give them strength.

The task was made even more difficult by the authority the industry wielded. As the dominant economic activity, farming represented more than just the economic aspects of capital, and its influence extended beyond the economic sphere to encompass the social and ideological spheres as well. A second important consideration, and one which helps to explain the strength of the ideology, is the fact that this was, for the white settlers, a new land, to be fashioned to the specifications they harboured in their residual cultures and to the conditions they encountered. The economy and society were evolving not only simultaneously, but conjointly, giving particular strength to the new institutions and to the agricultural industry upon which they were based. The final consideration is the one which most complicated the situation for labour. To a much greater extent than in other industries, economic and social dimensions in the relations between labour and capital were merged. There was seldom a clear distinction between the two. The overlap of these two realms helps to explain why farm workers acted as they did. They were moved by more considerations than simply their objective position within the economy. As in the economic sphere, their relations with capital were limited by subjective determinants.

The family farm created social and economic links that were much stronger than those in other industries. Prairie rural society was based upon the family farm as an economic and social unit. The farmer lived on his farm, and so did his hired help. The agricultural workforce thus shared more with its employers than skills. It usually shared the same roof, the same food, and sometimes even the same bed. Moreover, the hired hand was required to accommodate himself not only to his employer, but to his employer's family as well. In the same way that the majority of their work contacts were made with their employers and their employers' families rather than with fellow workers, most of their social contacts were as well. Because few farmers engaged more than one hired hand, farm workers were isolated not only from one another, but from other working class groups as well.

There is another dimension in which the agricultural industry exercised a less direct but no less powerful influence: the milieu of the agrarian society. The social importance of agriculture matched its economic weight. In sheer numbers, the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture, both directly and indirectly, was the majority.

In the larger context of social relations throughout the west, the farmer was no match for a mining magnate or a large-scale rancher. But in the rural community that he occupied, he was paramount in his position as a landowner. This was an agrarian world. Although farmers were far from a cohesive group themselves, they and their families were arbiters of society, determining the mores and the culture of the rural prairie west. Agrarian economic and social values were fostered by churches, schools and other social institutions. They were embraced not only by farmers and their families but by the other segments of the rural population that relied upon agriculture for their livelihood and upon the agrarian community for their social sustenance. Farming was regarded as more than an economic endeavour. It was a way of life which provided the underpinnings of an entire social system.

Farm workers did more than simply work. They entered a social milieu with a particular ideology with a very ambiguous place for them. They were expected as a matter of course to act in the interests of capital rather than of labour. This expectation was further heightened by virtue of labour's small size, both relatively and absolutely, and because of the blurring of the lines between labour and capital. Although objectively inferior to that of its employers, the position of labour in prairie agriculture was subjectively superior to that of labour forces in other industries. What is historically most significant about the social structure is the weight of the agrarian ideology.

IV

Despite the economic and social authority of capital, labour did much to determine the nature of its relationship with capital. There are two considerations: farm workers were situated within the broad context of labour in the west, and at the same time were influenced by the specific conditions that obtained in prairie agriculture. As part of the workforce of western Canada, labour in agriculture was subject to the same conditions that affected workers in other western industries, both constraining and freeing them. They belonged to a workforce that was characterized by occupational plurality and locational mobility. However, the men who chose to enter the agricultural sector of the workforce fit more closely but not exclusively into a more permanent category.

At the centre of the study are the men who worked as full-time hired hands on grain and mixed farms during the wheat boom. Between 1880 and 1930, as the agricultural economy of the prairie west was established and developed, these workers formed the majority of waged agricultural labour, and constituted the largest segment of the waged workforce in the prairie provinces. It is difficult, particularly in the early years, to separate that part of the agricultural labour force that worked primarily for wages from that part that derived most of its agricultural income through ownership of the land. In the early years, too, the labour force was characterized by fluidity, with men shifting with relative ease from one category of agricultural labour to another. Nonetheless, the men themselves had clear ideas about their location in the agricultural workforce.

The agricultural labour force on the prairies was made up of three components.[10] As measured by the Dominion censuses, the largest single group consisted of farmers themselves, whether owners or tenants of the farms they occupied. In 1881 they comprised close to eighty percent of the male population engaged in agriculture. But in the following decades, their proportion declined and fluctuated; it was seventy-four percent in 1911, but less than sixty percent by 1931. The second and third groups consisted of unpaid family members and paid agricultural labourers. The proportion of the second group, family labour, showed the greatest variation, ranging from a low of eight percent in 1911 to more than twenty-two percent by 1931. Proportions of the third group, wage labourers, showed some fluctuation, but were steadiest. In 1891, they made up fourteen percent of the agricultural workforce. In the next century, the proportion grew, reaching sixteen percent in 1911 and nearly nineteen percent by 1931. Still, the increase during most of the period under study was slow and steady. The agricultural workforce, then, contained a relatively stable proportion of hired farm workers, even though the individuals themselves were constantly changing.

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[10] See Table I-3 Agricultural Workforce

It is the latter group that concerns us here, yet even it must be further defined. The men who are the subject of this study were wage workers who were regularly employed as full-time permanent agricultural labourers on mixed and grain farms.[11] But not all men who were hired hands fit this description so neatly, and many men hovered on its periphery. Occasional agricultural workers such as harvesters or workers in other types of agriculture, such as dairying or sugar beet growing, will be included in this study when their experience helps shed some light on the conditions and experience of the men who were regular hired hands. In the case of the farm workers who are being examined here, it is easier to describe who they are by eliminating all those who they are not.

We can distinguish a number of broad categories of agricultural labourers. A first important distinction is between those who regularly worked in agriculture and those who did not. The latter group consisted of men who worked on farms for only part of the year, particularly during the spring planting period or the more important harvest season. During the rest of the year, their work was in another industry or in another part of the country. This group included workers with no attachment to any particular industry, especially the itinerant immigrant labourers described by Donald Avery: "in February, a lumber worker in Iroquois Falls, Ontario; in June a railroad navvy along the National Transcontinental; in August a harvester in Grenfell, Saskatchewan; in November a coal miner in Fernie, British Columbia".[12] Occasionally, these men might come from outside agriculture altogether, choosing farm work only as employment of last resort.

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[11]. The group under study is adult male farm workers. Women often appeared in the census in various agricultural pursuits such as general farming, dairying and bee-keeping, but seldom as agricultural labourers. In the literature, they have appeared as farm hands so scarcely that their inclusion in this study would present a misleading picture of their experience. It warrants a separate study. The same is true for male children. They were sometimes listed as farm workers, although the literature suggests they usually did work that was classified as "chores". For purposes of this study, the references to hired hands will include only males aged fifteen and over, unless otherwise specified. Comparisons with other groups will be restricted to the same age and sex categories, unless otherwise indicated.

Within the category of men who regularly worked in agriculture, another important distinction must be made between those who lived in the region and those whose ties with the prairies were temporary. Fall harvest and threshing operations had temporary labour requirements that far outstripped the available pool of labour in the prairies. Between 1891 and 1921, harvest excursions were organized to bring men from central and eastern Canada, the west coast, the United States and even Great Britain to help harvest prairie crops.[13] After these categories of seasonal wage labourers in agriculture are accounted for, there remain two large groups of men who earned part of their income from waged farm work, but who are beyond the scope of this study: small farmers, either owners or tenants, who left their own farms at peak periods to work out to earn cash income, and farmers' sons who were unpaid for work on their fathers' farms. They did not regard themselves as farm labourers, but they do come under study when their experiences help to shed some light on the conditions of waged agricultural labour.

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[12]. Donald Avery 'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932 Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1979 p 8

[13]. John Herd Thompson "Bringing in the Sheaves: The Harvest Excursionists, 1890-1929" Canadian Historical Review LIX:4 December 1978

By "hired hands" I refer to permanent full-time agricultural labourers. "Permanent" does not mean that agricultural work was the only employment a man might undertake in the course of a year. But if a "permanent" hired man sought work outside agriculture, it would only be a temporary expedient. Nor by "permanent" do I wish to suggest that the farm worker occupied an unchanging niche. Farm work for wages was seldom intended to last for a man's working life. The term "permanent" is used throughout this study to distinguish temporary farm workers such as homesteaders who worked part-time for other farmers, or seasonal workers such as harvesters who joined the agricultural workforce only for short periods, from regular hired hands.

The term "full-time" is likewise problematic. It refers to the nature of the work performed, more specifically to the type of jobs an individual farm hand might obtain. It does not indicate that farm jobs were long-term. Men designated as "full-time" workers were those employed as eight-month or year-round hands. Their jobs might extend over several years, or even longer. Equally, they might undertake a number of short-term jobs on several different farms, or have a more-or-less regular position with one farmer for specific periods and jobs such as spring planting or winter chores, and spend the rest of the year working on other farms throughout the district. The term is used in this study to indicate that farm work was regarded by these men as their main, sometimes their only, type of employment and their major source of income

This difficulty of defining an agricultural labourer is reflected in the methods used to tally the census. After 1911, changes in the date of the census, from the first of March to the first of June, and changes in the definition of different types of agricultural labourers mean that categories do not correspond from one census year to the next. Moreover, the seasonal nature of agriculture makes these figures less than reliable whatever date or definition is used. As long as the census was taken at the first of March, agricultural labourers who found winter work elsewhere were excluded. A more accurate measurement was likely achieved when the census date was moved forward to the first of June, although many short-term workers employed only for spring planting might have been included. The census definition of paid agricultural labourers changed slightly in different years. Even in a single census year, the designation of men as "agricultural labourers" or as "wage earners within the agricultural industry" results in different sets of figures. The latter group, but not the former, for example, included such employees as foremen on large farms. Another difficulty is that the census data include men who worked in agricultural enterprises which are outside the scope of this study, such as labour-intensive sugar beet farming. Wherever possible, the figures are adjusted to eliminate significant groups of men who do not fall into the more refined category of "permanent full-time hired hands". Finally, determining the actual numbers of agricultural labourers in the prairie provinces throughout the period of this study has presented special challenges. Census figures in 1881 and 1901 did not distinguish between paid farm workers and unpaid family members, and in 1891 did not specify their location within the North-West Territories. Despite these difficulties, however, the trends the census data show are the most accurate source of information.

The greatest value of the census in determining who was and was not an agricultural labourer lies in the way the questions about occupation were answered. It is reasonable to assume that most men who identified themselves as agricultural labourers were permanent full-time farm workers. In an economy and society based upon independent farm ownership, men who could claim to be something other than farm workers would have been proud to do so. Farm owners or tenants who were working on another farm during the enumeration would not have identified themselves as labourers. Given the higher status ascribed to farming, they would have described themselves as farmers, even if they were tenants or homesteaders waiting to prove up. Despite all these qualifications, however, for the purposes of this study the men who were defined as paid agricultural labourers in the census will be those who are described herein as "hired hands". Such a definition encompasses their varied circumstances, and anchors them in the world in which they worked and lived.

CHAPTER 3

"no money but muscle and pluck"*: Recruiting the agricultural labour force

In December 1874, Albert Settee signed a contract "hereby agree[ing] to work for Colin Inkster as a farm laborer for the space of Four Calendar Months" during the following summer season. For "the faithful performance of such service" he was to receive the sum of four pounds per month.[2] Such written contracts were rare. This one demonstrates a number of features in the relationship between labour and capital during the establishment of the agricultural industry.

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* The title of this chapter is taken from a CPR publication directed at potential immigrants. The words are those of prairie farmer G. A. Cameron of Indian Head, who claimed the North-West Territories "As good a place as a man can find if he has plenty of money and brains, or if he has no money but muscle and pluck." [Alexander Begg] Plain Facts from Farmers in the Canadian North West London: Canadian Pacific Railway 1885 p 48

[2] PAM MG 14/B30/2 Colin Inkster Papers Contract 1874

Settee signed the contract in mid-winter, a time of the year when farm work was scarce, if not impossible to find. The assurance of employment for the following summer may well have been all that enabled him to survive the rest of the winter. His willingness to agree to work at the same rate of wages for the entire summer, including the traditionally higher-paid harvest season, reveals his need for a secure job. Yet the advantage was not all to his employer. If Settee needed a steady job, Inkster just as surely needed a steady man. The contract reflected an anticipated uncertainty of labour supply. It ensured that Settee would stay in the district the following year, and that Inkster would not have to scramble to find hired help. The advantage to Settee would be more evident the following year when he collected his wages. Four pounds per month was not high in comparison with wages for other labouring jobs in the west, but room and board was included and the work was certain.

Both men were gambling on the weather. The contract ran from the beginning of May, and if Inkster was waiting for Settee before beginning spring seeding, he was taking a chance that the crop might not ripen before the usual mid-August cooling that slowed maturation. If summer weather were cool, the harvest might be extended into September, giving Settee a distinct advantage whether he bargained to stay on with Inkster at the going harvest rate or chose to seek work elsewhere in the district. A warm season, though, could result in a harvest as early as mid-August and would leave Settee tied up until other high-paying harvest work in the district was completed.

The mutual benefits and drawbacks that Settee and Inkster found in their contract reveal the challenges an industry faced in becoming established. The scant population meant that labour was in short supply. But the nature of agriculture, particularly cereal monoculture, meant that labour was in high demand for only part of the year. The low wages indicated that capital, too, was in short supply, but the ready availability of land as a substitute offset this. The short term of the contract illustrates not only the wage-determined and seasonal nature of agricultural labour needs, but the short-term nature of labour-capital distinctions. By the end of 1875, Settee may well have been working on his own farm, and Inkster may once again have been seeking an employee. It was uncommon for labour and capital in prairie agriculture to formalize terms of employment, as did Settee and Inkster, but the circumstances which caused them to do so reflect the broad conditions of prairie agriculture during the birth of the wheat economy.

This chapter examines the establishment of the wheat economy in the prairie west. It begins with a brief summary of developments in the agricultural industry and then turns its attention to the workforce, examining its recruitment and locating it within the industry. The major problem confronting the industry was a shortage both of cash capital and of labour. By using land as capital, the industry was able to secure a labour force instilled with expectations that dovetailed neatly with the industry's own needs. The chapter thus sets the stage for the way the two components of the industry -- labour and capital -- would work out their relationship as the imperatives of both altered with fluctuating agricultural fortunes in the coming decades.

I

When Albert Settee and Colin Inkster signed their farm labour contract in 1874, prairie agriculture could scarcely be said to exist as an industry. It was not until 1876 that the first commercial shipment of wheat left Manitoba: 857 1/6 bushels travelled by river boat, rail and steamship to Toronto. The entire amount had been grown by twelve local farmers in lots ranging from 17 3/4 to 204 bushels and fetched them 80 cents a bushel. The shipment was small, but the Manitoba Daily Free Press announced grandly that it was "fraught with the most important results to the agricultural interests of the North-West."[3] It signalled the beginning of what would become one of Canada's most important industries. Two years later, a consignment of grain followed the same route to St. Paul and then by rail to the seaboard, to be transferred to a freighter for delivery in

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[3] "The First Shipment of Grain From Manitoba" Manitoba Daily Free Press 23/10/1876 p 3

Glasgow.[4] Prairie agriculture had taken its first steps toward becoming a huge, profit-making enterprise, consuming large amounts of both capital and labour, incorporating technological innovations, and producing for international markets.

Before the 1870s, agriculture had been peripheral to the western Canadian economy. Production was self-sufficient or had been geared to local markets, and was confined to the Red River colony and the areas immediately surrounding the trading posts.[5] Yet by the end of the century, agriculture had become the mainstay of the western economy. From the diversity of mixed farming for local consumption to the specialization in a single cash crop for export, agricultural energies had become directed to the production of wheat.

But the rewards for such single-mindedness were still in the future. Throughout the closing decades of the nineteenth century, the fortunes of commercial wheat production varied between spurts of growth and stagnation. The period was characterized by frustrated optimism, anticipation rather than realization of the agricultural potential of the prairie west. High expectations for rapid expansion were tempered by the realities of remote and demanding markets, an insufficient and costly work force, and a harsh and unpredictable climate.

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[4]. Duncan A. MacGibbon The Canadian Grain Trade Toronto: Macmillan 1932 p 27

[5]. W. L. Morton "Agriculture in the Red River Colony" Canadian Historical Review XXX:4 1949; A. S. Morton A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71: Being a History of Rupert's Land (the Hudson's Bay Company Territory) and of the North-West Territory (including the Pacific Coast) (1929) Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1973 passim; Stanley Norman Murray The Valley Comes of Age: A History of Agriculture in the Valley of the Red River North, 1812-1920 Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies 1967 pp 29-53

Farmers moving onto the plains soon found they needed new agricultural techniques. It was the uncertainty of rainfall -- the problems both of insufficiency and of bad timing -- that most plagued the industry. Summer fallowing was finally seized upon as the best method of salvaging every drop of moisture the dry prairie climate doled out. By the 1890s the value of summer fallowing had been seen in weed prevention and soil renewal. Other climatic challenges, such as dry prairie winds, were met with new techniques of cultivation, tillage and seeding.[6] The difficulty, though, was that manpower requirements were heavy. Operations such as ploughing under the stubble rather than burning it or cultivating and harvesting a seed plot by hand were labour-consuming refinements that few farmers could afford. Instead, they concentrated on volume.

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[6]. David Spector Agriculture on the Prairies, 1870-1940 National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Department of the Environment, Canada 1983; Ernest B. Ingles "Some Aspects of Dry-Land Agriculture in the Canadian Prairies to 1925" MA University of Calgary 1973; James F. Shepherd "The Development of Wheat Production in the Pacific Northwest" Agricultural History 49:1 January 1975 pp 259-60; Delbert S. Clark "Settlement in Saskatchewan with special reference to the influence of dry-farming" MA University of Saskatchewan 1931; Mary Wilma M. Hargreaves Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains, 1900-1925 Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1957 pp 126-33; John Bracken Dry Farming in Western Canada Winnipeg: Grain Growers' Guide 1921 pp 6-8

As in most other industries in the late nineteenth century, agriculture increased production through mechanical and technological improvements. By the time the west was opening to agriculture, even though much of the old equipment was still in use, farm implements and equipment had already passed beyond the primitive stage.[7] In the 1820s, with traditional hand agricultural tools and horses, three man-hours of labour were required to produce one bushel of wheat. By the 1890s, largely due to mechanization, the same bushel of wheat could be produced in one-half man-hour.[8] Without such mechanization, commercial agriculture on the prairies would have been impossible.

Initially, the primary aim of mechanization and improvements to agricultural equipment was not so much directly to reduce labour requirements as to make more efficient use of labour's time. Improvements to the plough shortened the time required to prepare the soil for seeding. One man working with a team of oxen or horses and a steel walking plough would be hard-pressed to plough even three or four acres per day. At that rate, it would take years before a quarter-section grain farm was producing to capacity. A sulky plough provided a seat for the driver, but did little to speed the work. More important was the gang-plough, an implement that strung together a number of ploughs in order to cut more than one furrow at a time, bringing more acreage under cultivation quickly. Harvesting the larger crop also called for more sophisticated machinery. Using a cradle, a man could not cut and bind more than one acre a day. The much greater speed needed to harvest large prairie crops was provided by the horse-drawn reaper, which could cut six or seven acres in a day and leave it in piles for binding by hand. But hand binding was slow -- five man-hours were needed to bind an acre of wheat.[9] In 1877 an American farm worker invented a device to tie these piles into sheaves. Behind a good team of horses, these new self-binding reapers were capable of cutting and binding fifteen to twenty acres a day.

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[7]. Spector Agriculture on the Prairies pp 143-152; Wayne D. Rasmussen "The Mechanization of Agriculture" Scientific American 247:3 September 1982; Idem "The Impact of Technological Change on American Agriculture: 1862-1962" Journal of Economic History 22 December 1962; Hadly Winfield Quaintance The Influence of Farm Machinery on Production and Labor PhD University of Wisconsin 1904; Leo Rogin The Introduction of Farm Machinery in its Relation to the Production of Labor in the Agriculture of the United States During the Nineteenth Century Berkeley: University of California 1931; Clarence Danhof Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870 Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press 1969 pp 181-250; Allan G. Bogue From Prairie to Corn Belt: Farming on the Illinois and Iowa Prairies in the Nineteenth Century Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1963 pp 148-68; Donald P. Greene "Prairie Agricultural Technology, 1860-1900" PhD Indiana University 1957; O. L. Symes "Chronology of Agricultural Machinery Development and Related Information" Proceedings of Seminar: Development of Agriculture on the Prairies Regina: University of Regina 1975 pp 16-20

[8]. Symes "Chronology of Agricultural Machinery Development" pp 17, 20

New technology supplemented mechanization. Oxen and horses provided the major supplement to human labour, but as early as 1874 the steam engine appeared on the Canadian prairies.[10] Steam could not entirely replace horse-power for tillage, but it did provide an important supplement that allowed crop production to increase dramatically. Steam engines were capable of pulling ploughs that could turn twelve or fourteen furrows at once, enabling much larger acreages to be brought under cultivation rapidly. But it was in threshing that the steam engine was most important, replacing horses as the power to drive the threshing machines. Threshing was not subject to the same constraints of time as harvesting, because prairie farmers cut grain before it was ripe, then allowed it to ripen in the sheaf. But as wheat harvests grew, the ability of the steam engine to thresh seventy-five acres worth of wheat in a day was essential to keep up with production.

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[9]. Archie A. Stone and Harold E. Gulvin Machines for Power Farming New York: John Wiley and Sons 1957 p 520

Rather than reducing manpower needs, the new machinery and technology increased them by allowing greatly expanded production. The horse-drawn reaper had required only two men to operate it -- one to drive the reaper and another to throw the cut grain into piles for later binding. The self-binding reaper could harvest as much as seventy-five or eighty acres a day, but needed a crew of three or four men to follow after it, piling the bound sheaves into carefully constructed cone-shaped stooks. Steam threshers needed crews of eighteen to twenty-five men. By the 1890s, agricultural production outstripped the labour supply, and western farmers called upon work crews from central and eastern Canada to help bring in their crops.[11]

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[10] Ernest B. Ingles "The Custom Threshermen in Western Canada, 1890-1925" David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds. Building Beyond the Homestead Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1985 p 136

At the same time, though, the anticipated success of the industry was elusive. Fluctuations in the actual volume of grain production forcibly indicated the uncertainties plaguing the industry, despite a steady increase in the number of farms and in acreage under cultivation. Between 1881 and 1901 the number of prairie farms increased more than five-fold, and improved acreage more than twenty-fold. From fifty-four thousand acres planted to wheat in 1880, wheat acreage had reached more than one million acres eleven years later. By the end of the century it had reached almost two million.[12] But production figures did not mirror the steady growth.

Although the proportional increase in prairie wheat production between 1880 and the end of the century was spectacular, from just over one million bushels in 1880 to sixty-three million bushels in 1901, detailed examination paints a less rosy picture. A Manitoba crop of less than six million bushels in 1886 doubled the next year to more than twelve million. But by 1889, Manitoba production had fallen back to close to seven million bushels. A year later it doubled again, to fourteen and a half million bushels in 1890. The following decade saw even wider shifts. A bumper Manitoba crop of more than twenty-three million bushels in

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[11]. See Table I-5 Harvest Excursionists

[12]. See Table II-1 Prairie Farms; Table III-4 Wheat Acreage

1891 was followed by a three year series that averaged less than sixteen million bushels. But the 1895 crop, at more than thirty-one million bushels, was the largest of the century. The very next year saw the figures fall back to fourteen million, then rise again to almost twenty-eight million in the last year of the decade. The future did not hold much promise of improvement. The first crop of the new century was the lowest since 1892, only thirteen million bushels.[13]

Despite the vagaries in wheat production, the agricultural industry did achieve overall growth. The key was expansion. Increase in wheat acreage was the most important single indicator of the development of the wheat economy, demonstrating that continued growth could come about through continued expansion. In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, it appeared that the prairie west had all the prerequisites for a successful agricultural industry save one -- labour.

II

"I arrived in Winnipeg, July 1881, with only one sovereign in my possession" reported an immigrant from Dublin in 1883. Before two years had passed, he could boast that "I have a quarter of a section of land (160 acres) within half-a-mile of the railroad, and I have a house built upon it and some ploughing done." He believed his prospects were bright. "I will be able to hire a man next year," he declared confidently, "when I hope to have good crops, and a new house built on my land."[14]

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[13]. See Table III-5 Wheat Production. Manitoba is used as an example here because its production figures are more reliable for the early period than are those of the North-West Territories.

The route to this achievement was employment as an agricultural labourer. The Dubliner faced no difficulty finding farm work. Upon his arrival in Winnipeg, he "immediately went to Mr. Hespeler, the Canadian Government Agent, whom I found a very nice man indeed." Hespeler sent him to a farm at once, fifty miles from Winnipeg, where he demonstrated his mettle and "buckled to work." Within "a short time," he moved on to the North-West Territories and selected a homestead. Although his glowing report was tempered by the acknowledgment that a shortage of cash slowed his agricultural progress -- "If I had some capital I should have had a fine crop this year" -- he solved the problem by pursuing a widely-advertised strategy for success. The newcomer found that his days of farm labour were not as brief as he had expected, but this discovery did not dampen his enthusiasm. "I have been obliged to work out for some time," he explained, "but next year I hope to have a good crop". More importantly, he would join the ranks of men who had moved up from waged farm employment to the independence of farm ownership and the rank of farm employer.[15]

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[14]. Letter from a Dublin man [nd] Troy, NWT, cited in The Emigrants' Guide for 1883 London: Pitt and Scott 1883 p 23

Ambitious, independent men saw themselves in the Dubliner's tale. His assurance that his own rapid advancement was based solely on hard work struck a responsive cord among men who faced shrinking or closed opportunities at home. If they, too, were willing to work diligently, should they not be equally rewarded? If men like the Dubliner, of humble origins and few material resources, could become prosperous farm owners, there was nothing to hold back the thousands like him who were not content merely to maintain their economic position, when hard work and resolution could bring them independence and success as the full fruit of their labour.

Their ambitions coincided with imperatives for economic development in the prairie west. Canadian government and immigration agents, in conjunction with colonization and transportation companies, stepped up their efforts to capture the migrating European and North American populations and to funnel them to the west. They cast their advertising net at agricultural settlers.[16]

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[15]. Ibid.

[16]. Klaus Peter Stitch "'Canada's Century': The Rhetoric of Propaganda" Prairie Forum 1 April 1976; R. Douglas Francis Images of the West: Responses to the Canadian Prairies Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books 1989 pp 107-155; Ronald A. Wells, ed. "Editor's Introduction" Letters from a young emigrant in Manitoba Winnipeg: The University of Manitoba Press 1981 pp 16-22; James Hedges Building the Canadian West: The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway New York: Russell & Russell 1939 pp 94-125. David Hall

The lure was free land. For the promoters of an agricultural west, the vast prairie acreages could be substituted for capital as the reward for the labour that was necessary to establish the industry. For the men who were searching for economic and social improvement, the independence that farm ownership could provide seemed a fair exchange for hard work and fortitude. The early pioneering period in the prairie west was thus a time of promise, with farm ownership assuring the route to success both for the industry as a whole and for the men who shaped their work and their lives within it.

Success was measured by a number of criteria. Central to the fulfilment of the promise was the assurance that farm ownership would provide independence. The most tangible sign was material improvement, the degree of which was said to depend upon the individual's capacity for hard work. Less tangible measurements stemmed directly from the promised financial self-sufficiency and included an improvement in social status that could extend even beyond social equality to social leadership within the community. Ultimately, personal contentment, social standing and

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Clifford Sifton: The Young Napoleon, 1861-1900 Vancouver: University of British Columbia 1981 pp 253-269. For a review of some of the literature, see Elizabeth Waterson "Travel Literature, 1880-1920" in Carl Klink, ed. Literary History of Canada Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1965 pp 347-63. Immigration agents in Great Britain reported success in reaching prospective emigrants at "hiring markets, fairs, [and] agricultural shows' Robert Murdoch "Report of the Glasgow Agency" 27/12/1875 Report of the Minister of Agriculture for the Dominion of Canada for the Calendar Year 1875 Dominion Sessional Paper 8 1876 p 82 economic security awaited the man who strove for and achieved the independence that could only be derived from farm ownership.

Immigration propaganda was thus explicitly directed at men whose ambitions stretched beyond simple farm labour but whose economic circumstances might compel them to undertake it temporarily. It was prescriptive in its soliciting men who had "no money but muscle and pluck,"[17] actively seeking those who would make a vital contribution to agricultural growth, both through their labour and through their reinvestment of what capital they did acquire into the land. It was proscriptive in its warnings that the west was no place for shirkers. The west "is not the place for people who cannot make a living in their own home," declared farmer W.M. Champion, "but any man of strength and energy can do well here."[18] The literature of the period is liberally sprinkled with calls for men with "strong hearts and willing hands" who were "steady," "sober and industrious," men with "energy" and "perseverance" who could "make light of discomforts."[19] It sought men who aspired to be working farmers, who were not expecting an easy ride to wealth. Intending immigrants were warned that it was a "great mistake" to think "they need only to stoop down and pick up the lumps of gold lying by the roadside," but they were assured that "whosoever is able and willing to work will be well repaid for it."[20]

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[17]. G. A. Cameron cited in [Alexander Begg] Plain Facts from Farmers in the Canadian North- West London: Canadian Pacific Railway 1885 p 48

[18]. W. M. Champion cited in [Begg] Practical Hints p 10

[19]. See for example Ibid. p 9; Robert Christy Miller Manitoba Described: Being a Series of General Observations upon the Farming, Climate, Sport, Natural History, and Future Prospects of the Country London Wyman and Sons 1885 p 105; W. Henry Barneby Life and Labour in the Far, Far West: Being Notes of a Tour in the Western States, British Columbia, Manitoba, and the North-West Territory London:

These criteria had been determined even before the west was opened, as Doug Owram has shown in his study of the Canadian expansionist movement:

> the ideal society envisaged for the future was one based on the independent rural landowner. While he was unlikely ever to become rich, it was thought he could become comfortable by working the land.[21]

Contemporary observers believed that intending settlers would want reassurance that the North-West could provide "a

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Cassell and Company 1884 p 338; Canada Department of Agriculture and Immigration Manitoba. The Prairie Province. The finest agricultural country in the world. Winnipeg 1890; Canada Department of the Interior Some of the Advantages of Western Canada. Practical Farmers give their experiences Ottawa 1889; Canadian Pacific Railway Facts for Farmers. The great Canadian North-West; its climate, crops and capabilities; with settlers' letters Liverpool: Journal of Commerce Printing Works 1887

[20]. F. Woodcutter "What Rev. F. Woodcutter, Parish Priest, has to say about his experiences in Canada, and especially about the Esterhaz colony, Kaposvar Post Office, Assiniboia, Canada, July, 1902" in [Paul Oscar Esterhazy] The Hungarian Colony of Esterhaz, Assiniboia, North-west Territories, Canada Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau 1902 reprinted in Martin Louis Kovacs Esterhazy and Early Hungarian Immigration to Canada: A Study Based Upon the Esterhazy Immigration Pamphlet Regina, Saskatchewan: Canadian Plains Studies 1974 p 78

[21]. Doug Owram Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1980 p 137

resting place of comfort, of independence and freedom."[22] The plan for a yeoman society was often frustrated by men who wanted more from their land. The "development and sale of land for a profit was relatively common," according to R.G. Marchildon and Ian MacPherson in a study of prairie settlers in the 1870s and 1880s. "Many speculated in ways that would have warmed the heart of any aggressive Winnipeg real estate salesman."[23] More often though, the men who took their cue from the promises were those who were willing to work hard and to live frugally, and who fully expected to win the reward of a comfortable independence.

Expert voices enhanced the official endorsements of governments and the blandishments of private land and transportation companies. The Department of the Interior and the Canadian Pacific Railway employed in the propaganda campaign authorities such as John Macoun, who had been rewarded for his services in reassessing the agricultural potential of the prairies with an appointment as Dominion botanist, and Alexander Begg, a long-time resident and prominent observer of the Red River area. At a time when farming was so difficult, and the prospects of successful agriculture so uncertain, their testimonies were expected to act as correctives to the unfavourable publicity filtering back to prospective immigrants, and to entice the doubtful to the prairies.[24] Macoun was already well-known for his extravagant assessments. He declared that the North-West contained the "Best Soil in the World", and hinted that the temperatures of New Orleans were visited upon the southern prairies, "and confer on it the blessings of a climate, not only exceptional as regards character, but productive of results to the agriculturalist, which ... are unsurpassed in any other part of the world."[25] Begg waxed enthusiastic about the rewards awaiting settlers. "Manitoba and the Canadian North-West are ... essentially agricultural countries," he insisted,

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[22] [Begg] Plain Facts p 41

[23] R. G. Marchildon and Ian MacPherson "'A Stout Heart and a Willing Mind': The Wherewithal of Prairie Settlers in the 1870s and 1880s" unpublished paper presented to the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting, Montreal 1985 p 13; See Paul Voisey for the continuation and growth of this feature. He has found that for settlers to the Vulcan region in the early twentieth century, the greatest of "the golden opportunities of the frontier" was land speculation. Paul Voisey Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988 p 37

> and it is to the tiller of the soil that they offer the greatest inducement. Farmers from the old country, and those who have a knowledge of farming may, with care and industry, prepare for themselves a future of independence and comparative ease.[26]

Even more effective than their own assurances, though, were first-hand accounts by established settlers. Men who responded to the promises of the immigration literature were most persuaded by accounts of those who had gone to the west with limited resources but with energy and determination and succeeded in carving out not only a prosperous farm but a new life. Tales of achievement such as that of the Dubliner received widespread publicity. Macoun backed up his claims with the advice of successful farmers. "I would advise any young man with good heart and $300 to come to this country," he quoted farmer Joshua Appleyard of Stonewall, Manitoba, "for in five years he can be independent."[27] Begg's use of settlers' declarations was even more refined. In 1881, the Canadian Pacific Railway appointed him as General Emigration Agent to publicize the potential of the western prairies.[28] Through the distribution of questionnaires in 1884 and 1885, he solicited the testimonies of pioneer men and women about their settlement experiences, and published a number of pamphlets culled from the positive replies.[29] The Department of Agriculture endorsed the project by joining the CPR in the sponsorship of the publications.[30] Begg found many examples of satisfaction and economic improvement. Most of the respondents reported that they were at least comfortably off, with farms valued from a few hundred pounds upward.[31]

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[24]. Norman Macdonald Canada: Immigration and Colonization, 1841-1903 Toronto: Macmillan 1966 pp 96-7

[25]. John Macoun Manitoba and the Great North-West: The Field for Investment. The Home of the Emigrant London: Thomas C. Jack 1883 pp 196, 146-147

[26]. [Begg] Plain Facts p 3

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[27] Macoun *Manitoba and the Great North-West* p 642

[28] W. Kaye Lamb *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* New York: Macmillan 1977 p 218; Hedges *Building the Canadian West* p 95

[29] As well as *Plain Facts* and *Practical Hints* already cited, other titles were CPR *Manitoba -- The Canadian North-west as well as some experiences of the resources and capabilities of the Canadian North West as well as some experiences of men and women settlers* Montreal: CPR 1883; CPR *Manitoba, the Canadian North-west: what the actual settlers say* Montreal: CPR 1886; CPR *What Women Say of the Canadian North West* Montreal: Herald 1886

[30] For a detailed appraisal of the questionnaires, located in the Alexander Begg Papers at the Provincial Archives of British Columbia, see Marchildon and MacPherson "'A Stout Heart and a Willing Mind.'" They argue that the questionnaires are an accurate representation of the

The most successful farmers started with some capital, and there was universal agreement that money would provide an easier start. When British observer Henry Barneby published the conditions of Life and Labour in the Far, Far West, he established his credentials by noting that he was "indebted to Canadian residents" for his information. "People have told me," he informed his readers, "that they consider a settler should have at least enough money to keep him in food for two years." His suggestion was that 330 to 400 pounds would provide a good start for a couple:[32]

Yoke of oxen, say at Qu'Appelle	£50
Waggon	16
Plough	5
Farm tools, say	20
One year's supply of food for self and wife (and this is a low estimate)	60
Lumber for house and stable, for building a four-roomed house	60
Two cows, say	30
Journey out for two, say	40
Extra cash for seed, &c., and contingencies	...
Homestead fee, 160 acres	2
160 acres pre-emption land, at 2 1/2 dols. per acre	80
	£363

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experiences of British and British Canadian settlers in the most populous regions of the North-West, pp 6-7. They note that Begg did not publish unfavourable responses, p 5.

[31]. [Begg] Plain Facts pp 5-6

[32]. Barneby Life and Labour in the Far, Far West pp 252-253; Barneby calculated the value of a pound at $5.00; the actual value in 1884 was $4.73.

Barneby's list of expenses was realistic, but countless farmers testified that they had begun with much less. The estimated amount needed to begin farming varied, depending upon the degree of hardship a settler was willing to endure. Five hundred dollars was a figure often cited in immigration literature, although the CPR assured single men that $385 would give them a good start.[33] Less than $300 would condemn the homesteader to "a life of penury," according to Reverend Nestor Dmytriw, an observer of Ukrainian settlements in Canada in 1897.[34] These figures are confirmed by Lyle Dick in a study of farm-making costs in southern Saskatchewan from the 1880s. In a challenge to the study by Robert Ankli and Robert Litt which estimates that settlers at the turn of the century needed $1000, Dick has concluded that a settler could begin farming with only $300 to $550, "albeit in a rudimentary way."[35] But these estimates omit the cost of labour, as economist Irene Spry has pointed out.[36] Labour was a crucial factor in establishing a farm, and the cost of hiring it could easily spell the difference between success or failure. But promoters of immigration tended to emphasize how much farmers could earn on the farms of others rather than how much they would have to pay in wages. They assumed that the most important non-cash resource settlers possessed was their capacity for hard work, and they did not weigh the delicate balance of time and labour expended on the home farm or for cash elsewhere. Settlers were expected to use their energy wisely by building up their own farms and by earning extra cash on the farms of others.

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[33]. Canadian Pacific Railway The North-West Farmer in Manitoba, Assiniboia, Alberta 1891 p 10

[34]. Reverend Nestor Dmytriw "Canadian Ruthenia" in Harry Piniuta, ed. and trans. Land of Pain, Land of Promise: First Person Accounts by Ukrainian Pioneers, 1891-1914 Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books 1981 p 47

[35]. Robert E. Ankli and Robert Litt "The Growth of Prairie Agriculture: Economic Considerations" Canadian Papers in Rural History Vol.I Donald H. Akenson, ed. Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press 1980 p 56; Lyle Dick "Estimates of Farm-Making Costs in Saskatchewan, 1882-1914" Prairie Forum 6:2 1981 p 198

[36]. Irene M. Spry "The Cost of Making a Farm on the Prairies" Prairie Forum 7:1 1982 pp 95-96; and see Dick's reply in which he concedes the point: Lyle Dick "A

This would entail a more convoluted route to the promised economic independence. Books, pamphlets and reports echoed the advice of Alfred Pegler, a reporter for the Hampshire Independent of Southampton who undertook an investigative visit to Canada in 1884 to examine prospects for settlement. He joined other voices of the day in urging men to come to Manitoba on the first of May with 100 pounds in their pockets. For this sum, the newcomer could build a house, buy a yoke of oxen, and purchase tools and seeds to carry him through until he sold his first crops. After breaking twenty-five acres for the first year's crop, he could earn enough cash for his winter's provisions by hiring himself and his oxen out to his neighbours at $4.50 to $5.00 per day. In his second year, he could crop the original

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Reply to Professor Spry's Critique 'The Cost of Making a Farm on the Prairies'" Prairie Forum 7:1 1982 p 101 twenty-five acres and break another twenty-five.[37] Within one year the newcomer could count on an income that came from the work on his own land as well as on that of others.

Both types of earnings were necessary. The tactic employed by the successful Dubliner and countless others like him -- to homestead and to work for wages concurrently -- was recommended to all but the most financially secure settlers. The CPR assured intending immigrants that wage work for other farmers was readily available and need not interfere with operations on the home farm. "The settler opening a new farm can always find plenty of work among his neighbors," declared a CPR advertisement for the North West Territories, "after he has done his own breaking and back-setting and cut his hay."[38] It was the juxtaposition of these opposite forms of income that would lead both to the development of western agriculture and to the independence of the individual farmers who operated within the industry.

For men with no capital at all, advocates of western settlement had other advice. In order to earn the necessary stake to begin farming, ambitious and hard-working men should take advantage of Canada's great economic potential. They could readily find work in any number of her developing industries. Reports like Pegler's were optimistic, but did not attempt to paint an unrealistic portrait of economic prospects for cash-poor immigrants. They were tempered by a recognition of the uncertain labour market. Expenses for labourers were high, and although wages might be high too, they were not available for all. Pegler warned that demand for labour outside agriculture was unsteady, and that although highly skilled workers could earn as much as $3.50 to $4.00 per day at piecework, the "poorest class of labourers" could expect only $1.50.[39] At the time of his report, he noted that there was no demand for labourers, carpenters or bricklayers in Toronto. And he reported that the Canadian Pacific Railway, while calling for 2300 men in the North-West, had just reduced its workforce by ten percent.[40]

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[37]. Alfred Pegler A Visit to Canada and the United States in Connection with the Meetings of the British Association Held in Montreal, in 1884 Southhampton: "Hampshire Independent" Office 1884 p 26

[38]. GAI CH .C212B CPR Papers Advertisement for the North-West Territories c1883

A more certain route to the savings necessary for successful farming was through agricultural labour. Even in 1876, when Canadian workers were suffering from such high unemployment that their plight drew attention in the press, the Dominion Minister of Agriculture endorsed the blithe assertion of Charles Foy of the Belfast Agency who reported that "I am sure that there are no good ploughman nor farm labourers amongst them." Foy deplored the "gloomy reports" and called upon the newspapers to exercise logic to see their error:

> by adducing the simple fact that every genuine farm labourer could get immediate employment, and

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[39]. Pegler A Visit to Canada p 22

[40]. Ibid. pp 16, 23

> that if the calling of every one of the thousands out of employment were given, they would see that there was not a single genuine farm labourer amongst them.[41]

Waged farm labour could clearly provide the cash to supplement the hard work necessary to make a successful start. When it came to agricultural prospects, Pegler shared the popular and widespread belief that western Canada was a land of unlimited agricultural potential, and that success was assured to anyone willing to work hard and endure a few years of rough conditions. Success stories received wide publicity. Notable cases were those of Christian Troyer of Alameda, NWT, who explained that "I borrowed 8 [pounds] to come here with" and who claimed to have a farm worth 2000 pounds, or Henry Proctor of Woodlands, Manitoba, who arrived with "Nothing" and was now worth 2400 pounds.[42] Apparently, men could start out with little more than a filing fee and a strong will.

Even intending settlers with no capital at all faced excellent prospects. Szikora Mihàly of Kaposvàr, Assiniboia, had emigrated in 1888 "with a debt of $70," but had soon parlayed hard work into "320 acres of fine land ... three draught horses, six head of horned cattle, and pigs and poultry enough for our wants."[43] W. E. Cooley of

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[41]. Charles Foy "Annual Report of the Belfast Agency 1875" Report of the Minister of Agriculture...for 1875 p 83

[42]. [Begg] Plain Facts pp 5-6

[43]. Szikora Mihàly "What Some of the Hungarian Settlers have to say for themselves, about the Canadian North-west, particularly about the Esterhaz colony, -- their

Birtle, Manitoba, recounted that when he had arrived in 1887, his "earthly possessions ... were $1.75, a wife and several children." Through a combination of waged farm work and tenancy, he was soon "the owner of 800 acres, and I think as fine a residence as there is in the district."[44] For "the large numbers whose only inheritance is their brawny arms and determined will" farm work was readily available, and men like the Dubliner were offered as proof.[45]

The widely-publicized need for farm labour was no exaggeration. The problem was evident even to observers outside agriculture. Distressing results of shortages drew comment from the Royal North-West Mounted Police in their annual reports. "As a rule, too little fall ploughing is done in the North-West, and there is consequently too much hurry among farmers in the spring, and large tracts of land are sown but not sufficiently worked;" observed Commissioner L.W. Herchmer in 1886. "Nearly all the farmers work too much land for their own strength."[46]

Farmers besieged government agencies with requests for

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present abiding place, and of the productiveness of their own farms, and the cause of their prosperous circumstances in these days" in [Esterhazy] The Hungarian Colony of Esterhaz p 127

[44]. W. E. Cooley "Settlers' Testimony" Canada, Department of the Interior Western Canada: How to Get There; How to Select Lands; How to Make a Home 1902

[45]. Pegler A Visit to Canada p 26

[46]. Report of the Commissioner of the North-West Mounted Police Force reprinted in Royal North-West Mounted Police Law and Order 1886-1887 Toronto: Coles 1973 p 17

hired help. They were unable to meet the demand. J.S. Armitage, the agent for the Manitoba Department of Agriculture and Immigration in 1887, left a file of letters outlining his difficulties. "Men for farm labour are scarce," he explained to a Salterville farmer, "and unless more men come in I am afraid I will not be able to get you one."[47] The farmers' desperation for labour only compounded the problem of coordinating supply and demand, as he complained to another farmer:

> Your application for a farm labourer is received and I fully expected one to have gone out to you yesterday, but men are very scarce and we cannot always depend upon them keeping their word, as some man may come in and take them off.[48]

Private agencies whose interests coincided with government policy added their voices to the call for agricultural labourers. The CPR, as the largest private landholder in the west, and as one of the many organizations actively involved in placing farm help, was one of the most prolific advocates of farm labour as a prelude to farm ownership. It encouraged men to come to the west where farm work was plentiful, and called upon local farmers who were potential employers to back up its claims. Testimonial letters from farmers in search of hired help were extravagant in their assessment of the opportunities for farm work. When James Kelly, a farmer at Arnaud, Manitoba, wrote to the Manitoba government agent in Liverpool in 1891 of the scarcity of farm labour, his letter was reproduced in a CPR pamphlet. "A thousand farm laborers would get work here at present," he declared, "at wages from $50 to $60 and board per month."[49] By 1894, observers of the prairie west were assuring their readers that they could provide "Hundreds of thousands of instances" of opportunities for farm workers to "live well and get good wages."[50]

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[47]. PAM RG1/D1/vI Department of Agriculture and Immigration Records p 361 J.S. Armitage to S.E. Brown 11/7/1887

[48]. Ibid. p 354 Armitage to Emerson Lorne 5/7/1887

Good wages meant more than simply rates that were competitive with those in other western industries. Wages represented land. Men were eager to know just how quickly the payment for their labour could be turned into a working farm. If a man were to believe that he could earn the promised fifty or sixty dollars a month, he would be able to save the recommended five hundred dollars in less than a year. Even the most exuberant literature did not hold out such a definite guarantee, but information for settlers was filled with equations for translating labour into land. Calculations varied, but all were confident. "Practical workers, if steady reliable men, could do well here," declared Colonel P.G.B. Lake of Grenfell, Assiniboia, in a CPR pamphlet, "Good wages are paid, and an honest man starting with no capital and saving carefully from his wages, should find himself fairly upon his feet on his own account, in at most five years."[51] The message to intending settlers was clear. Men were encouraged to enter waged agricultural labour for the express purpose of leaving it. Immigration pamphlets held out the promise:

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[49]. James Kelly to A. J. McMillan 23/8/1891(?) cited in CPR Farming and Ranching in Western Canada. Manitoba, Assiniboia, Alberta, Saskatchewan 1892? p 25

[50]. J. G. Colmer Across the Canadian Prairies: A Two Months' Holiday in the Dominion London: The European Mail 1895 p 84

> The laborer is happy and contented; he is only waiting for an opportunity to get a farm of his own and become as independent as his employer. With a farm free from debt; his fields of ripening grain ready for harvest; with herds of cattle on his pasture lands, and flocks of sheep feeding on the hillside; dairy and poultry providing the household with groceries and many other comforts; schools for his children in the immediate neighbourhood; churches close at hand, and such other social advantages as he desires within easy reach -- what more is required for a happy existence?[52]

III

The response of ambitious newcomers was equally clear. For Herbert and Dick Church, who moved to the North-West Territories from London in 1886, land was "a means of getting a permanent and independent livelihood, and perhaps something more," and the hard work was a fair price to pay.[53] To intending settlers, the promise of land in return for their labour was the cultural condition of their decision to enter prairie agriculture; the ability to exchange their labour for land was the structural condition which shaped their actions within the industry. Their hard work, perseverance and independence would be repaid with land ownership, which would, they believed, directly enhance their material and social conditions. The common denominator was a search for improvement. Men who came to the west were seldom those who were leaving impoverishment at home. Rather, they were ambitious, individualistic men, whose strivings were channelled into a desire for land ownership. They constituted a stratum of migrants who were anxious to hold on to what material and social gains they had acquired and who hoped to build on their strengths to create an even better economic and social position for themselves as prairie farmers.[54]

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[51]. Letter from Col. P.G.B. Lake and R.L. Lake 20/10/1890 cited in CPR The North-West Farmer in Manitoba, Assiniboia, Alberta 1891 p 47

[52]. Canada Department of the Interior Western Canada. Manitoba and the Northwest Territories, Assiniboia, Alberta, Saskatchewan. Information as to the resources and climates of these countries for intending farmers, ranchers, etc. 1899 p 38

The specific criteria for what constituted improvement was as varied as the social and economic backgrounds and national origins of the men who came. Settlers came in greatest numbers from Ontario, followed by those from Great Britain. Their numbers were augmented by migrants from the other Canadian provinces, Europe and the United States.

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[53]. Alfred J. Church, ed. Making a Start in Canada: Letters From Two Young Emigrants London: Seeley and Co. 1889 p 170

[54]. Maldwyn A. Jones "The Background to Emigration From Great Britain in the Nineteenth Century" Perspectives in American History VII 1973

Although Canada was active in recruiting immigrants from many countries, the greatest number of prairie settlers came from within the Dominion. Men from Ontario particularly flocked to the west. As early as the 1850s they began to regard the west as their patrimony and to press for annexation of the western prairies. This is hardly surprising. Agriculture in most of Ontario had passed the pioneer stage of inexpensive and accessible farming, if such a stage actually ever existed.[55] David Gagan's quantitative analysis study of Peel County shows an "apparently stagnant community" by the 1860s. Nor was Peel an isolated case, for "demographic decline or stagnation was prevalent among the south-central and eastern lakeshore counties of Canada West."[56] The limits of agricultural expansion had been reached; further growth could only be achieved through consolidation and more intensive use of the land. Farmers in Peel enlarged their holdings, usually at the expense of smaller, less successful farmers, and altered demographic patterns of marriage and inheritance. Typically, a farm was bequeathed to one son, who was then held responsible for his brothers and sisters. Marriages and the arrival of children were delayed. These patterns relieved the pressure on land, but created social pressures on the people involved. Farmers' sons who did not inherit the land, as well as immigrants and newcomers, were effectively excluded from establishing farms. When prairie lands became available in the 1870s, they moved west.[57]

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[55]. Peter A. Russell "Upper Canada: A Poor Man's Country? Some Statistical Evidence" in Donald Akenson, ed. Canadian Papers in Rural History Volume III Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press 1982; Robert E. Ankli and Kenneth J. Duncan "Farm Making Costs in Early Ontario" Ibid. Volume IV 1984

[56]. David Gagan Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West Ontario Historical Studies Series Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1981 p 40

Their expectations were high. Men who based their decision to move on the widely-disseminated settlement propaganda felt assured of independence and prosperity, a far cry from the limited horizons of a lifetime of poorly-paid agricultural work at home. Men who had preceded them to the west underscored the promise. J. Downie of Oak River, Manitoba, maintained that he was "perfectly satisfied, and would not go back to Ontario to farm if paid for it."[58] The feeling was widespread. George Wood, a self-proclaimed leader of the community of Birtle, Manitoba, declared that he did not know "a single instance of a sober, industrious person who has not benefitted by coming here, and I do know of many who always lived 'from hand to mouth' in Ontario, who are getting rich."[59]

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[57]. The economic and social consequences were felt in Ontario. The value of farm land fell between 1884 and 1894 from $625,478,706 to $587,246,117, a decline attributed to the development of the west. Canada Statistical Yearbook of Canada 1 1895 p 303. I am indebted to Bob Beal for bringing this information to my attention.

Young Ontario women began to lament the shortage of marriageable partners. Their refrain became a popular song complaining of "that plaguey pest,...the Great North-West," which drew away eligible men:

> One by one they all clear out
> Thinking to better themselves, no doubt,
> Caring little how far they go
> From the poor little girls of Ontario.

Cited in Joseph Schull Ontario Since 1867 Ontario Historical Studies Series Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1978 p 133

[58]. Begg Plain Facts p 42

The next major group to be drawn to the prairie west was immigrants from Great Britain. They came from a wide variety of backgrounds, from farm labourers to the sons of the well-to-do. For some it was an opportunity for adventure, but for most, it was a chance to improve their material position. Men who had been in business came looking for a change. Men who saw a threat to their economic and social position came looking for a chance to secure their future. Men who had been unable to establish themselves came looking for new opportunities. Men who saw their families living in want came looking for a whole new life.

Farm labourers fell into the last category. Throughout the latter part of the nineteenth century, large segments of the British agricultural workforce were becoming increasingly impoverished. Their efforts to improve their position resulted in the formation of a National Agricultural Labourers' Union.[60] The Union fought for better working and living conditions at home, and was instrumental in raising the wages of farm labourers. But prices were rising, too. The major problem was the glut of farm workers on the labour market. The Union's solution was to encourage and financially assist the removal of superfluous workers.[61] In its efforts, it was part of a larger and concerted attempt by reform agencies and the government to remove Britain's surplus labouring population. This dovetailed neatly with Canada's own desire to attract immigrants who would provide the labour necessary for agricultural improvement.

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[59]. Ibid. p 48

[60]. Arthur Clayden The Revolt of the Field: A Sketch of the Rise and Progress of the Movement Among Agricultural Labourers, Known as the "National Agricultural Labourer's Union" London: Hodder and Stoughton 1874; Pamela Horn Joseph Arch: The Farm Workers' Leader Kineton: Roundwood Press 1971; J.P.D. Dunbabin "The 'Revolt of the Field': The Agricultural Labourers' Movement in the 1870s" Past and Present XVI November 1963

An agreement in 1874 with Joseph Arch, the president of the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, was the first concerted attempt to resettle farm workers in Ontario where they might continue to find employment. It was designed to provide a labour force that was inexpensive, hard-working and unambitious. Timothy Demetrioff's study of the agreement indicates the scarcity of such qualities among the small number of Canadian men who were willing to undertake waged farm labour.[62] By contrast, the English agricultural labour force was "ready to work at anything by which they can honestly earn their bread," according to the Ottawa Times, "and this at a very low rate of wages, indeed, and without any prospect of improvement."[63]

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[61]. Pamela Horn "Agricultural Trade Unionism and Emigration, 1872-1881" Historical Journal XV:1 1972; Henry Simpson The Emigration Mission of Mr. Joseph Arch to Canada Liverpool: np 1874; R. V. Clements "Trade Unions and Emigration, 1840-80" Population Studies IX November 1955; Charlotte Erickson "The Encouragement of Emigration by British Trade Unions, 1850-1900" Population Studies III December 1949

[62]. Timothy L. Demetrioff "Joseph Arch and the Migration of English Agricultural Labourers to Ontario During the 1870s" unpublished paper Queen's University September 1982 pp 11-13

In 1875, the Dominion government stepped up efforts to attract farm workers and debated the merits of assisted passages. British agents described the "large numbers of people" who would leave at once "if we could provide the means to pay their passage, which they were unable to do themselves."[64] An agreement with the Allen, the Dominion, the Temperleys and the Anchor Lines allowed considerably reduced rates to farm labourers and their families. Other attractions were improved standards of living and amenable social conditions. Following the agreement with Joseph Arch and the National Agricultural Labourers' Union, a rival union visited Canada hoping to gain similar concessions. In 1875 a delegate of the Federal Union of Agricultural and General Labourers returned a glowing report:

> I may say that throughout my tour, I everywhere found the diet and treatment of the labourer, when boarded by his employer, far superior to what he could obtain in England. Animal food at every meal is the usual rule, and working as they do, side by side, there is not, as in older countries, a wide gulf of separation between employers and employed.[65]

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[63]. Ottawa Times 24/9/1873 cited in Demetrioff p 10

[64]. See Report of the Minister of Agriculture... for 1875 passim. The quotation is from Angus G. Nicholson "Report of the Special Immigration Agent" Stornoway 14/2/1876 p 186

[65]. A. Spencer Jones "English Labourers' Union Delegate's Report" 14/1/1876 Ibid. p 106

Canada was anxious to receive British farm workers. "It has been found, almost without exception," declared the Minister of Agriculture, "that English agricultural labourers with families, [is] the class most desireable to bring to Canada."[66]

But farm labourers faced a bleak prospect. Wages and conditions deteriorated when Ontario agriculture entered a slump that made it difficult for farmers to pay even low wages. The British example of union success among farm labourers spurred a similar effort in Ontario. A treatise on Farm Life As It Should Be and Farm Labourers' and Servant Girls' Grievances appeared in the 1880s, proposing a union for farm labourers in Ontario. The book extolled the virtues of agriculture, but deplored the conditions into which farm labour had sunk. "Tilling the soil should be man's noblest work," wrote Edward Amey, "but unfortunately avaricious and short-sighted people have made it slavish and degrading."[67]

Waged farm labour was extremely unattractive. Farm children who had expected to become farmers themselves were dismayed by the prospect of working permanently on the farms of others. At the same time, the physical toil of farm work was losing its social acceptability. Farm consolidation and post-pioneering prosperity meant that the arduous labour of farm work was no longer the social leveller it had once been. Alison Prentice has shown that with the increasing mid-century emphasis on education and gentility, both for children and in its technical application in economic pursuits, there was "a strong suggestion that the physical aspects of farming were really degrading."[68] Farming was still a noble profession, but farmers were expected to take advantage of education to be able to distance themselves from the manual labour. The corollary was that "there was little apparent hope for the mere agricultural labourer or farm servant".[69]

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[66]. L. Letellier Report of the Minister of Agriculture... for 1875 p xiv

[67]. Edward Amey Farm Life As It Should Be and Farm Labourers' and Servant Girls' Grievances and Rules of the Proposed Agricultural Labourers' Union Toronto: Ellis & Moore 1885? p 25

Men who moved to Ontario to begin farming soon found that it was a dead-end job, and with no immediate compensations. George Tuxford left his family firm in North Wales in the 1880s to try his hand at farming. After working on three or four Ontario farms, he moved to Moose Jaw and took up his own farm. His experience led him to advise his younger brother to come directly to the west, and not to stop in Ontario as he had done: "In one way if he worked there for a year, it might lessen his liking for farming considerably," he wrote to his parents, "for a hired man's work there is very different from England. It is simply slavish."[70] Amey's proposed union might have been a vehicle for improvement of the conditions, if not the prospects, of farm labour, but it either never materialized, or has left no accessible record. Ambitious men, as Gagan has shown, simply moved on.

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[68]. Alison Prentice The School Promoters: Education and Social Class in Mid-Nineteenth Century Upper Canada Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1977 p 106

[69]. Ibid.

Canadian efforts to attract men near the bottom of the economic scale were soon redirected. The agreement with Joseph Arch's union was short-lived. Ontario's economic slump caused a reaction against the distribution of public largesse to men who would enter an insecure labour market. At the same time, improved wages and conditions for farm workers in England caused them to lose interest in moving to the colonies simply for better employment prospects.

These conditions had the opposite effect upon a group of men with the agricultural experience that Canada was seeking. Tenant farmers began to fear that they might lose what economic and social status they had gained, and they began to consider emigration as a likely route to secure their position and even to improve it.[71] The possibility was addressed directly in immigration literature, in which readers were encouraged to ask themselves "Can I hope to live there with greater comfort and less anxiety for the future of myself and my children than in the old country?"[72] These men had capital. "I am certain that this tenant farmer class will be of benefit as they had some means with them," reported Canada's immigration agent in Liverpool about a recent group of emigrants, since "they are not as entirely dependent on their manual labour for the support of themselves as the agricultural labourers."[73] Canada began to woo them.

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[70]. SAB R-418 George S. Tuxford Papers Tuxford to Father and Mother 29/9/1889

[71]. Jones "The Background to Emigration From Great Britain" p 90

It was farm ownership that was expected to have the greatest appeal. Although Canada sought settlers with enough cash to establish themselves quickly and without having to draw upon Canadian resources, she also needed men with limited means who would provide the labour for a rapidly growing industry. Tenant farmers filled the bill. Farm labourers were still actively recruited, but attention was increasingly directed toward men with modest means who could be counted upon to provide the labour not only for their own farms but for those of their neighbours. These criteria could be met if men could be made to appreciate the potential for upward social and economic mobility, and could be induced to follow the necessary route. The message was explicit:

> It is for the possibility it affords of elevating himself, and above all his children, in the social scale, and not from any mere increase in wages, that Canada is to be recommended as a home for the British labourer. A man with so little ambition as to have no hope or wish to be anything in the

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[72]. Begg Plain Facts p 41

[73]. George Thomas Haigh "Report of the Liverpool Agent 5/1/1876 Report of the Minister of Agriculture...for 1875 p 75

> future but a labourer, and who only desired increased wages as a larger fund for self-gratification had better remain at home.[74]

But it was only in western Canada that prospects for such improvement were still widely available. Ontario was the point of arrival for great numbers of British immigrants, but for those with aspirations to independence, it was a mere stopping place to earn some cash and to learn rudimentary farm skills. The most ambitious soon moved west.

They were joined by settlers from the prairie and midwestern United States who faced slender prospects at home.[75] The increasing difficulty farmers' sons and hired hands faced in achieving farm ownership was revealed as early as 1880, when the American census showed an alarming extent of tenancy. In both the East and West North Central States, more than twenty percent of the farms were operated by tenants. During the following decade, the rate of tenancy in the West North Central States nearly doubled, and came close to doing so again in the 1890s.[76] Commentators at the time credited the phenomenon to a surge of men taking a step up the agricultural ladder to farm ownership, although later analysis concluded that it in fact represented a shrinking of agricultural opportunities.[77] At the same time, farm consolidation, mechanization, specialization, and falling agricultural prices conspired to reduce significantly the economic and social position of waged agricultural labourers.[78]

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[74]. Jones "English Labourers' Union Delegate's Report"

[75]. Karel Bicha The American Farmer and the Canadian West, 1896-1914 Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press 1968 p 16; Harold Troper Only Farmers Need Apply: Official Canadian Government Encouragement of Immigration from the United States, 1896-1911 Toronto: Griffin House 1972; Fred A. Shannon "The Status of the Midwestern Farmer in 1900" Mississippi Valley History Review XXXIV December 1950

[76]. LaWanda F. Cox "Tenancy in the United States, 1865-1900, A Consideration of the Validity of the Agricultural Ladder Hypothesis" Agricultural History 3 July 1944 p 102

Men who sought farm ownership found that their position on the bottom rung on the agricultural ladder was likely to be permanent, as the numbers of men who became farmers after a stint as tenant or labourer began to dwindle after 1880.[79] The opportunity to realize their ambitions by moving further west was also coming to a close. 1890 witnessed the last great land sale in the western territory. Sub-humid lands were still available under the Kincaid Act, but these were marginal. As Gilbert Fite has indicated,

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[77]. Margaret Beattie Bogue Patterns From the Sod: Land Use and Tenure in the Grand Prairie, 1850-1900 Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library 1959 pp 161-175

[78]. Peter H. Argersinger and Jo Ann E. Argersinger "The Machine Breakers: Farmworkers and Social Change in the Rural Midwest of the 1870s" Agricultural History 58:3 July 1984 p 396; Allen G. Applen "Labor Casualization in Great Plains Wheat Production: 1865-1902" Journal of the West XVI:1 January 1977 pp 5, 9; Paul W. Gates "Frontier Estate Builders and Farm Laborers" in Walker D. Wyman and Clifton B. Kroeber, eds. The Frontier in Perspective Madison 1957; LaWanda F. Cox "The American Agricultural Wage Earner, 1865-1900" Agricultural History XXII:2 July 1948 pp 100-102; Paul S. Taylor "The American Hired Hand: His Rise and Decline" Land Policy Review VI:1 Spring 1943 pp 15-16

[79]. Bogue Patterns from the Sod pp 161-175, esp 164

"good opportunities for new settlers on the public domain were gone."[80] Men began to look northward.

Continental Europe was the other major contributor to western settlement. Many of the migrants from the United States were Europeans or of European origin who saw more fertile fields north of the border, but the majority came directly from Europe, sharing with other newcomers a common goal of farm ownership. Throughout Europe, as in Great Britain, it was almost impossible for any but the very wealthy to obtain land except through tenancy. Agricultural labourers could not even hope for this much.[81] Although the prime attraction of North America was free or cheap land, even the immediate improvement in the conditions of agricultural labour could act as a draw. The appeal of independence must have been very strong for farm workers who were accustomed to strict controls. Lars Peter Erickson, a Danish farm worker who came to Canada in the 1880s, brought his Skudsmaalsbog, a booklet recording all his agricultural employment. Erickson explained that every agricultural labourer was required to carry such a booklet, and to have it signed by each employer. "It was impossible to move about the country", he noted, "unless you had one of these." The possibility of farm ownership was Erickson's prime motive in coming to Canada, but even in the short-term he looked forward to agricultural employment free from "this regimentation." He also looked forward to better working conditions, complaining about the "poor treatment of workers" back in Denmark. At his last job there, Erickson's only time off had been every second Sunday, and that was "the best place he had worked at."[82]

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[80]. Gilbert C. Fite The Farmers' Frontier, 1865-1900 New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston p 215

[81]. John-Paul Himka "The Background to Emigration: Ukrainians of Galicia and Bukovyna, 1848-1914" Manoly R. Lupul, ed. A Heritage in Transition: Essays in the History of Ukrainians in Canada Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1982

Men like Erickson fully expected to put in some time as wage labourers on the farms of others, but their ultimate objective was farm ownership. The attraction was so strong that the numbers and proportion of Europeans moving to the west increased steadily. In 1881, the "foreign-born" population, composed primarily of Europeans, made up less than fourteen percent of the prairie population. A decade later it had grown to more than eighteen percent, and by the end of the century had surpassed the British-born segment of the population by rising to almost twenty-five percent.[83] Like the newcomers from Ontario and Great Britain and the United States, Europeans came to the west because they wanted to farm, but could entertain no hopes for farm ownership in their own lands.

In the closing decades of the nineteenth century, western Canada began to gather a population with a desire for self-improvement, with ambitions extending to the economic independence they believed would result from farm ownership. At the same time they were limited by this conviction. Whatever their origin or ultimate plans, men were drawn to the prairie west by the promise of farm ownership, to be achieved by their own individual labour. Their future was assured in glowing terms:

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[82]. GAI M364/1 Lars Peter Erickson Papers

[83]. Census of Canada 1880-81 Vol I Table IV pp 398-9; 1891 Vol I Table V pp 362-3; 1901 Vol I Table XIII pp 416-7

> for the industrious, self-reliant, frugal and observant man, who, while preparing to do his duty by his present employer, looks forward to owning his own acres and securing still brighter prospects for his offspring, Canada affords chances inferior to those of no other land.[84]

The promise that land could be won in exchange for labour reverberated through immigration and settlement propaganda well beyond the period of settlement. It can even be found, albeit in muted tones, in the "back to the land" fantasies aimed at the urban unemployed in the 1930s. After 1945 the theme was redirected at a new generation of immigrants from war-torn Europe. From time to time a note of caution crept in, and voices of moderation could always be heard, but the siren's song composed in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, when the prairies seemed infinitely vast and empty, lured would-be independent farmers for a century.

The concerted efforts of governments and immigration agents to woo agriculturalists, and to instill in them expectations of plentiful farm work, resulted from the disappointingly slow rate of agricultural growth at the end of the nineteenth century. Since this growth was being fuelled primarily through acreage expansion, which was being carried on by labour rather than the technology that capital could buy, it was clear that it could not continue without an increase in the labour force. And when the labour force did multiply in the opening years of the twentieth century, agriculture expanded enormously. Economic realities thus played a large part in bringing a labour force to the prairie west, and in keeping it there. Canada continued to be the "Last Best West",[85] offering land for homestead and sale long after entry into farm ownership had become a vain hope in the more developed agricultural regions.

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[84]. Jones "English Labourers' Union Delegate's Report"

Illusion was an even more a powerful force. Although the prairies have left ample records of farm dreams that were dried out, or hailed out, or were foreclosed, there were always enough tales of settlers who did secure their own farms and attain their own standard of success to validate the claim that it was possible. Even the failures served to reinforce the belief that individual effort and hard work would be rewarded. Those who abandoned their attempts at farming were charactterized as unadaptable or unwilling or unprepared for the difficult early years. Their absence made self-defense impossible, and they appeared as shirkers who had been weeded out, leaving behind those who were willing to continue to the struggle. Those who remained were often forced to lower their expectations for material improvement and economic independence. As Lyle Dick has suggested about long-term farming progress in Saskatchewan, "persistence was not necessarily an advantage."[86] Yet long-time farmers looked back with pride on their hardships, counting the farm deed in their hands as the ultimate success.

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[85]. The Last Best West was the title of an oft-reprinted immigration pamphlet: Canada Department of the Interior The Last Best West: Canada in the Twentieth Century. Western Canada. Vast agricultural resources. Homes for millions Ottawa: The Department of the Interior 1907?; The Last Best West is Canada West. Homes for millions 1908?; The Last Best West is Canada West 1911

Even when land became scarcer and labour became more plentiful, immigration and settlement propaganda continued. It did more than merely provide a labour force -- it legitimized the structural and cultural conditions necessary to create a labour supply that was both cheap and abundant. Individual farmers may have been cash-poor, but the industry as a whole was able to rely on the federal government to underwrite its labour costs by providing land as a wage supplement. By the time this became less feasible in the post-war period and beyond, the pattern of expectation had been established and rationalized. Farmers continued to depend upon low-waged labour. Men continued to work for meagre wages in the anticipation of a future reward in land. Both the prescriptive and the proscriptive nature of the promise had ensured that those who answered its call fit the description of the archetype of the self-made man described by Allen Smith. The pioneer farmer, and the man who aspired to become one even long after the pioneer era had closed, was "free of all constraint and interference, quite literally able to shape his world as he wished." And this was to be achieved entirely through his own effort. His "abundant and fulfilling future" was to be attained by "no more nor less than his own capability."[87]

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[86]. Lyle Dick "Factors Affecting Prairie Settlement: A Case Study of Abernethy, Saskatchewan in the 1880s" Historical Papers/Communications historiques 1985 p 26

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[87] Allen Smith "The Myth of the Self-made Man in English Canada, 1850-1914" Canadian Historical Review LIX:2 June 1978 p 192

CHAPTER 4

"spice with every day's work"*:

Prairie agricultural labour and the nature of work

The promise of A Farm for Two Pounds drew Harry Baldwin to the prairie west.[2] Baldwin achieved his dream by toiling his way up from farm labourer to farm owner, then published an account of his accomplishment. His story is romantic and heroic, similar to dozens of others left by prairie pioneers who wrote themselves into the saga of the developing west. Baldwin's view of himself and of his place in the new economy and society is representative of men who entered the shifting world of labour-capital relations during the early years of the wheat boom.

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* The title of this chapter comes from a description of agricultural labour by a hired hand in Manitoba before the First World War. "There was spice with every day's work," he reported, "and hard rougn work but with it all a lot of fun." Manitoba Legislative Library "Local History - Manitou" Acc: 8/1/1951 "A Citizen of Canada" unpublished ms. by W. N. Rolfe p 9

[2] Harold Baldwin A Farm for Two Pounds: Being the Odyssey of an Emigrant London: John Murray 1935

"That farm of my own was the lure," Baldwin recalled, explaining his flight from the English Midlands. "I craved an outdoor life, but in a land so congested as ours, however a man toiled he could never become anything more than a farm labourer." Baldwin's ambitions were modest, but they filled his horizon: "In the west my own fields, the shocks of my own grain, awaited me."

Baldwin embarked on his agricultural career as a hired hand in Ontario, where he hoped to learn Canadian methods. He was proud of his ability to milk and drive a team of horses, but he had much to learn. "Although the principles of the farming game were familiar," he remarked, "being new to the ways of the country, I naturally made mistakes." Baldwin regarded his education as a necessary prelude to farm ownership, and although he chafed about "the fetish of the Ontario farmer -- work for work's sake", he relished other aspects of farm life. "How good the food was!" he recalled. "My meals were a joy."

Baldwin was also receiving lessons in labour-capital relations. He found his work "dull, weary, exhausting toil" and fixed the blame on his employer, whom he accused of "slavery and slave-driving." His boss returned the compliment by chiding Baldwin for his short stature and slight build, casting doubt on his likely productivity. Baldwin capitulated and took a cut in pay. But the experience stiffened his resolve. With a "fixed determination to start on the road that led to a farm of my own," he found work on another farm. His second experience could not have provided a greater contrast. Again, Baldwin understood the distinction in terms of individual differences. He credited his employer with creating an atmosphere of equality, "no master and man stuff about it." His year on the farm was rewarding. "I learnt quickly under Rube's direction," he explained, and was proud to report that "no better relations could have existed between a hired man and his employer."

But Baldwin was anxious to enter the world of farm ownership, and "there was a glamour about the very name of the West that struck an answering chord in my romantic young heart." As he joined the harvest excursionists, he saw himself among "the bronzed young Apollos carrying sheaves of purest gold over stubble as golden under an azure sky." The thrill of such glamour seemed payment enough, but Baldwin also anticipated earnings of such princely proportions that he need only labour a "short spell and then -- my horses, my sheaves, my homestead!"

Once again reality pulled Baldwin back to earth. "Life was a dreary misery on that Manitoba farm," he recalled, and stooking was the "most monotonous job in the whole gamut of labour." Yet as an agricultural labourer, he was developing qualities that would stand him in good stead as a farm hand and eventually as a farmer. He learned resiliency and began to joke that "the monotony was relieved by constant fault-finding". He took pride in his work and bragged that his abilities were recognized when his sheaves weathered a storm as well as any others. He cultivated feistiness and related how he settled a dispute with his co-worker: "I smote him right on his dapper little moustache." By the time his work on the farm began to pall and his boss began to criticize him, Baldwin had no qualms about quitting. When the boss refused to pay his wages, the two came to blows. Baldwin lost the fight, but held his own. "Very shortly after I was on the road once more," he recalled, "with a patched eye, a bruised face and a big lump on my head, but with quite a few dollars in my pocket."

Despite the arduous work and often unsatisfactory conditions, Baldwin remained enamoured of prairie agricultural life. Learning to operate complex farm machinery filled him with pride. Catching the "faint odour of gasoline and the reek of sweat and harness" caused his heart to catch with a "passionate love of the west." His resolve to make this his life's work stiffened, and after a brief stint in a lumber camp, he returned to waged agricultural labour.

More cautious now, Baldwin recognized the economic and social particularities of prairie agriculture, and determined to wrest what he needed out of the bargain for his labour. He weighed the relative benefits of higher wages against likelihood of collection, of hard work against generous room and board, and based his decision on his own sense of ability to control his conditions and handle his boss. "Shucks, I liked the old skeezicks," he declared, "and I wasn't such a kid, now. If he came any funny stuff

I'd find a rock to heave at him."[3]

Baldwin's education as a hired hand was complete. He had not only learned how to farm the Canadian prairies, but had come to understand the particular relationship between labour and capital in the prairie west. The lure of independent farm ownership had drawn him into agricultural labour, and his experiences of that labour and of the relationships within which he operated had fostered this sense of independence. Baldwin perfected strategies to deal with his conditions of work, and with his employers, that were highly individualistic and ideally suited to the particular conditions of prairie agriculture during the period of settlement and agricultural expansion.

This chapter examines the early years of the wheat boom. It begins with a brief description of agricultural developments during the early settlement period and the First World War then directs its attention to the agricultural labour force. The early years were the heyday of the agricultural labourer, because the shortage of labour and the plenitude of land coincided to allow easy access both to farm work and to farm ownership. But the opportunity was short-lived, curtailed by the post-boom depression and the First World War. Nor was the quest for independence without difficulty and complexity. Men found themselves in an unconventional position that was neither clearly labour nor clearly capital. The strategies they developed for achieving their various goals reflected this anomaly: they acted both as aspiring farm owners and as active members of the working class. This chapter probes the relationship between labour and capital at a time when the fortunes of both were at first in an uneasy balance and later in flux.

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[3] Harold Baldwin A Farm for Two Pounds: Being the Odyssey of an Emigrant London: John Murray 1935 pp 2, 18, 19, 21, 50, 55, 63, 74, 92, 93, 97, 120, 124, 258

I

Harry Baldwin came to the prairie west at the beginning of the Wheat Boom, a period when the production and export of wheat brought long-awaited prosperity. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the number of farms grew between four- and five-fold, and improved acreage grew eight-fold.[4] The most striking increase was in wheat production. In 1890, the prairies produced 16,458,000 bushels of wheat. Twenty-five years later a bumper crop measured in at 360,187,000 bushels.[5]

The boom was based upon expansion. Ready markets and high prices for wheat[6] acted as a draw to agricultural settlers, who brought both capital and labour. The promise of agricultural growth acted as a draw to developmental and investment capital from both government and private investors. The combination of a rapid and massive increase in labour's productive capacity and capital's lavish investment created a striking but temporary phenomenon of great prosperity, providing a heady atmosphere of limitless potential.[7]

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[4] See Table II-1 Prairie Farms

[5] See Table III-5 Wheat Production

[6] See Table III-8A Wheat Prices. No. 1 Northern wheat sold in the 60- and 70-cent-per-bushel range at the Lakehead for much of the 1890s. In 1915, the Lakehead prices was 113 cents per bushel and would rise dramatically during the next few years.

Beginning in 1896, the trickle of newcomers to the west turned to a flood.[8] Homestead entries soared to a peak in

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[7]. The actual economic effects of the Wheat Boom upon the Canadian economy have been subject to debate. See Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations Report Book I: Canada, 1867-1939 (1940) ed. and intro. by Donald V. Smiley as The Rowell/Sirois Report/Book I Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1963; W. T. Easterbrook and H. G. J. Aitken Canadian Economic History Toronto: Macmillan 1965; A. G. Green and M. C. Urquhart "New Estimates of Output Growth in Canada: Measurements and Interpretations" in Douglas McCalla, ed. Perspectives on Canadian Economic History Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman 1987; F. Lewis "The Canadian Wheat Boom and Per capita Income: New Estimates" Journal of Political Economy 83:6 1975; Gordon W. Bertram "The Relevance of the Wheat Boom in Canadian Economic Growth" Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science VI November 1973; E. J. Chambers and D. F. Gordon "Primary Products and Economic Growth: An Empirical Measurement" Journal of Political Economy LXXIV August 1966

[8]. See Table I-1 Prairie Population. For a recent synthesis of the debate about the rate of prairie settlement see Kenneth Norrie and Douglas Owram A History of the Canadian Economy Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1991 pp 321-325. For specific arguments see Kenneth Norrie " The Rate of Settlement of the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1911 Journal of Economic History 25:2 1975; Idem "Dry-Farming and the Economics of Risk Bearing: The Canadian Prairies, 1870-1930" Agricultural History 51:1 1977; William Marr and Michael Percy "The Government and the Rate of Canadian Prairie Settlement" Canadian Journal of Economics 11:4 1978; Kenneth Norrie "The National Policy and the Rate of Prairie Settlement: A Review" Journal of Canadian Studies 14:3 Fall 1979; Trevor J.O. Dick "Productivity Change and Grain Farm Practice on the Canadian Prairie, 1900-1930"

1911,[9] translating into a rapid increase in agricultural settlement. The number of men engaged in agriculture increased from close to forty three thousand in 1891 to close to two hundred and seventy-nine thousand by 1911.[10] During the first decade of the century alone, the rural male population nearly trebled.[11]

Rapid settlement meant rapid development, but it also meant that the limits to expansion were very quickly reached. Manitoba was the first to fill up. By 1903, there was little land left for homesteading, and even purchased land was rapidly taken. By 1908, good land close to railways was gone. Farther west, most of the best land between the parkbelt and the dry area of Palliser's Triangle was taken by 1908. A sense of urgency underscored the drive for expansion. The demand for land was putting settlers into areas in southern Alberta and southwestern Saskatchewan that could only be made productive through costly irrigation projects.[12] The costs of agricultural over-expansion were soon evident. Drought brought homesteaders to the edge of

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Journal of Economic History 40:1 1980; Idem "Canadian Wheat Production and Trade, 1896-1930" Explorations in Economic History 17 1980; Frank D. Lewis "Farm Settlement on the Canadian Prairies, 1898-1911" Journal of Economic History 41:3 1981

[9]. See Table I-4A Homestead Entries

[10]. See Table I-3 Agricultural Workforce

[11]. See Table I-1F Total Rural Male Population

[12]. James B. Hedges Building the Canadian West, The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway New York: Macmillan 1939 pp 169-211

starvation.[13] Over-expansion had broader results as well. The rise in production stalled in 1911, and grain prices fell markedly in 1912.[14] The downward trend continued the next year, with no relief in sight. The entire prairie economy was affected. Investment capital began to dry up, railway construction slowed in 1912, urban building starts fell in 1913 and 1914, and unemployment became more than a seasonal phenomenon.[15] The prairie economy was reeling.

War revived the agricultural industry. The first wheat crop harvested after the declaration of war was by far the largest on record. It found a ready market in war-struck England and Europe, and prices rose dramatically during the war. Every bushel that could be produced was snapped up at once, and it took federal legislation in 1917 to cap the Lakehead price at $2.21 a bushel. The farm value of prairie major crops rose from almost $221 million in 1914 to almost $630 million in 1917.[16] Commercial farmers reacted quickly. The decade that encompassed the war witnessed an increase in the number of farms by more than one quarter and in their total acreage by more than one half. The most startling expansion was in land under cultivation. Farm size increased and improved acreage almost doubled.[17] The gamble paid off in a doubling of wheat exports during the war. By war's end shipments of wheat had become the largest single Canadian export in terms of dollar value.[18] Canada had become the second largest world exporter of wheat, averaging almost 165 million bushels during 1915-17, with ninety percent of this from the western provinces.[19]

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[13]. David C. Jones Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 1987; Vernon C. Fowke The National Policy and the Wheat Economy Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1957) 1978 pp 77-80

[14]. See Table III-8A Wheat Prices

[15]. John Herd Thompson Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918 Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1978 pp 47-48

[16]. See Table III-5 Wheat Production; Table III-8A Wheat Prices; Table III-3 Major Crops Farm Value

The economic roller-coaster of boom-and-bust that characterized the agricultural industry during the first two decades of the twentieth century found reflection in the relations between labour and capital. Farmers juggled their drive for expansion with the concomitant increase in labour needs, attempting to bring more land under cultivation while gambling that their labour needs would be met. The rush of settlers to the west offered no solution. As long as land was available and affordable, men placed ownership at the top of their list of priorities, entering waged agricultural labour only when and if it promoted this goal. Labour shortages thus continued to plague the industry, although the absolute labour shortages of the last decades of the nineteenth century became instead relative. It was a circular process -- as men rushed to take up farms of their own, they increased overall labour.

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[17] See Table II-1 Prairie Farms

[18] Fowke The National Policy and the Wheat Economy p 74

[19] See Table III-9 Wheat Exports

A solution was sought, as in the previous decades, in technology, but once again the overall effect frequently was to increase labour needs. Dry-land farming techniques, which were well-established by the turn of the century, underwent refinement.[20] Techniques for improving the quality of seed, for controlling plant disease, and for careful cultivation and tillage practices that would preserve moisture and eradicate weeds all required a good deal of labour.[21] Other technological refinements aimed to increase efficiency. Modification and improvements in implement design and the introduction of new machinery often led to greater agricultural productivity per man-hour worked, although it did little to reduce overall labour requirements, since the time saved was used to produce larger crops.[22] It was not until the First World War that soaring wheat prices coincided with declining labour supplies and escalating labour costs to push agricultural technology in the direction of reducing labour needs rather than simply making labour more productive.

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[20]. David Spector Agriculture on the Prairies, 1870-1940 National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Department of the Environment, Canada 1983 pp 151-156; John Bracken Dry Farming in Western Canada Winnipeg: The Grain Growers' Guide 1921; Mary Wilma M. Hargreaves Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains, 1900-1925 Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1957 pp 130-35; Ernest B. Ingles "Some Aspects of Dry-Land Agriculture in the Canadian Prairies to 1925" MA University of Calgary 1973; James F. Shepherd "The Development of Wheat Production in the Pacific Northwest" Agricultural History 49:1 January 1975 pp 259-60; Delbert S. Clark "Settlement in Saskatchewan with special reference to the influence of dry-farming" MA University of Saskatchewan 1931

[21]. Seager Wheeler Seager Wheeler's Book on Profitable Grain Growing Winnipeg: Grain Growers' Guide 1919 pp 110-12 and passim; W. R. Motherwell Methods of Soil Cultivation Saskatchewan: Department of Agriculture Bulletin 21 1911

[22]. Thomas Isern "The Discer: Tillage for Canadian Plains" Agricultural History 62:2 1988; Wayne D. Rasmussen "The Mechanization of Agriculture" Scientific

The combination of agricultural expansion and the use of technology to make expansion possible added up to overall agricultural prosperity. In the first decade of the twentieth century and during the First World War, the results of this prosperity generally filtered down to individual farmers. Even so, distribution of the agricultural bounty was very uneven. Years of spectacular crops were followed by years of equally spectacular failures, and for individual farmers the result could be fortune or insolvency. In periods of economic set-back farmers suffered even more. The industry as a whole could easily absorb the annual fluctuations as well as the more serious and long-term slumps, but individual farmers could not.

Their response was to tackle the problem head-on. Farmers lobbied the federal government to reshape tariff policy and transportation rates, worked with provincial governments to ensure controlled and adequate storage facilities, and organized themselves to enter the field of

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American 247:3 September 1982; Idem "The Impact of Technological Change on American Agriculture: 1862-1962" Journal of Economic History 22 December 1962; O. L. Symes "Chronology of Agricultural Machinery Development and Related Information" Proceedings of Seminar: Development of Agriculture on the Prairies Regina: University of Regina 1975 p 20; Fred A. Shannon The Farmers' Last Frontier New York: Rinehart and Company 1945 p 143 marketing.[23] Through these ventures, prairie farmers used their combined voice to demand protection and promotion of their interests. By 1916, Henry Wise Wood, president of the United Farmers of Alberta, was able to articulate the feeling of unity and direction among farmers. "We are a class organization, it is true, but we are the basic class," he declared in his annual report, "We represent a rising of the people, the great common people, en masse, in an upward struggle."[24]

It may have been economically and politically useful for farmers to see themselves as a single class, although recent scholarship has done much to uncover evidence of an increasing degree of stratification as farming communities moved beyond pioneer conditions.[25] In terms of the relations between labour and capital, farmers' awareness of their special status and their actions to overcome their disadvantages were reflected in their relationships with their own hired hands.

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[23]. Ian MacPherson Each for All, A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900-1945 Toronto: Macmillan 1979; Louis Aubrey Wood A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada: The Origins and Development of Agrarian protest, 1872-1924 (1924) Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1975; William Irvine The Farmers in Politics (1920) ed. and intro. by Reg Whitaker Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1976; Paul F. Sharp The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing Western Parallels Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1948; R. D. Colquette The First Fifty Years: A History of United Grain Growers Limited Winnipeg: Public Press 1957

[24]. United Farmers of Alberta Annual Report and Year Book 1916 pp 13, 17. See also W. L. Morton "The Social Philosophy of Henry Wise Wood, the Canadian Agrarian Leader" Agricultural History 22:2 July 1948

[25]. Lyle Dick Farmers 'Making Good': The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan, 1880-1920 Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History: National Historic Parks and Sites, Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada 1989 pp 123-30; Ian MacPherson and John Herd Thompson "The Business of Agriculture: Farmers and the Adoption of 'Business Methods', 1880-1950" Peter Baskerville, ed. Canadian Papers in Business History Vol. I Victoria:

II

Hired hands did not intend to remain hired hands. The economic boom that brought more settlement and greater production meant expanding opportunities for farm employment and for eventual farm ownership. But these were conflicting aims, and farm workers who aspired to ownership became enmeshed in the contradiction. The inconsistency of their class position was reflected in their responses to the situation and their methods of dealing with it. Although hired hands put most of their energy into strategies for removing themselves from the working class, they also pursued strategies to improve their position as members of the working class. Few men took the time to ponder the dichotomy as they pursued their primary objective, farms of their own.

Public History Group, University of Victoria 1989 p 247; Gerald Friesen The Canadian Prairies: A History Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1984 pp 311-16. Compare with C. B. Macpherson Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1968 p 19; Reg Whitaker "Introduction" in Irvine The Farmers in Politics. See also Leo A. Johnson "Independent Commodity Production: Mode of Production or Capitalist Class Formation?" Studies in Political Economy 6 Autumn 1981

Newcomers were encouraged to bring with them enough capital to begin farming at once, but many came with the intention of beginning as labour and climbing the agricultural ladder to ownership. The "agricultural ladder" as it existed in the prairie west deserves attention for its effect upon labour-capital relations. Its importance lies as much in what it promised as in what it delivered.

The agricultural ladder on which a hard-working and frugal young man could work his way up from farm labourer to farm tenant to farm owner, was a notion familiar to North Americans.[26] The ladder did exist, but it was a fleeting phenomenon, operating for short periods only when land was plentiful and labour and capital were in short supply. It was limited to the frontier, existing in southern Ontario during the early part of the 1800s to about mid-century, and in the United States moving westward with agricultural settlement until about the turn of the century.[27] But by

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[26]. Margaret Beattie Bogue Patterns From the Sod: Land Use and Tenure in the Grand Prairie, 1850-1900 Springfield, Illinois: Illinois State Historical Library 1959 pp 161-9; W. J. Spillman "The Agricultural Ladder" American Economic Review IX:1 Supplement March 1919; Shu-Ching Lee "The Theory of the Agricultural Ladder" Agricultural History XXI April 1947; [Stewart Jamieson] Labor Unionism in American Agriculture United States Department of Labor Bulletin 836 Washington 1945 pp 5-6

[27]. LaWanda Cox "Tenancy in the United States, 1865-1900, A Consideration of the Validity of the Agricultural Ladder Hypothesis" Agricultural History 3 July 1944; William L. Marr "Tenant vs. Owner Occupied Farms in York County, Ontario, 1871" in Donald Akenson, ed. Canadian Papers in Rural History Volume IV Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press 1984; Joy Parr "Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Comparative Perspective" Labour/Le Travail 15 1985 p 95

1900 even the western United States could no longer provide access to agricultural independence. In Oklahoma more than 43 percent of farmers leased their land, and the pattern was similar in Texas and Kansas. In the states of the western Middle West, tenancy was increasing, not as a step up toward ownership, but as a step down. The alarm caused by the increased tenancy revealed in the 1890 census seemed well-founded when the 1900 census showed an even greater increase.[28] Frederick Jackson Turner's startling thesis of 1893 that the frontier, which had provided "the promotion of democracy," "economic power ... political power," and "intellectual traits of profound importance" was closed, seemed accurate.[29] In an era of agricultural consolidation and mechanization, small farmers were driven out of business or into tenancy.

Farm workers were unable even to achieve tenancy. The increase in agricultural income that followed the 1896 economic recovery was very unevenly distributed, with waged farm workers receiving less than half their share of the returns. In Iowa, for example, farm labourers made up thirty-five percent of the agricultural population, yet received only six percent of the gross returns to agriculture.[30] It was from the North Central States that the Canadian prairies received the greatest number of American settlers.

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[28]. United States Bureau of the Census Twelfth Census of the United States, Taken in the Year 1900 Statistical Atlas Washington: US Census Office 1903 pp 72-3, plate 140; Nick Salvatore Eugene V. Debs: Citizen and Socialist Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press 1982 p 234

[29]. Frederick Jackson Turner The Significance of the Frontier in American History (1893) ed. and intro. by Harold P. Simonson New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing 1976 pp 51, 52, 57

Fred Pringle was typical of young Americans who knew they could not climb the agricultural ladder at home. In 1909 he moved north from Montana, with a clear intention to make his agricultural future in Canada. His careful record of expenditures suggests he had a nest egg of no more than one hundred dollars. In the autumn before he came, he had hayed, threshed and husked corn on several farms, then turned his hand "to work at the Barber trade" for a few months.[31]

When he "Pulled out of Billings" on 22 April 1909, Pringle spent $13.90 for a railway ticket through Great Falls and Sweetgrass to Lethbridge, then another $3.15 to reach Calgary and finally Stettler. He was in no great rush to reach his new home, for he stopped in Lethbridge to attend the Wesley Methodist Church, write a letter, and gaze at the "big bridge 507 ft high." In Calgary he "loafed around" for two days, waiting for his trunk and writing letters. From Stettler he spent a day travelling to Lacombe where he stopped and "Danced 3 times", spent $1.00 on whisky, sent postcards to the folks back home, and "went to church twice." He then returned to Stettler, where he picked up a little cash by "Slinging ties all day" for $1.50 a day. Finally, on 7 May, he "Filed on a Canada claim" and sent for his trunk. Despite the terseness of the entry, there is a note of tempered pride. Pringle at first wrote in his diary of "my Canada claim", proudly underlining "my". He must have been bitten with caution however, for the "my" was crossed out and replaced by a neutral "a".[32]

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[30]. Karel Bicha The American Farmer and the Canadian West, 1896-1914 Lawrence, Kansas: Coronado Press 1968 p 16

[31]. GAI M1008/A .P957 Frederick Pringle Papers, diary p 111

With only $41.00 left in his pocket, Pringle began his homesteading venture by seeking to accumulate cash. He found work the next day "Building fence for Mr. Hargreaves", and three days later he "Hired to Geo. Hoskins for 1 mo. for $35." Pringle spent his first summer and fall on the Canadian prairies working at different farms. On 9 September, he "Finished month work [sic] for Wisler's," and had no trouble finding another job. He spent one day "Working for my health", but the next day he was "Threshing at Davis's in the evening", and spent another six days there. His threshing job ended abruptly on 19 September when he "Got thrown from horse, and collar bone cracked." At this point, Pringle decided to see his homestead. He spent four days travelling. He must have felt greatly satisfied with what he saw, for his entry on 23 September revealed that he had done nothing but "Tramped around all day".[33]

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[32] Ibid. pp 126, 128

[33] Ibid. pp 129, 140-141

Fred Pringle had achieved in one summer what he could not hope for in many years in the United States -- entry to farm ownership. It was a meagre beginning, with only unimproved land, no stock, no buildings, no implements and no crop, but it was a start. At home, he had not expected to be able to climb the agricultural ladder. In Canada he did not have to. The western Canadian version of the agricultural ladder was significantly different from its Ontario or American counterpart. The classic agricultural ladder on which a man climbed from farm labourer to farm tenant and finally to farm owner, did not exist on the Canadian prairie frontier. Here, the ladder was significantly more flexible and it could also be shorter. In western Canada, one could skip either the labour or the tenant rung. In fact, it was usually farm owners who became tenants, renting land after they had established themselves, as a low-risk form of expansion. Tenancy was often not an intermediary rung at all.

In his contribution to the Canadian Frontiers of Settlement series on prairie pioneer settlement, R. W. Murchie attempted to uncover the extent to which the agricultural ladder was operating. He scrutinized the agricultural progress of farmers in several farming districts and found little evidence that the classic agricultural ladder operated or was even necessary to achieve ownership. In the Swan River Valley, "A very large proportion of the settlers omitted the labour and tenancy stages and attained ownership directly." In Turtleford, 153 out of 178 farm owners had skipped the tenancy rung, and in Kindersley, only 31 out of 198 farmers had taken the route from farm labour to farm ownership via tenancy. In the Riding Mountain Fringe district, Murchie noted tellingly, "the agricultural ladder has failed to function or ... these farmers did not choose to use it."[34]

If tenancy was not a necessary stage toward farm ownership, then agricultural labour alone should be able to provide the step up to ownership. The ladder on the Canadian prairies thus usually consisted of only two rungs. It might more accurately be called a stepping stone. The promises of farm work as prelude to farm ownership that had drawn men like Fred Pringle to the prairie west were repeated throughout the settlement period and well beyond. Promoters never carefully examined the accuracy of their assurances, and as a result there are few records available to researchers who wish to survey the extent of the phenomenon. The studies by Murchie have indicated, however, that the promises contained at least a kernel of truth.

Murchie found that although farm labour was not a necessary prelude to farm ownership, it was a route taken far more often than tenancy was. In the Swan River Valley, 41 out of 168 farm owners "went directly from positions as farm labourers to ownership", compared to only 29 who had been tenants but not labourers. In Kindersley, 124 of the 198 farmers surveyed had worked as farm labourers and had not been tenants, compared to only 18 who had been tenants but not farm labourers. But in all districts, there were numbers of farmers who had achieved ownership without having worked as agricultural labourers at all. The proportions varied. In some districts, more than half of the farm owners had worked as farm labourers, as many as sixty-three percent in Kindersley and seventy-three percent in Turtleford. In Olds, the proportion was just under half, forty-eight percent. In other districts, fewer farmers had first worked for wages on the farms of others. In the Riding Mountain Fringe only thirty-seven percent had done so, and in the Swan River Valley the figure was even lower at twenty-four percent.[35]

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[34]. Murchie Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier Toronto: Macmillan 1936 pp 195, 262, 242, 156

The pattern of labour in prairie agriculture was thus not a simple distinction between waged work and farm ownership, with the latter negotiated through a series of stages beginning with the former. Newcomers might go directly from labour to ownership. They might homestead or buy land and work on the farms of others simultaneously and thus be farm labourers and farm owners concurrently.[36] Or they might even became farm owners before they became labourers and use their farm wages to help establish themselves or to supplement their agricultural income.[37] In the long term, what is most significant about the agricultural ladder in western Canada is the ideological sway it held. Whatever the actual number of men who arrived at farm ownership through waged farm labour, there were enough who did so to convince others that it was not only possible, but likely.

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[35]. Ibid. pp 242, 259, 289, 156, 159; author's calculations

[36]. See for example SAB RE 191 Geoffrey Yonge Papers; GAI A.B474A Roy Benson Papers

In the short term, the significance of the western Canadian version of the agricultural ladder lay in the effects it had upon labour-capital relations. Because a climb up the traditional ladder was not expected to take place overnight, it implied a lengthy and dedicated commitment to waged labour in agriculture, and another long term as tenant. The ability to skip the tenant stage, and simply to use agricultural labour as a stepping stone, or even as an adjunct to farm ownership, severely undercut the willingness that men might have had in the older agricultural districts to look forward to long years of waged labour. In all of Murchie's studies, farmers who taken the steps from farm labourer to tenancy to ownership had taken "a substantially longer period" to arrive at their destination than did those who had skipped a rung or two.

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[37]. Even in the late 1920s, homesteaders in newly settled areas were found to "derive their income from off-farm wages," compared with farmers in more settled areas who earned most of their income from "the farms on which they live." C. A. Dawson and R. W. Murchie The Settlement of the Peace River Country: A Study of a Pioneer Area Toronto: Macmillan 1934 pp 112-3; C. A. Dawson and Eva Younge Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces: The Social Side of the Settlement Process Toronto: Macmillan 1940 p 138

In the Swan River Valley district, for instance, the average age at which present farm owners had begun working full time was fourteen years, yet the average age upon which they achieved ownership ranged from 29 years for those who had skipped both the farm labour and tenancy rung, to 32 years for those who had skipped the tenancy rung and only spent time working as agricultural labourers, to 33 years for those who had skipped the farm labour rung and only been tenants, and up to 36 years for those who had climbed the classic ladder. In the Riding Mountain Fringe, it had taken farm owners an average of eighteen years to scale the agricultural ladder.[38]

Men who came to the prairie west to begin farming were impatient, reluctant to wait the years that a climb up the vaunted agricultural ladder might take. Percy Maxwell enjoyed his job as a hired hand, but twelve months was enough for him. "It is quite time I struck out for myself," he declared, "instead of spending the best years of my life working for somebody else."[39] This eagerness was underscored by the rush of settlement. Men had only to look around to see how quickly the land was being taken up. They could not afford to wait. On the other hand, if they were short of cash or lacked farming skills, they were well-advised to spend some time acquiring both. This delay met the needs of both labour and capital. Farm workers needed cash and experience. Farmers needed cheap experienced labour. They reached a compromise. During the settlement period, farm workers and their employers entered what amounted to an informal arrangement that can best be described as an apprenticeship.

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[38]. R. W. Murchie Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier pp 156, 242

[39]. Percy Maxwell to Eveline and Stanley 4/4/1904 in Percy Augustus Maxwell Letters home during his years as a homesteader in the developing period of Canada's West Printed for Private Circulation 1967 p 65

The system of agricultural apprenticeship was not a true apprenticeship, in which a master and a student enter a legal contract, the one to teach and the other to serve in the acquisition and performance of a craft.[40] In prairie agriculture, there was no formal contractual agreement explicitly defining rights and obligations. There was no fixed term, and there was no recognized determination of skill acquisition. The only legal parallel was in the provincial Masters and Servants Acts which governed relations between hired hands and their employers. In Manitoba it also explicitly applied to apprentices.[41]

But the arrangement did embody many classical features. Men who engaged in farm labour expected to acquire the wherewithal to enter the rank of master themselves. Primary among their concerns was education in the craft of farming. The method of obtaining the necessary agricultural skills and know-how served both master and pupil, for it was a combination of instruction and practice.[42] The next important prerequisite to farming was capital, and this, too, reflected the usual arrangements between a master and pupil. Wages for farm work were notoriously low, and during winter months often consisted only of room and board, a situation that was common in apprenticeships. But it was in the third requisite in which the apprenticeship relationship was most apparent. The men who engaged in farm labour and the men who hired them fully expected that one day the relationship would end, and that the pupil would join the rank of the master. The social relations they shared were thus determined not only by their productive relations but by their anticipated equality of social and economic position. This social relationship did much to mediate the inconsistencies in the arrangement and the variations that men discovered in the conditions of their labour.

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[40]. On apprenticeship see Charles More Skill and the English Working Class, 1870-1914 London: Croom Helm 1980 pp 41-45; Olive J. Dunlop English Apprenticeship and Child Labour: A History London: T.F. Unwin 1912; Kate Liepmann Apprenticeship: an enquiry into its adequacy under modern conditions London: Routledge and Kegan Paul 1960

[41]. "Labour Laws of Manitoba" The Masters and Servants Act, Chapter 124 with amendments, in Canada Department of Labour Labour Legislation Existing in Canada in 1920 Ottawa: King's Printer 1921 pp 471-3

Studies of working-class culture demonstrate how a strong social community with proletarian values can nurture proletarian behaviour and develop an institutional framework to provide the support for collective action.[43] Prairie farm workers enjoyed no such community support. Villages of farm workers were not successfully established in the prairie west, despite various suggestions and even attempts by colonization and land settlement companies to establish them. Simple logistics were part of the reason, and as a result, farm workers for the most part lived on the farms of their employers, precluding any community network of support. More important were the ambitions of farm workers to move quickly beyond the stage of waged labour. As apprentice farmers, they sought to establish links with the class to which they aspired rather than with the class to which they belonged, and they subscribed to an ideology and culture that represented their aspirations rather than their realities.[44]

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[42]. Harry Braverman reckoned that apprenticeship for farming extends well beyond the three to seven years required for traditional crafts, covering "most of childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood. Harry Braverman Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century New York and London: Monthly Review Press 1974 p 109. Contemporary observers and immigration and settlement agents were more sanguine, seldom suggesting more than a year or two.

The dominant culture in the prairie west was that of capital rather than labour, and it derived, in the rural setting at least, from the economic importance accorded to agriculture.[45] There was "no one universal prairie culture," as John Herd Thompson and Ian MacPherson have pointed out, precluded by differences in "ethnicity, religion, time of settlement, varied agricultural practices, and the differing economic opportunities offered by local environments."[46] Nonetheless the values and institutions that emerged from and directed rural society were those that reflected the economic base and social attitudes of the dominant agrarian group, the farmers.[47] And as prospective farmers themselves, hired hands occupied a special niche. Within the social structure of the farming community their position was one of apparent equality.[48]

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[43] E. P. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class (1963) New York: Penguin Books 1982; Herbert Gutman, ed. Work, Culture and Society in Industrializing America, 1815-1919: Essays in American Working-Class and Social History New York: Alfred Knopf 1976; Greg Kealey Toronto Workers Respond to Industrial Capitalism, 1867-1892 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1980; Bryan Palmer A Culture in Conflict: Skilled Workers and Industrial Capitalism in Hamilton, Ontario, 1860-1914 Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press 1979. For an attack on that position and the methodology, see David J. Bercuson "Through the Looking Glass of Culture: An Essay on the New Labour History and Working-Class Culture in Recent Canadian Historical Writing" Labour/Le Travailleur 7 Spring 1981

[44] I am using "ideology" as "the set of ideas which arise from a given set of material interests" Raymond Williams Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society New York: Oxford University Press 1976 p 129, but see also the refinement of my use of the term in Chapter 5, note 180. "Culture" I use in the Thompsonian sense, see note below.

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[45]. I am using "culture" in the Thompsonian sense, to include such broad categories as "traditions, value-systems, ideas and institutional forms." E. P. Thompson The Making of the English Working Class p 9. The term "dominant culture" is more restricted. I am deliberately avoiding the use of the term hegemonic because culture is an arena of continuing class struggle rather than a process by which one culture imposes its own ends and its own vision on another, thus reducing the other culture to a kind of corporate culture which, although it may seek to improve its position within the social order (which has been determined beyond its control), is essentially self-defensive. I see proletarian culture as just as purposive as bourgeois culture in its endeavour to perform a transformative role in society, even though the former is certainly less successful than the latter. Nonetheless, I use the term "dominant" to refer to the culture that has achieved preeminence over another. What I am stressing is the adaptability of culture, and the fact that it is in flux.

[46]. John Herd Thompson and Ian MacPherson "How you Gonna Get 'em Back to the Farm?: Writing the Rural/Agricultural History of the Prairie West" unpublished paper presented to the Western Canadian Studies Conference, Saskatoon 1987 p 11

[47]. See for example, pioneer Wilfrid Eggleston, who observed that "we were a diverse peoples but shared a common challenge." Nonetheless, when his father moved from farm labourer to farm owner, the status of the family shifted to "in some respects even leaders in the community activity." Wilfred Eggleston "The Old Homestead: Romance and Reality"

The location of farm workers within the dominant culture obviated their need to develop ties with the working class, even in a cultural sense, and indeed militated against it since their very status was contingent upon their participation in the activities and institutions of the dominant culture. The wage labour aspects of their lives were downplayed. Farm hands did not seek to establish ties with the working class. They felt no need to establish such links in the present, nor did they anticipate the usefulness of such links in the future. Ties with labour would have been inappropriate. In the labour-capital equation, the rightful place of farm workers was on the side of capital. Hired hand Fred Wright demonstrated how he sided with

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Howard Palmer, ed. The Settlement of the West Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1977 pp 120, 121. See also Jean Burnet Next-Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1951 p 21

[48]. Abundant examples are provided in local histories and pioneer reminiscences such as A. Bert Reynolds 'Siding 16': An Early History of Wetaskiwin to 1930 Wetaskiwin, Alberta: R.C.M.P. Centennial Committee 1975 p 220; Weyburn R.M. 67 History Book Committee As Far as the Eye Can See: Weyburn R.M. 67 Weyburn: History Book Committee 1986; Stone Diggers Historical Society Prairie Wool: A History of Climax and Surrounding School Districts Manitoba: Stone Diggers Historical Society 1980; Rev. George Henry Hambley, publ. The Golden Thread of the Last of the Pioneers: A Story of the District of Basswood and Minnedosa, Manitoba from Community Beginning to Our Present Day, 1874-1970 Manitoba: Hambley 1971; George Shepherd West of Yesterday John Archer, ed. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1965 p 19; James M. Minifie Homesteader: A Prairie Boyhood Recalled Toronto: Macmillan 1972

capital, rendering a harsh judgement on a group of harvesters who had been holding out for higher wages. "They had no idea of working," he observed. "They were called Industrial Workers of the World and we also called them 'I Won't Work' and they didn't. They were a hard bunch to deal with."[49] It was a circular process: once situated within the dominant class, farm workers were absorbed into its culture and in turn absorbed its values and outlook.

The cultural structures that gave shape and continuity to the farm workers' lives were thus determined by the farming community and reflected the interests and direction of the leaders within that community, the farmers. While working as hired hands, George Shepherd and his father found themselves drawn into "the spirit of the frontier ... as we became more conscious of farmers' problems and the farmers' point of view."[50] The associational network to which farm workers belonged was centred in the rural community. The names of farm workers can be found on the membership lists of local agricultural societies, whose direction was always firmly under the control of the farmers.[51] Other types of organizations were as diverse as debating societies and hunting clubs.[52] Such organizations were not antipathetic to agricultural labourers, but neither did they provide an environment in which farm workers could identify a shared outlook or develop their own cohesion, since membership was open to all members of the farming community.

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[49]. GAI M 1345/A.W949 Frederick John Wright Interview February 1971

[50]. Shepherd West of Yesterday p 23

[51]. See for example SAB B89 Agricultural Societies 1912-1933; PAA 73.316 Agricultural Societies 1912-1933, esp. 4/26a,b Hays Agricultural Society, 27a High Prairie Agricultural Society, 30a Lacombe Agricultural Society, 53a Rocky Mountain House Agricultural Society; 58a Stettler Agricultural Society; PAA 73.167 Jens Skinberg Interview 31/1/1973

Indeed, the self-conscious if superficial democracy of pioneering society decreed a social structure that was not stratified upon class lines.[53] Historians have grappled with the question of class structure in the prairie west, acknowledging social hierarchies based at least in part on economic status, but disagreeing on the importance of such stratification.[54] Distinctions were as likely to be based upon ethnicity as upon occupation or financial standing, especially since most of the early homesteaders began farming in an undercapitalized state and were heavily dependent upon wage labour themselves.[55] Consequently, the hired hand became firmly entrenched within the dominant social structure of the farming community. The ease of his social acceptance is reflected in pioneers' reminiscences. Farmers and other members of the agricultural community have asserted that the hired hand was treated as one of the family and welcomed into the farm society, participating fully in sports events, entertainments and recreational and religious activities.[56] Farm workers did not develop a culture of their own. The poem written by hired hand Frank Timmath of Lavoy, Alberta, sums up the contradiction. Timmath acknowledged the contract between labour and capital as well as the shared animosity to the farmers' common foe:

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[52]. See for example PAA 66.119 Norman Nelson Papers, diary of Wm. Sutton, hired hand; GAI A .5874/1 John Stokoe Papers; PAA 73.167 Jens Skinberg Interview 31/1/1973

[53]. See for example, SAB X2 Pioneer Questionnaires. Beginning in the winter of 1950-51, the Saskatchewan Archives Board distributed a series of questionnaires dealing with pioneer life to early settlers. The number of responses varied with each questionnaire from approximately 300 for #8 Health to approximately 900 for #2 General. Several articles in Saskatchewan History provide information gleaned from the questionnaires, such as Kathleen M. Taggart "The First Shelter of Early Pioneers" XI:3 Autumn 1958; Catherine Tulloch "Pioneering Reading" XII:3 Autumn 1959; Christine MacDonald "Pioneer Church Life in Saskatchewan" XIII:1 Winter 1960; E.C. Morgan "Pioneer Recreation and Social Life" XVII:2 Spring 1965

[54]. For a contrast of the positions, see the work on W.R. Motherwell: Sarah Carter "Material Culture and the W.R. Motherwell Home" Prairie Forum 8:1 1983; Allan R. Turner "W.R. Motherwell: The Emergence of a Farm Leader" Saskatchewan History 11:3 Autumn 1958; Lyle Dick Farmers 'Making Good'. Compare with Paul Voisey Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988 Part IV "Society" pp 201-46

> Now John, I ask this much of thee.
> I've tried to serve you faithfully.
> If I should die here, from home afar,
> Don't ship my remains on the C.N.R.[57]

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[55]. D. McGinnis "Farm Labour in Transition: Occupational Structure and Economic Dependency in Alberta, 1921-1951" Howard Palmer, ed. The Settlement of the West Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1977 p 177

[56]. See for example SAB X2 Pioneer Questionnaires #5 Recreation and Social Life and #7 Folklore; local histories such as Barons History Book Club Wheat Heart of the West Barons, Alberta: Barons History Book Club 1972; La Riviere Historical Book Society (Lois Creith, convenor) Turning Leaves: A History of La Riviere and District La Riviere, Manitoba: The Society 1979; and pioneer reminiscences such as GAI D920.C554/1 Otto D. Christensen Papers; SAB RE 191 Geoffrey Yonge Papers; Helen D. Howe Seventy-Five Years Along the Red Deer River Calgary: D.W. Friesen and Sons; Shepherd West of Yesterday p 19

[57]. Cited in John H. Blackburn Land of Promise ed. and intro. by John Archer Toronto: Macmillan 1970 p 80

A measure of farm workers' acceptance into the dominant culture is seen in a closer examination of one of the most important cultural institutions in prairie agriculture -- marriage. Its economic and social significance illustrates the intersection of themes affecting the position of farm workers. Recent studies on the construction of gender have plotted the complex relationship between gender and class.[58] In the case of prairie farm workers the correlation is particularly clear. Masculinity was an important component in the package that mediated labour-capital relations. The physical traits of manliness were affirmations of self-worth in a society that valued hard work and offered little financial reward. But masculinity in the society and culture of the prairie west had another dimension. Most prairie farm workers were bachelors.

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[58]. See for example Cynthia Cockburn Brothers: Male Dominance and Technological Change London: Pluto Press 1983; Paul Willis "Shop Floor Culture, Masculinity and the Wage Form" John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson, eds. Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory London: St. Martin's Press 1979; Ava Baron "Technology and the Crisis of Masculinity: The Social Construction of Gender and Skill in the US Printing Industry, 1850-1920" Paper presented at the 5th UMITS-ASTON Conference on the Organization and Control of the labour Process, Manchester, England, April 22-24, 1987; Michael Yarrow "Class and Gender in the Developing Consciousness of Appalachian Coal Miners" 5th UMITS-ASTON Conference April 1987; Stan Gray "Sharing the Shop Floor" Canadian Dimension 18:2 June 1984; Joy Parr The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1990; Mark Rosenfeld "'It Was A Hard Life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920-1950s" Historical Papers/Communications historiques Windsor 1988; Steven Maynard "Rough Work and Rugged Men: The Social Construction of Masculinity in Working-Class History" Labour/Le Travail 23 Spring 1989

The agricultural community in the prairie west had been designed and was defined, both economically and socially, as a family-oriented community, based on small-scale units of production -- family farms.[59] The economy provided the infrastructure for the society.[60] Small units of production that could be handled by a family, and could provide it with an adequate, if modest, living, ensured that the society that was to be produced in the prairie west would be agrarian and family-oriented. The advantages of a family-oriented society were obvious. The economic contribution of a family was proportionally much greater than their mere numbers, since the costs of their labour and provisions were hidden in their production. There were political and social benefits as well. Individual farm ownership meant conservative values, and the predominance of families ensured the entrenchment of institutions and fostered social stability.[61] Westerners embraced the vision of the family farm as the "ideal social unit."[62]

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[59]. The Last Best West and other immigration pamphlets; Doug Owram Promise of Eden: The Canadian Expansionist Movement and the Idea of the West, 1856-1900 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1980; Doug Francis Images of the West: Responses to the Canadian Prairies Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books 1989; Max Hedley "Domestic Commodity Production: Small Farmers in Alberta" David H. Turner and Gavin A. Smith, eds. Challenging Anthropology: A Critical Introduction to Social and Critical Anthropology Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson 1979; Saskatchewan Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life Report 3 "Land Tenure" p 119

[60]. Max Hedley "Relations of Production of the 'Family Farm': Canadian Prairies" Journal of Peasant Studies 9:1 October 1981; Harriet Friedmann "World Market, State, and Family Farm: Social Bases of Household Production in the Era of Wage Labor" Comparative Studies in Sociology and History v.20 1978

Yet despite the clear orientation toward families, there was a well-defined niche for bachelors. The term "bachelor" had a particular connotation in the prairie west. Its basic designation, of course, was an unmarried man. But it also referred to married men who were temporarily without their wives. Elizabeth Mitchell, a careful observer of western Canada before the First World War, gave the following definition:

> 'Bachelor' has the technical meaning of a man living by himself or with other men, with no woman in the house. A widower or grass-widower 'batches', an unmarried man with a sister or housekeeper does not.[63]

Married men often found themselves in this condition. When Wilfred Eggleston's family decided to begin farming in 1909, his mother and the three children stayed in Nanton, Alberta, for the school, while his father took up a homestead. Young Wilfred observed that the family looked forward to their reunion, but "In the meantime my father would have to rough it and 'batch it' on his own."[64] The term "to batch" entered the prairie lexicon with ease, indicating the social acceptability of men without women. In some ways this is a little surprising, since both the social and economic progress of men on their own lagged far behind those of men who had their wives and families at hand. Bachelors were perceived to live in squalor and loneliness. Their homes were "wretched establishments", even by rough pioneering standards.[65] Bachelor shacks were makeshift and cramped, thrown up quickly to provide little more than the barest shelter while the men fulfilled homestead duties. They were unpainted, small, and had no amenities.[66] Prairie bachelors bemoaned their condition. Young Edward ffolkes [sic] described the hardships of single life. "The bachelor lives on pork and bannocks, [sic] as a rule;" he wrote to his mother, "never sweeps his house out, or very seldom; generally hoes the floor once a month."[67]

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[61]. Owram Promise of Eden p 137

[62]. Francis Images of the West p 233

[63]. Elizabeth B. Mitchell In Western Canada Before the War: Impressions of Early Twentieth Century Prairie Communities Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books 1981 (1915) p 150n

[64]. Eggleston "The Old Homestead" p 117

The economic progress of bachelor farmers was usually much slower than that of their married counterparts. Batching on the prairies was "the most expensive way" to keep house, explained ffolkes, "because [the bachelor] has no time to make bread often, or even butter, in summer, or puddings, or soups with vegetables, which saves the meat --

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[65] Mrs. George [Marian] Cran A Woman in Canada Toronto: Musson c1908

[66] Burnet Next-Year Country p 21

[67] Edward ffolkes to Mother 15/12/1881 in Letters from a young emigrant in Manitoba ed. and intro. by Ronald Wells Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press 1981 p 100. For a brief biography of ffolkes, see Patrick A. Dunae Gentlemen Emigrants: From the British Public Schools to the Canadian Frontier Vancouver/Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre 1981 pp 82-4

and meat is expensive."[68] The Nor'-West Farmer was only one of many voices to counsel the acquisition of a wife as a necessary condition to economic success. In reply to a bachelor's plan to begin raising livestock, it warned:

> one man on a farm can hardly make a success in mixed farming. Better look out for a female partner, if you can arrange to that effect, and plan at the same time for heifers to come in at between two and three years.[69]

Isolation increased the hardship. The "prairie madness"[70] that afflicted women, took its toll on bachelors, too. In an item on the mental illness of a local homesteader, the Hanna Herald observed the general self-neglect that resulted from a solitary existence on an isolated farm. "Many a lonely homesteader puts in his hard day's toil and retires at night on a meal quickly made by his own hands and scant." The problem could be apathy or exhaustion: "after working in the field he has not the inclination to go to the trouble of preparing a better" meal.[71] Bachelor homesteader Ebe Koeppen from Germany had first-hand experience of the toll of isolated living. He recorded in his diary that he had reached a "very sad point." Life without a wife was "slow suicide. Slow spiritual death." He confined his observations to his diary, explaining "I do not write home about these things" because the "staggering drearyness [sic] of such existence is too difficult to make understandable."[72]

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[68] ffolkes to Mother 15/12/1881 in Wells Letters from a young emigrant p 100

[69] "Bachelor Stock Raising" Nor'-West Farmer 6/2/1899 p 94

[70] Mitchell In Western Canada Before the War p 150

[71] Hanna Herald 5/6/1913 cited in Burnet 'Next Year' Country p 19

It was not surprising to find bachelors lamenting their fate, although many tried to make light of it. A popular prairie song entitled "The Alberta Homesteader" described "Dan Gold, an old bach'lor" who was "keeping old batch on an elegant plan." Prairie bachelors could empathize:

> My clothes are all ragged, my language is rough,
> My bread is case-hardened and solid and tough
> My dishes are scattered all over the room
> My floor gets afraid at the sight of a broom.[73]

But these very tangible impediments to economic and social progress did not cause bachelors to be shunned. Quite the contrary. Bachelors were viewed with tolerance, with concern, with benevolence and often with bemused affection. Westerners, particularly women, felt a certain responsibility toward them. Part of women's duty in the west was "being kind to poor bachelors round about who need kindness badly."[74] Bachelors were more to be pitied than scorned, and the sorrier their existence, the greater the solicitude.

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[72]. Ebe Koeppen, diary, reprinted in Rolf Knight Stump Ranch Chronicles and Other Narratives Vancouver: New Star Books 1977 pp 120, 121, 129

[73]. Leonora M. Pauls "The English Language Folk and Traditional Songs of Alberta: Collection and Analysis for Teaching Purposes" M.Mus. University of Calgary 1981 p 144

[74]. Mitchell In Western Canada Before the War p 47

The men developed strategies for dealing with their unhappy position, and the local community willingly met their needs. Recalling their first winter on their homesteads, Ebe Koeppen and his homesteading partner Hans admitted "we damn near lived on rolled oats and corn syrup." But they soon became acquainted with the nearest family who were "lovely people. The wife would bake bread for us once a week and we would work it off."[75] This kind of response was common, and clearly demonstrated that there was a special niche reserved for men without women. "I used to feel so sorry for those boys" recalled one pioneer: "They were so pitiful. My mother, she worried over them and she babied them and they came to her with all their troubles."[76]

Aside from compassion, there were other more practical reasons for welcoming bachelors into the family-oriented community. Despite the slowness of their progress, they did make tangible economic and social contributions. A simple shortage of population meant that all settlers were eagerly included in all economic and social functions. Welcomed at barn-raising bees and on harvest crews, at dances and at ball-games, prairie bachelors pulled their weight in the developing agrarian community. In 1885, the Qu'Appelle Vidette reported a dance hosted by "the bachelors of the northern part of this municipality," for a crowd of about forty. An "excellent repast" began at six, and dancing went on "until daylight warned the delighted but wearied party that it was time to homeward wend." The bachelors had done themselves proud, and earned the admiration of the community. The Vidette summed it up with the observation that "it is doubtful if anything better could be turned out anywhere in the Northwest, outside of Winnipeg."[77]

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[75]. Koeppen in Knight Stump Ranch Chronicles p 58

[76]. Cited in Barry Broadfoot The Pioneer Years, 1895-1914: Memories of Settlers Who Opened the West Toronto: Doubleday 1976 p 138

They could also be easily forgiven for their bachelorhood, since not only was the prairie population still very small, it was also badly skewed in its male-to-female ratio.[78] Pioneer David Maginnes of Balwinton recalled a dance with only three women to thirty men: "We danced until the women got tired."[79] C. A. Dawson and Eva Younge's close examination of ten survey areas shows that the newly pioneered areas of Turtleford, Saskatchewan, and Peace River, Alberta, had a rural male:female ratio as high as 202:100 during the first decade of settlement. In older, stable settlements such as Red River, Manitoba, the ratio was 121:100 even at the beginning of the century.[80]

But the major reason bachelors found such a ready acceptance in the family-oriented community was because their condition, like many other pioneer hardships, was perceived as temporary. Felix Troughton, who had been a young bachelor on the prairies during the early pioneer period, entitled his memoir A Bachelor's Paradise, but his description tells another story. He drew upon an unnamed western farm journal to paint a gloomy picture of the prairie bachelor's existence:

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[77]. Qu'Appelle Vidette 14/1885 p 3

[78]. In 1911, adult males (21 years and over) outnumbered females by 137.7 to 100 in Manitoba, by 181.2 to 100 in Saskatchewan, and by 184.3 to 100 in Alberta. Census of Canada, 1921 Vol II Table 26 p 124

[79]. SAB X2 Pioneer Questionnaires #5 Recreation and Social Life David H. Maginnes

[80]. Dawson and Younge Pioneering in the Prairie Provinces p 310

> The young man rises in the morning, leaves unmade the bed that has not perhaps been made for weeks, he then feeds his oxen, and in the unswept and dusty house prepares a hasty and ill-cooked breakfast, which is eaten from off unwashed dishes. The bread is generally sour, hard or dry, the butter salty and rancid, the coffee worthless, the meat burned on one side and raw on the other. The breakfast table is left covered by dirty dishes and slops, and a million flies gather to feed in undisturbed peacefulness. The unrefreshed bachelor goes to his work lonely, miserable and dyspeptic. At noon he unyokes his oxen and turns them loose to feed, then goes to his shack and makes a hot fire in order to get his dinner. Heated by hard work under a blazing sun, a good wash, a cool room, and a well-cooked meal is what he requires, and what he cannot have. At supper, it is the same thing over again. His underclothes, seldom washed, become clogged with perspiration, and his bedclothes are in the same unhealthy condition.[81]

It was not only his person that suffered, but his farm as well:

> When he is away at work, the hawks soar around the forsaken house and catch the chickens in the yard; the pigs get into the garden, if he has one, and the calves get out of the enclosure and suck the cows. Sometimes the house is burned down from a spark that may drop from the neglected stove. When the bachelor has to go to town for supplies, mail, etc., cattle get into his grain fields, or

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[81]. Felix Troughton A Bachelor's Paradise or Life on the Canadian Prairie 45 years ago London: Arthur A. Stockwell c1930 p 5

> pull down his stacks, and there is no one to let the dog loose, so the marauders riot at will undisturbed.[82]

Where was Troughton's paradise? Like so many other prairie promises, it was in the future. It was free land, and the promise of economic independence, for the "average plucky, physically fit, and red-blooded young man." But in order to achieve this independence, the "Bachelor Farmer," of whom there was "no more amiable, industrious ... and persevering" person, must first of all bring his bachelorhood to a close:

> What the bachelor requires in his home is a broad-shouldered, stirring wife, who will keep the house in order, as well as the husband who owns it, and who will see that clothing and bedding are made clean, and are kept so; who will serve a well-cooked meal with fresh, sweet bread of her own making; who will see that groceries are good, and that proper value has been received for money expended; who will wash and mend her husband's clothing, and will remove the shingle nails that have been used as substitutes for buttons; one who will look after the hens' nests, see that the dairy is kept in order, and who will place the Bible on the table when the day's work is done.[83]

Then would happiness and success be assured:

> The dejected and forlorn bachelor will then be transformed into one of the lords of creation. His bearing will be erect, his eyes clear, and his purse full, his garden will have flowers, and his shirt will have buttons. Instead of dead flies, stale crumbs, and grease spots, there will be a clean cloth on the table, and strawberries and cream in season.[84]

The status of bachelor may have been regarded as a disability, but it was not a handicap, since it was not permanent. This temporariness was implicit in the designation. Married men who were batching were doing so only until they could send for their wives and families. Single men were bachelors only until they could provide for a family, or until the shortage of women in the west could be redressed. There were few "confirmed" bachelors on the pioneer prairies, most unmarried men were "eligible" bachelors. And given the rate at which "every girl is pounced on directly she puts her face inside the settlement,"[85] it seems that the eligible bachelors were eager to end this temporary condition. "Us bachelors were all desperate," recalled Ebe Koeppen, "you can use the word 'desperate' quite properly here -- we were desperate to get a wife one way or the other."[86]

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[82]. Ibid. pp 5-6

[83]. Ibid. pp 4, 6

[84]. Ibid. p 6

Just as bachelorhood was temporary, so was the family-oriented economy and society of the west a design that had not yet been realized. The reality of the pioneer years was that the population was overwhelmingly male. "Canada is a man's country," declared the Department of the Interior in 1906, recognizing "that all new countries first attract men, because the labour required for early settlement calls for that of man rather than that of woman."[87] The idea of settlement was so strongly linked to masculine endeavour that the term 'bachelor homesteader' came into widespread use.

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[85]. ffolkes to Mother 15/12/1881 in Wells Letters from a young emigrant p 100

[86]. Koeppen in Knight Stump Ranch Chronicles p 66

[87]. Canada Department of the Interior Twentieth Century Canada 1906. But for much evidence to the contrary, see accounts of pioneer women such as Georgina Binnie-Clark Wheat and Woman (1914) intro. by Susan Jackel Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1979; Cran A

It was a positive designation, embodying many of the attributes that were needed on a frontier. Such men elicited admiration. Kathleen Strange, writing from the perspective of a 'modern' pioneer, described the common view:

> The first bachelor homesteaders had come out, most of them, with nothing more substantial than courage and optimism with which to battle against the harsh elements of a new country and a new life.[88]

In the crucible of this new country and new life an identity of bachelorhood was forged, an amalgam of the idealized attributes of bachelor homesteaders. It provided an identity for the men who made up the group, and it was incorporated into a broader prairie pioneering ideology. This fusion enabled bachelorhood to receive a very positive assessment, and gave the identity additional legitimacy and strength.

Bachelorhood was male, which meant that any attributes ascribed to it would automatically be considered masculine characteristics. At the same time, it would mean that traditional qualities of manliness would be incorporated.

Woman in Canada; Susan Jackel, ed. A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914 Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1982

[88]. Kathleen Strange With the West in Her Eyes: The Story of a Modern Pioneer Toronto: George J. McLeod 1937 vii

But gender identities are fraught with contradictions, and manliness in one context is not necessarily manliness in another.

So, although bachelorhood certainly was a masculine identity, it was a particular type of masculinity, one that served the needs of young men, generally of limited means, who were engaged in small-scale pioneer agriculture on a relatively womanless frontier. Each of these elements was incorporated into the identity of the pioneer bachelor, which thus resonated with the ideals of the dominant culture.

Much of the definition had to do with physical prowess. Agriculture was a physically demanding occupation - it required strength, stamina, and physical dexterity. These characteristics had a long tradition as affirmations of masculine identity, and were readily accepted as such. "Work is recreation," declared the Canadian Power Farmer. "Work! which beads the brow and tans the flesh of lusty manhood, casting out its devils!"[89] The needs of agriculture were thus well-served by incorporating these characteristics into the identity of bachelorhood.

On the prairies, it was small-scale agriculture that was being practised, with individual farmers working individual farms, making decisions and carrying out an endless round of tasks on their own. As a result, individualism was an important component of the identity.

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[89]. Canadian Power Farmer April 1920

But the extreme of individualism -- competitiveness, which is a frequent component of masculine identity -- was less important in the bachelor identity, since it did not serve the needs of an agricultural community struggling to establish itself. Cooperation rather than competition was necessary for survival in the early years.

Pioneering called for a spirit of adventure, for courage and resourcefulness, the desire to leave behind an old life and to embark upon a new one, to call upon fortitude in the face of adversity, a will to succeed, adaptability, and a willingness to subordinate present gratifications for future possibilities. Taking pride in craftsmanship, and deriving satisfaction from a job well done, commonly expressed characteristics of masculine identity, took on added importance to pioneers who often saw little financial reward for their hard work.

Homesteading, too, helped shape the bachelor identity. It required thrift. The low filing fee meant that men with limited resources could begin farming, but in order to do so they had to be able to husband their financial resources, demonstrate ingenuity and resourcefulness in enlarging them, and be willing to endure hardships in the present in the expectation of comfort in the future. There had to be an acceptance, too, of an aggressive democracy which decreed that to be cash-poor was not dishonourable. The Nor'-West Farmer summed up the attitude towards farming on the frontier, quoting "one of the social teachers of the century," John Ruskin: "'There is no degradation in the hardest manual or the humblest servile, labor, when it is honest'."[90]

Some parts of the identity were derived in contradistinction to the identity of other groups. Bachelor manhood was measured in its dissimilarity from womanhood, and also in its dissimilarity from childhood, but these measurements were not derived in an antagonistic way. Women and children both served an important and highly visible economic role in prairie agriculture. Except under exceptional circumstances, their roles were complementary, rather than competitive, to those of men, so they seldom posed a threat to adult male occupations.[91] Although bachelorhood was the antithesis of femininity and immaturity, the maleness and the maturity of bachelors were neither defensive nor aggressive traits.[92]

Rather than concentrating on their physical superiority, bachelors defined their contrast to women in their lack of such social niceties as an ability to take care of themselves, to cook, to sew, to keep clean, to converse politely, and to demonstrate other features of a gentle civilization. Their contrast to children was defined by steadiness both in physical work and in life commitments, maturity of judgement, and wisdom from experience. All were necessary qualities in agriculture.

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[90]. "Ruskin on Labor" Nor'-West Farmer 6/2/1899 p 100

[91]. Compare with, for example, the response by male typographical workers to the threatened encroachment into their trade by female workers. Cockburn Brothers

[92]. For a discussion of the muting of gender antagonisms through mutually supportive gender-distinguished work roles, see Ella Johansson "Beautiful Men, Fine Women and Good Work People: Gender and Skill in Northern Sweden, 1850-1950 Gender and History 1:2 Summer 1989

By and large, bachelor homesteaders found their identity within the dominant ideology. They were expected to live a wholesome frugal life in anticipation of the time they would leave the bachelor state to become full-fledged members of the family-oriented agrarian community. Likewise, their actual economic position mattered less in the social network of the agrarian community than did their preparation for full economic membership within it.

It was the apprenticeship system that equipped farm workers to move toward full membership. It provided not only acceptance into the agricultural community, but also the other necessary tools for successful farming: skills and capital. Men who undertook farm labour as an apprenticeship shaped their work strategies to meet their own exigencies, striving to achieve a balance between what they were required to give to the system and what they needed from it. Farming skills were the most important, because without them no amount of capital could make a man a successful farmer. On the other hand, men needed some capital to make a start. Those who entered the apprenticeship system found this the weakest part of the arrangement.

The glowing reports of immigration and settlement propaganda had assured them that a short stint at agricultural labour would provide them enough capital to make a good farming start. Hard-working and thrifty men could expect to begin farming on their own within a few years of their arrival. A comparison of a yearly farm wage with the costs of homesteading reveals that throughout the pioneering and settlement period this was at least statistically possible. In the 1880s, immigrants had been told that three hundred dollars was the minimum required to provide the barest necessities on a homestead, and that five hundred would provide a good start. A summer agricultural job that included room and board could pay from twenty-five to forty dollars, with an average of about thirty dollars. At that rate, if a farm hand found extra work at harvest and room and board over the winter, and managed to save every penny, he could raise the requisite amount in two or three years.

But capital accumulation involves not just earning the money, but being able to hold on to it. The rosy translation of farm wages into homesteading costs fails to account for the expenses that even a frugal hired hand had to meet. On prairie farms, the usual method of payment was to withhold wages until the end of the term of employment, with advances for tobacco, clothing or an occasional night out. For farm workers who were intent on saving every dollar, this method of enforced savings could be useful. But even though they received room and board, farm workers faced unavoidable expenses that ate into their accumulated wages, lengthening the time, if not the amount, they needed to save.

Wages and homestead costs did not increase noticeably before the turn of the century. At that time, homesteading costs still represented about three years' farm wages, and the Labour Gazette blamed the shortage of farm labour on "the disposition of the farm labouring class ... to become homesteaders." It found that such a course of action "was quite possible for a man after working for another for from three to five years."[93] But as the west began to fill up, costs to begin homesteading rose. By 1910, the recommended figure had tripled to fifteen hundred dollars. Farm wages had risen, too, but at a much slower rate. At the annual farm wage rate of about two hundred and twenty-five dollars a year,[94] homesteading costs represented six years of steady work. The war years appeared on the surface to present an ideal opportunity for farm workers to make the transition to ownership, as wages doubled and tripled from their pre-war rates. But by this time, much of the good homesteading land had been taken, and costs of purchased land reflected wartime inflation. Still, men were encouraged to undertake farm labour as a vehicle to ownership.

But it was not always necessary for men to save the entire cost of setting up before they could begin farming. The homestead made this possible. In searching for an explanation of labour shortages in the North-West Territories, the Labour Gazette found that a "very potent factor ... is the disposition of energetic men to homestead for themselves". They were not willing to continue as waged labourers when the opportunity to be farm owners was at hand, even if this did not remove them from the necessity of waged farm work. Rather, they found it "profitable to work out for at least part of the busy season in order to place themselves in a better position as settlers on their own account."[95] As Fred Pringle had discovered, ownership did not mean the end of waged labour.

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[93]. Labour Gazette 1901 p 560

[94]. See Table II-5A Annual Farm Workers' Wages

There is sufficient evidence to suggest that immigration promises were not just good prairie salesmanship. Although it was never easy, an experienced and frugal hired hand who was able to secure steady employment, could, as the settlement literature promised, save enough to make a fair start on farming, but only as long as free land was still available. Homesteading could be carried on with a minimum cash outlay, if frugality and sacrifice were accepted as part of the bargain. Current research supports this observation, although there is qualified disagreement about the speed with which farm labour could bankroll a homesteading venture. Lyle Dick argues that prior to the First World War, "a hired man usually earned enough to start farming on free grant land with a year's accumulated wages."[96] Dick's view is too optimistic. Calculations on paper support the notion that a year's wages could provide homesteading expenses, but this was only possible if men found steady work and had absolutely no expenses. More commonly, men needed the wages of at least two or three years, and usually more, to make a fair start, even when they planned to continue working out in order to underwrite their farms.

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[95]. Labour Gazette June 1901 p 561

[96]. Dick Farmers 'Making Good' p 66

Murchie's examination of the agricultural ladder is of limited use in resolving this question, since it does not distinguish the date at which men took up farming, even though it does show that their stint at waged farm labour was lengthy. The SAB Pioneer Questionnaires dealing with farm establishment at least corroborates that the route to ownership through farm labour was both possible and easier while homestead lands were still available. Farmers were asked whether they had worked as agricultural labourers in Canada before becoming farmers themselves. Of the 178 who responded to this question and who had come to Saskatchewan between 1890 and 1914, 40 answered yes. For this group, twenty-two percent took this route to farm ownership. But as homestead lands were taken, there was a decline in the number of settlers who travelled this route. The surveys document the change. Of the men who arrived in Saskatchewan between 1890 and 1899, twenty percent worked first as agricultural labourers. Arrivals in the 1900 to 1904 period showed a much higher rate of thirty-one percent. Thereafter the rate declined, with twenty-one percent of arrivals in the 1905 to 1909 period and seventeen percent of the 1910-to-1914 arrivals working as farm labourers before becoming farmers.[97]

By the eve of the First World War, prospective homesteaders faced disappointment. In a report on unemployment in 1914, Saskatchewan Premier Walter Scott summed up the experience of immigrants who had been lured to the west:

> Their vision, inspired by immigration literature of a small farmstead, a comfortable home and practical independence in a few years, were indeed quickly dispelled upon their arrival in the West. They then learned that good homesteads were some distance from centres of population, and above all, that it required considerable capital to take up homesteading properly.[98]

A man needed money to start, but no amount of capital would ensure his farming success if he lacked the skills and expertise. Experience was regarded as the best teacher. Immigration pamphlets encouraged newcomers to learn Canadian farming methods at first-hand by seeking work on Canadian farms. Letters home from recent immigrants were full of plans to work out in order to learn the ropes, and letters and diaries detail the process of learning. Many men came with the express intention of working on the farms of others in order to gain experience. "The main reason I took this job", recalled Willem de Gelder, a newcomer from Holland, "was to find out how to make this land as productive as possible."[99] Despite his agricultural background, de Gelder found that he needed to learn specific skills, too, such as the intricacies of the western harness and handling horses on the prairie sod. He was unused to his employer's method but determined to learn. "He works his horses in tandem" remarked de Gelder, "I've never handled horses in this fashion... Well, I'll learn about it from close-up: it will be a little strange at first but I think I'll get used to it."[100]

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[97]. SAB X2 Pioneer Questionnaires #6 Pioneer Farming Experiences, author's calculations

[98]. SAB M1/IV Walter Scott Papers: Labour p 46050 "Unemployment"

Men eager to learn prairie farming methods sometimes faced the prospect of making financial sacrifices in order to do so. Harry Self, immigrating from Liverpool in 1903, at first took work on the Canadian Pacific Railway line for several weeks but left it when he found the opportunity for agricultural labour. Self recounted his encounter at Pense, Saskatchewan: "I met a farmer at lunch time at the hotel who wanted a hand so, as my intention was to do that kind of work, I hired for the summer at $15.00 a month and board." Although he had been raised on a farm in England, he decided to spend three years gaining local experience. He took a cut in pay to do so. At the end of the summer, Self stayed on over the winter for room and board, and in the spring agreed to a full year's engagement at $200.00. As a vehicle for capital accumulation, Self found little success in agricultural labour. The next year found him working for a farmer near Wascana, Saskatchewan, who suffered from ill-health and was unable to do much work. The advantage for Self was that he was put in charge of all the work on the 320 acre farm except driving the binder during harvest, the one job that his boss was able to manage. This entailed hard work beginning every day at 4:45 a.m., but Self was satisfied with the arrangement. What he lost in wages he gained in experience, and by the following spring, he was able to take out a homestead himself, right on his own schedule.[101]

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[99]. Willem de Gelder A Dutch Homesteader on the Prairies: The Letters of Willem de Gelder, 1910-13 trans. and intro. by Herman Ganzevoort Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1973 p 5. For more examples see also Wells Letters from a young emigrant pp 72-7; Shepherd West of Yesterday p 18; GAI A .5874/1 John Stokoe Papers; SAB RE 33 Harry Self Papers "Memories of my First Years in Canada" unpublished ms. 1964

[100]. de Gelder A Dutch Homesteader on the Prairies p 46

Farm workers were very conscious of the benefits of first-hand experience, and they took advantage of the general shortage of labour and the wide variety of farm enterprises to increase their farming knowledge. The example of Gaston Giscard is typical. He came from France with an agricultural background, but knew that conditions on the Canadian prairies were very different. He regarded his farm work primarily as an opportunity to learn and took steps to ensure that he achieved his goal. "After apprenticing for a few weeks", he recalled, "I tell my boss that I intend to leave him. He's sorry that I'm going. He's surprised, too". Giscard's employer attempted to hold on to him by offering a higher wage, but to his consternation, Giscard was working to his own agenda: "I hasten to tell him that that's not my reason for leaving. I just insist on changing bosses to compare the different methods used by each farmer."[102]

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[101]. SAB RE 33 Harry Self Papers "Memories of my First Years in Canada" unpublished ms. 1964 pp 2, 5, 7

Used as an apprenticeship, agricultural labour could enable a farm worker to make the transition to farm owner. It required that men carefully employ strategies to take advantage of the particular conditions of settlement agriculture. It also required hard work, determination, flexibility and a good deal of luck. John Stokoe is a good example of a prairie newcomer who used the apprenticeship procedure to negotiate his way from labour to capital.

Stokoe emigrated from England in the spring of 1903. He had gained some farming experience in England and planned to homestead in the North-West Territories, but first wanted to learn western Canadian farming methods. Looking for work at Stonewall, Manitoba, he impressed a prospective employer with his enthusiasm. The farmer hired him on the spot and gave him a great deal of responsibility right from the start. "I am doing all the work just now", Stokoe proudly wrote in his first letter home. "My work is never supervised." He took the responsibility seriously, telling his family of his long day:

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[102] Gaston Giscard Dans La Prairie Canadienne trans. by Lloyd Person, ed. by George E. Durocher Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center 1982 p 14

> At night after the Boss & his wife have retired I take a lantern & go around the whole place to see that all is secure, & am up first in the morning, without being called, light fire & put on the kettle then go & feed stock, come back & replenish fire & sit down & read till someone comes down to make breakfast.[103]

Stokoe relished the opportunity to adapt his English farming skills to Canadian conditions and methods and was optimistic about his ability to learn. "I guess I won't be long in having a place of my own", he wrote confidently, "at the rate I am going ... I will be able to manage this farm myself in a few weeks time, or any other farm." He ascribed his rapid schooling primarily to the fact that he had been given "complete control of everything since I came." On the day of his arrival, Stokoe's boss left for a two-day shooting expedition. Stokoe also attributed his progress to his eagerness to learn quickly: "A thing is never explained to me," he wrote, "I just go by what I see." He impressed the boss's wife who "reckons she never saw anyone pick up things so quickly" and the boss, who "said I had done everything to a T."[104]

As an entry into the agricultural community, Stokoe found farm work invaluable. By late summer, he had moved to a farm near Wood Bay, and quickly made himself part of the community. "You see, while working on a farm," he explained, "a man can learn something of the country, courage, people & conditions of work." Even more important was the ready acceptance of an obviously ambitious man into the fraternity of farming. He sought the acquaintance of established farmers and eagerly solicited their advice. "Social conditions over here have made it quite easy for me to become intimatley [sic] acquainted with big farmers", he explained. He was welcomed, too, into the agricultural community, helping to form a local literary society, joining the church choir, and attending dances, picnics, and other social occasions. He was proud to be an accepted member of the district, identifying strongly with his new home and his new social relations. As he proudly wrote to his father: "We are a go-ahead people in Wood Bay."[105]

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[103] GAI A .5874/1 John Stokoe Papers, Stokoe to Mother 19/4/1903

[104] *Ibid*. Stokoe to Mother 19/4/1903

Stokoe's apprenticeship was obviously off to a good start, but it proceeded more slowly than he had anticipated. He remained at waged farm work for another three years, then instead of homesteading further west, he purchased a farm. The delay and change of plans were not due to problems with his apprenticeship. Rather, it had worked so well that he had come to feel a part of the community, and he had been so successful at a wide range of farming ventures that he believed a purchased farm in a settled community was a sounder economic investment than a homestead, which would not begin to produce a reasonable return for at least three or four years. Financially, though, his years of agricultural labour were ill-rewarded. After three years of steady work and stringent saving, Stokoe had accumulated an average of only $120.00 per year. Part of this had come from his supplementary farming ventures such as stock-raising and sharecropping. He was able to raise the $500.00 downpayment for his farm, but he would be left with nothing to carry on farming operations. "Now, here's where I stick", he wrote to his father. "If I give him that money I won't have horses, seed, feed or anything else, I will be cleaned right out". Although he felt that his progress was a cause for pride, Stokoe was reluctant to ask for help. "It was not my intention when I came out here to take any help from you if I could help it", he admitted, "but I didn't expect to run against these circumstances."[106]

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[105]. Ibid. Stokoe to Adam 28/10/1905; Stokoe to Father 6/6/1906; Stokoe to Father 11/9/1904

For John Stokoe, the apprenticeship system worked. He had learned a great deal about all aspects of farming and had been welcomed into agricultural society. If he had been unable to enlist the financial help of his family, he could still have acquired a farm of his own through homesteading. The meagre wages he had been willing to accept were his part of the bargain. For the valuable experience he was gaining, and for the entry into the farming community, he felt well-paid.

Stokoe is an example of a the prairie farm hand in transition. In negotiating his role from farm labourer to farm owner, he occupied a number of different economic positions. His ability to employ strategies that enabled him to pursue his chosen course reflected the broad reality of prairie pioneering. The agricultural workforce was made up of men who were farmers, or who would soon be. They were tenants and owners, farmers and sons, and waged agricultural labourers. There was fluidity among the positions, upward as well as downward, and the role of employee was not confined to men who were permanent paid labourers. At any time, anyone in the workforce might labour for another, whether for wages or for a simple exchange of services. It was through their combined and coordinated efforts that agricultural production was achieved. This is not to say, however, that the cooperation that was such a significant feature of the agricultural economy of the early west, and which has spawned such a vital mythology about social and economic relations, extended to relations that existed between men when they faced one another as employer and employee.

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[106]. Ibid. Stokoe to Father 23/10/1906

III

Hired hands, like workers in other industries and in other places, attempted to improve the conditions of their life and labour. In doing so, they found that their working experience was firmly rooted in their objective class position. Even while they worked to leave the working class, farm workers shared with it fundamental goals. The expectations they brought to their position as wage labourers and the conditions they encountered in the prairie west shaped the contours of their experience of class. That experience in turn influenced the way they reacted to their position. Their response was pragmatic.

Operating within conditions that were particular to the prairie west, agricultural labourers employed strategies common to those used by labour elsewhere but tailored to meet the particular circumstances of agriculture during the pioneering period. In contending with such factors as a dearth of capital, the nascency of the agricultural economy, the seasonality of the labour demand, and the organization of the industry, they pursued strategies that took advantage of the particular circumstances of time and place and industry. Their aims were those of workers everywhere, ranging from the intangible rewards of job satisfaction and control of their own labour in the workplace, to the more practical necessities of improved living and working conditions, and above all, higher wages.

Wages for farm work were notoriously low. Outside of the high-paying harvest season, agricultural labour was paid less than was labour in any other western industry. "Agricultural wages at best reach to within about 10 per cent of unskilled industrial wages," reported the International Labour Review on farm wages in Canada, "but much more often range somewhere about one-half such wages

[and] often below one-half."[107] The reasons bore little relation to the value of production. Wages were kept down by the organization of the industry into small-scale units of production, in which the state of an individual farmer's finances decreed how much he paid his help. Beginning farmers were often capital-poor, yet the prevailing low wage offered was maintained by well-established and even prosperous farmers. Cases of better-off farmers offering higher-than-usual wages were rare, although pioneer Anna Farion recalled that her father and his brother, while living in Dauphin, Manitoba in 1897, "hoofed it all the way to Brandon where farmers were quite well-to-do and able to pay good wages."[108]

Wages were also kept low by the international market for agricultural products. Farmers paid their hired help at least partially on the basis of estimates of their own income, but more actually on the basis of the local "going wage." If they could anticipate a good crop and a good price for grain, higher wages could pay off. However, since wages were decided at the beginning of the season and profits or losses were not realized until the end, farmers attempted to hold wages down to the minimum that men would accept. Farmer George Tuxford of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, complained in 1911 that "the labor problem is intense," with men "asking all kinds of wages. This might be borne with a good crop," he reasoned, "but under existing conditions are out of the question."[109] While the principle of shared risk was a familiar theme in wage negotiations, farm hands seldom received bonuses for a bumper crop or for unexpectedly higher prices. More often, farm workers were faced with employers who found at the last minute that they would not be able to pay the wages they had promised, or who were unwilling to do so. When Ebe Koeppen found threshing work to help finance his homestead, he had difficulty collecting his wages. His employer "wouldn't, or couldn't pay up. I had to ride over there three times in the middle of winter till I got most of my wages."[110]

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[107]. Reported in "Effects of Agricultural Depression on Farm Wages" Labour Gazette June 1931 p 647. See also "Wages and Hours of Labour in Canada 1901-1920" Supplement to Labour Gazette March 1921 pp 10-16; "Wages and Hours of Labour in Canada" Addendum on Wages of Coal Miners, 1900-1921 Supplement to Labour Gazette February 1922 p 25. For a similar situation in central Canada, see George V. Haythorne and Leonard C. Marsh Land and Labour: A Social Survey of Agriculture and the Farm Labour Market in Central Canada McGill Social Research Series 11 Toronto: Oxford University Press 1941 p 345

[108]. Anna Farion "Homestead Girl" in Harry Piniuta ed. and trans. Land of Pain, Land of Promise: First Person Accounts by Ukrainian Pioneers, 1891-1914 Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books 1981 p 87

But the single most important element to determine the low wages, or indeed the occasions of high wages, was simply the labour market. It almost always seemed as if farm labour was in short supply, especially during peak periods. In 1912, the Saskatchewan agriculture department estimated that 25,000 additional workers would be needed to harvest the crops. The province received 15,000 harvesters. The next year, the department estimated the need at 20,000 and received fewer than 13,000.[111] During the temporary peak labour demands of harvest, and in periods of acute labour scarcity such as the First World War, farm wages shot up.[112] When the labour supply was greater than the demand, as during the winter months and in periods of depression, farm wages plummeted.

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[109]. SAB R418 George Tuxford Papers p 1092 Tuxford to Father and Mother 12/10/1911

[110]. Koeppen in Knight Stump Ranch Chronicles p 68

Farm workers had to be both astute and fortunate to be able to tailor their wage requirements to the state of the labour market over the course of a year. If they were attempting to build a nest egg, the task was even more difficult. The promise that a man could earn enough as a hired hand to begin farming contained a germ of truth, but a number of considerations served both to reduce the wage tally and to make inroads on the accumulating bankroll.

Wages were not only low, they were extremely varied. There was no uniformity to the demand for labour. Farm jobs might be plentiful in some areas and scarce in others depending on such factors as the condition of the land or crops, the type of farming and the size of the local labour supply. In Saskatchewan in 1914, a farm worker could earn as little as $230 per year including board in the lowest-paid North Western district or as much as $338 per year including board in the highest-paid South Central district.[113] The seasonal cycle of agriculture created enormous oscillations in labour demand that was naturally reflected in wages. If a farmer needed help urgently, he raised his offer, which "immediately causes a fluctuation in the farm wages of his district," to the great dismay of his neighbours.[114] For farm hands, the irregularity had as severe an effect. The newcomer who believed the assurances of some immigration propaganda that he could expect wages of fifty or sixty dollars a month soon found that this might be available only for the spring and summer months or for the peak harvest season. Winter wages were seldom more than five dollars a month, or could be only room and board and a bit of tobacco money.

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[111] Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture *Eighth Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture of the Province of Saskatchewan 1912* Regina: Government Printer 1913 p 137; *Idem* *Ninth Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture of the Province of Saskatchewan 1913* Regina: Government Printer 1914 p 195; and see Table I-5 Harvest Excursionists

[112] See Table II-5A Annual Farm Workers' Wages

Wages varied for other reasons as well. An examination of farm employment by the Labour Gazette in its first year of publication, 1901, found that variations in wages were "largely attributable to the variation in the efficiency of the different employees."[115] By the turn of the twentieth century, according to the Department of Agriculture of the North-West Territories, the prairies had absorbed most of the experienced farm workers that eastern Canada could supply. The result was inexperienced, inefficient, and therefore low-paid farm labour, especially at harvest. The department's Report painted a gloomy picture:

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[113]. Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture Tenth Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture of the Province of Saskatchewan 1914 Regina: Government Printer 1915 p 137

[114]. SAB M6/X-11-0 Charles Dunning Papers: Labour p 14562 "Farm Wages" March 1922

[115]. Labour Gazette June 1901 p 556

> The glowing possibilities of the West having already attracted there permanently a large proportion of the farmers' sons and those experienced in farm work from the eastern provinces, many of those who take advantage of the excursions are found to be unemployed men and boys from eastern cities who cannot satisfactorily perform the duties required of them on a farm without a certain period of training during which they are as a rule worth little more than their board.[116]

Men who possessed a wide range of farming skills found that their experience usually earned them a wage that could range from an extra five or ten dollars a month to more than double the wage of an inexperienced worker. The "better classes of men are preferred even at the higher wages", reported the Labour Gazette, "most farmers being prepared to pay to good, able-bodied, competent and trustworthy men the maximum wage quoted, rather than to employ inferior men at lower rates."[117] In 1912, the Saskatchewan government began a program to subsidize the travel costs of experienced farm workers from Great Britain, to work for much higher wages than they had been getting at home. The Department of

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[116]. North-West Territories Department of Agriculture Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture of the North-West Territories, 1903 Regina: King's Printer 1904 p 37. For the opposite side of this complaint, that the west was draining Ontario of experienced farmers' sons, see Ontario Department of Agriculture Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Province of Ontario, 1892 Toronto: Warwick Bros. & Rutter 1893 p 94

[117]. Labour Gazette June 1901 p 556

Agriculture explained:

> While Saskatchewan farmers suffer from a dearth of experienced farm labour there are in Great Britain hundreds of thoroughly experienced farm servants who are debarred from coming to this province simply because it is impossible for them to save sufficient to pay passage money from the scanty wages received.[118]

Newcomers realized that their shortcomings would be reflected in their wages. Even with his agricultural background, Gaston Giscard admitted "I can't estimate what I earn since I'm completely ignorant about everything concerning field work." He was willing to offer his services for a trial period. "It isn't that I'm not willing to try", he declared. After the week, he decided to "take a chance on asking: Everything all right?" and was given an affirmative answer and a wage of twenty dollars a month.[119] Yet experience was no guarantee of a higher wage. Newcomers to a district sometimes found that they had to accept a lower wage at the beginning of a job, until they proved their worth. This might mean an entire month's work at a beginner's wages, which could make a significant difference in a short-term job of two or three months. In a long-term job it could prove disastrous. When George Shepherd and his father hired on at a farm near Brandon, Manitoba in 1908, their inexperience led them to agree to a wage of ten dollars a month for the entire summer, including harvest.[120]

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[118]. Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture Eighth Annual Report ... 1912 p 137

[119]. Giscard Dans La Prairie Canadienne p 13

The seasonality of agricultural work was probably the greatest variable in determining a farm worker's income, for it regulated not only the wages earned, but the length of employment. There were several categories of farm work.[121] At the bottom of the wage scale was the winter job, which lasted from freeze-up until spring and often paid no more than room and board. A full-time job was one that lasted the full year. Wages were lowest in this category, but they were assured for the full year. More common and more highly paid were jobs that lasted for the summer, or the "working year" of a farm, for seven or eight months. Even more common and more highly paid were jobs for the busy season in the spring or fall, a period of one to three months. Finally, the shortest term jobs were undertaken for specific tasks and were paid by the day. Wages here depended on the job, and could be as little as a dollar a day for rock-picking to five or six dollars for harvesting. The latter was the most highly paid work but the most uncertain. Rain or a breakdown in machinery resulted in the loss of work that could completely offset the high wages. The "frequent rains so interfered with continuous employment on the farms that men quit work", reported the Saskatchewan Bureau of Labour in 1911. They were "unable to make a living wage owing to so much lost time."[122]

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[120]. Shepherd West of Yesterday p 18

[121]. Labour Gazette June 1901 pp 555-6

Farm workers responded to the challenge of low and irregular wages by developing strategies to take advantage of fluctuations in the labour market, turning a liability into an asset. The most effective strategy was the very simple one of withholding labour. Farmers were outraged by "the quasi-strike attitude" of farm workers who "show a tendency to stand out against reasonable wages."[123] According to all contemporary reports, the demand for labour was pressing and persistent throughout the settlement period. Farm journals regularly carried articles about the shortage of help, and farmers' organizations sought the aid of government and private labour and immigration agencies to fill their needs.[124] But labour shortages were inconsistent. During the pioneering period of the late nineteenth century, and in areas which were just opening up in the twentieth, the shortage of labour was absolute. But as regions passed beyond the days of sparse settlement, and as the influx of settlers burgeoned after 1896, the labour shortage became simply relative.

The seasonality of cereal monoculture further complicated the demand for labour, and the supply. During the harvest period of high wages, men flocked to the industry, yet farmers continued complaining that they were unable to find sufficient help to bring in their crops. The logistical problems of rapidly transporting the labour supply to areas of demand provides only a partial explanation. What economists refer to as lack of effective demand is the real key to understanding the existence of a sufficient labour force but an apparent labour shortage. When farmers were not offering employment, it was more often because of a shortage of cash than of a shortage of work to be done. Farmer Georgina Binnie-Clarke turned down two men who came looking for work after harvest, but the next day listened to her brother, who was helping her farm, lament that "you simply can't get labour for love or money."[125] When the agricultural industry complained that it could not attract labour, its real difficulty was that it could not provide wages to compete with those in other industries.

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[122]. Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture Bureau of Labour Annual Report 1911 p 20

[123]. SAB M4/I/100 W. M. Martin Papers: Labour p 29832 G. Graham to W. M. Martin 18/3/1918

[124]. See for example PAM MG10/E1 United Farmers of Manitoba Papers, especially Minutes of Conventions; SAB M12/II/60 W. R. Motherwell Papers

The strategy of withholding labour was carried out at different levels. In the aggregate, it was reflected in the continuous refusal of the labour force to satisfy the labour requirements of the industry. But working men were also selective in their tactics. Clearly, it was to their advantage to ensure that they were employed in agriculture during high-wage periods. It is at the individual level that farm workers employed tactics that demonstrated their ability to make most effective use of the shortages of labour, the seasonality of production and the organization of the industry.

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[125]. Binnie-Clark Wheat and Woman p 35

This is demonstrated in labour's pursuit of one of its most basic aims: to maximize its earnings. Farm workers were sometimes torn between working to gain experience and working to build up a bankroll. When George Shepherd and his father took their low-paying job near Brandon, it was on the condition that by the end of the summer they "would become fully qualified to work on any farm in the West or to start up on our own."[126] But after six weeks, they placed the need for cash at the top of their priorities and left the job in search of something better. When men acted primarily as workers and secondarily as apprentices, they placed the priority of wages above that of gaining farming experience. Rather than settling down to a steady year-long job, they kept their employment options open. Wage figures for 1901 illustrate the point. They range from as little as $10.00 per month for a yearly engagement, to as much as $2.50 per day for a shorter engagement.[127] In the Lisgar district of Manitoba, average wages were $156.00 for a full-year engagement. A man could thus earn $13.00 a month if he hired on for a full year, but this increased to $20.00 a month for a seven- or eight-month job, and went up to $25.00 if he hired on for only a month or two. Short-term jobs paid as much as $1.50 per day. Thus during periods of labour scarcity, when a man could find farm work quickly at the best rates, he could calculate that he could earn more by moving from job to job. A season's job lasting eight months could pay $160.00. He could earn even more by changing jobs more frequently. If he filled his year with a winter job paying only room and board, then a number of short-term day jobs in the spring, then found a four month summer engagement, then moved into the harvest fields in the fall, his earning potential rose to more than $200.00.[128] It was a gamble, but a risk that many were willing to take.

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[126]. Shepherd West of Yesterday p 18

[127]. Labour Gazette 1901 pp 564-5

The effectiveness of the tactic depended upon the use farm workers made of the particular conditions of prairie agriculture. Individual small farms were the backbone of the industry, and each was a potential source of employment. Although the number and proportion of farm workers increased until the beginning of the Second World War, they were always outnumbered by farmers, most of whom needed help at some time during the year. Farm workers enjoyed a large marketplace for their labour and used it as a lever to pry up their wages. In conjunction with seasonality of production, the tactic could be very effective. Especially at harvest, men were able to parlay the urgency of the demand for their labour into higher wages. Although farmers sometimes made overt agreements among themselves to keep harvest wages at a uniform level, they undercut their own potential strength by engaging in bidding wars during the crucial weeks of late summer.[129] Farm workers were quick to take advantage of the competition for their labour, and they were equally quick to move on to another job if a better opportunity presented itself.

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[128]. Ibid. pp 265-266

The individualistic strategies farm workers developed to deal with the problems of low wages proved equally effective when shaping their jobs to their needs. An important historical discourse has recently emerged on the labour process. A fuller discussion of labour process theory and its application to agricultural labour on the prairies will be presented in the following chapter. First, however, it is necessary to explain the nature of the relationship between hired hands and their work. According to sociologist Howard Newby, farm workers occupy a world of their own:

> Work on the land has customarily been regarded as a qualitatively different experience from work in any other industry. The agricultural worker tends to think of himself as being part of a distinctive breed, divorced by temperament and environment from the urban, industrial majority. The actual work itself is therefore an exceedingly important attribute of the farm worker's personal and social identity -- more than many other jobs it defines for the farm worker what he is.[130]

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[129] See for example PAA 65.118/17/47 Employment Service of Canada Papers W.D. Trego, United Farmers of Alberta, Labor Committee Official Circular #10 29/3/1921; SAB M6/X-11-0 Dunning Papers: Labour p 14563 "Farm Wages" March 1922, and other submissions in the Annual Western Conferences.

[130] Howard Newby The Deferential Worker: A Study of Farm Workers in East Anglia London: Allen Lane 1977 p 279. Emphasis in original. Although farm workers in the prairie west demonstrated few of the deferential traits that Newby found among East Anglian farm workers, prairie hands shared the perception that their work was infused with an

Farm folk reminisce fondly of the pattern of agricultural work, describing its cyclical attunement to nature. "We tread two endless wheels of labour on this farm," recalled pioneer Robert Collins, "one within the other: a daily round of chores spinning inside the greater circle of seasons' tasks."[131] Farm work was arduous and often monotonous. It could be stultifying and unrewarding, yet it held an appeal that defied conventional explanations of economic returns for labour expended. In part, this was because the agricultural community lived on hope, on next year's crop, in "next-year country".[132] But beyond this stubborn optimism lay an ambivalence toward the work itself. Farm labour was demanding and tedious, yet it was also diverse and challenging. It offered such a wide range of tasks that even though boredom took its toll, the order was more often hustle and intensity. The back-breaking and muscle-stretching aspects of the work that could result in physical debilitation could also lead to physical well-being.

Perhaps the strongest appeal to the labour of farm work was ideological. The challenge that it presented was

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"air of uniqueness." p 279

[131]. Robert Collins Butter Down the Well: Recollections of a Canadian Childhood Saskatoon: Prairie Producer Books 1980 p 66

[132]. The term "next year country" was used so commonly by western farmers to describe their land that it has entered the prairie vocabulary. Jean Burnet's study of rural social organization in Alberta appropriately bears the phrase as its title.

embraced as an affirmation of both moral and physical worth. For men who chose farming as a career, the hard work, the diversity of labour and the pressure of balancing time and effort and money might be frustrating and wearing. But it could also add up to an immediate sense of accomplishment and a deeply felt sense of fulfilment. Looking back on his years as a homesteader and farm worker, Ebe Koeppen recalled the pleasures. "Through thick and thin, I always found farming very rewarding. He "discovered that taking care of animals and working with growing things gave me great satisfaction."[133] Farm work could be a reward in itself.

Farm workers sought a share of these rewards. Men who entered the waged agricultural labour force did so by choice, motivated as much by the non-remunerative aspects of the work as by their prospects for the future. The low wages were scarcely sufficient compensation for the long hours, the strenuous labour and the dangerous conditions.[134] There were easier and more secure ways of earning a living. Indeed, men whose primary goal was an agricultural future often turned to work in other industries in order to tide them over during periods of unemployment in agriculture, or to provide them with the capital to set up farming, or to subsidize their farming ventures. Murchie's study of the agricultural ladder found that significant numbers of farmers had engaged not only in agricultural labour, but also in some other occupation before establishing their own farms. At Kindersley, Saskatchewan, 94 out of 198 farmers had worked at non-agricultural labour for an average of 5.8 years and at farm labour for an average of 6.5 years before becoming farmers themselves. At Turtleford, Saskatchewan, the proportion was lower at 87 out of 178 farmers and at Olds, Alberta, it was 86 out of 108. The men engaged in a wide variety of non-agricultural occupations including general labour, skilled artisanship, clerical work, civil service, commercial employment, entrepreneurship and teaching.[135]

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[133]. Koeppen in Knight Stump Ranch Chronicles p 49

[134]. Despite the general belief that farm work was healthy, accidents were common. In July 1904, for example, 21 accidents in agriculture, of which 12 were fatal, were reported in Canada. In contrast, the fatality rate was only 5 out of 17 in mining, 12 out of 36 in railway service, 5 out of 26 in the building trades, and 4 out of 25 in unskilled labour. Labour Gazette V July 1904 p 98

Yet they returned to farming when they could, finding in the labour itself present satisfactions and potent hopes for the future. In order to ensure that they would receive the benefits, they employed strategies common to workers in other industries but designed to take advantage of the special circumstances of prairie agriculture. As in the search for higher wages, they shaped their strategies to fit their own imperatives, working out their own balance of economic benefit and the way of life promised to men who engaged in agriculture. Even more than a higher income, farm workers sought satisfaction in their working lives. Despite the hard work, Edward ffolkes insisted that "these two months of simple labouring life, like a plough-boy in England, will have been amongst the happiest and most undisturbed in my nineteen and a half years' residence in the world."[136]

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[135]. Murchie Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier pp 156, 262, 290

Labour in agriculture is varied and complex. Each task requires a different degree of expertise and range of skills, and each brings a different degree of pleasure or misery. Farm hands have left few records of their private lives, but have been more willing to record, sometimes in detail, sometimes more cryptically, their experiences of the labour which filled their lives.

The daily round of work on a grain farm is described by Noel Copping, who began working as a hired hand near Earl Grey, Saskatchewan, in April 1909:

> At present our daily routine of work is 5 A.M. to 5:30 P.M. Rise, milk cows, feed and clean down horses .... About 6 A.M. have a wash and breakfast. After breakfast I saw wood for the kitchen stove and get water from the well.... Then at about 7 A.M. we commence work on the land.... This morning I have been ploughing. .. at 12 noon we come in to dinner, first unharnessing the horses and putting them in the pasture. After dinner I clean out the stable then bring up the horses, feed and harness them. Then work goes on again until 6 P.M. At this hour we come in from the fields, unharness the horses and give them oats. Tea is the next item on the programme and afterwards the horses are turned out and the cows brought up to the stable and milked. This I usually do in the evening. Then any odd jobs are done and the day's work is over. I usually end up with a wash and am then ready for bed.[137]

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[136]. ffolkes to Mother 6/10/1881 in Wells Letters from a young emigrant p 83

[137]. NAC MG 30 C63 Noel Copping Papers "Prairie Wool and some Mosquitoes" Excerpts from a Diary, Saskatchewan 1909-1910 pp 18-19

Other varieties of work were called for in the yearly round. The "work on the land" to which Copping referred varied from season to season.[138] Spring was the time for seeding, from about mid-April to mid-June. Ploughing was the first order, when the soil was opened up and broken. The techniques and labour for this task varied widely. The simplest was turning over one furrow at a time by a single-bladed plough drawn by a single horse or ox. A man followed the plough, working hard to cut a straight furrow and to ensure that the soil was turned over properly to expose the undersoil. The process could by speeded up using a gang plough, a series of two or more blades lined up to cultivate more land with each turn around the field. The extra blades added the complication of a two- or four-horse team. Different types of soil required different handling. It took strength and skill to cut a furrow two inches deep into virgin prairie sod. When farm communities held fairs and exhibitions, ploughing contests rated high on the list of favourite attractions. The newly-turned sod then had to be backset, or ploughed between the furrows to turn the undersoil to the top.[139] Stubble land needed less handling, but no less finesse, and a straight furrow was the mark of an accomplished ploughman. Hired hand Arthur Jan ruefully admitted his initial difficulty. "I would start off all right to plow a field with four horses but where I ended up was doubtful."[140]

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[138]. The material in this section is a composite of information gleaned from contemporary agricultural guides and farm journals such as John Bracken Crop Production in Western Canada Winnipeg: Grain Growers' Guide 1920; Idem Dry Farming in Western Canada; Wheeler Seager Wheeler's Book on Profitable Grain Growing; Farm and Ranch Review; Nor'-West Farmer; The Farmers' Advocate; Grain Growers' Guide

Ploughing was only the first step in preparing the soil. Next came discing, the further breaking up of the soil by a series of discs pulled behind horses and guided by a driver. After the discing came harrowing, the smoothing out of the soil by pulling a long rake-like implement over it. Hired hand John Cowell commented about his turn at the task. "At Sniders my job was harrowing with 4 horses. Walking. My feet was [sic] sore before I started."[141] Then the soil was ready for seeding, which was accomplished by pulling a seed-drill press over the land, with levers to regulate the depth of seed. Finally, the land was harrowed yet again, to ensure that the seed was properly covered. All these tasks had to be completed in a rush, with an eye on the weather. The time between spring thaw and first frost in the fall was measured in days. A week or even a few days' delay could mean the loss of the crop.

Once the crops were planted, the summer lasted until early August. There was always work to be done, as a popular quip from Weyburn, Saskatchewan, attests: "You can rest while you feed the pigs."[142] Farm lands were maintained and improved. This was often the time to break new land for next year's crops. The simple turning of prairie sod was only possible on stretches of fields that were comparatively flat. Most farms contained brushy areas that needed clearing. In the parklands, trees had to be removed as well, and it was a rare prairie farm that did not have its share of rocks to be picked. Dry-land techniques dictated ploughing summer-fallowed fields and, depending on the soil, discing and harrowing as well. This was also the time for general farm maintenance and improvement. Wells were dug, farm buildings erected or repaired, fences strung, and machinery and implements overhauled. As the summer drew to a close, haying began, and then preparations were made for the climax of grain farming -- the harvest.

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[139]. See Wheeler Profitable Grain Growing Chapter III, especially pp 110-12 for the detailed care needed in cultivating. Not all land was backset.

[140]. PAM MG8/B41 Arthur Jan Papers

[141]. PAM MG8/B18 John Cowell Papers p 2

The rush and labour of harvest far surpassed that of all other seasons. The vast acreage to be harvested required an enormous amount of manpower, and the threat of fall frosts dictated that preparing the crop for threshing be done very rapidly. Technology speeded up parts of the process, thus increasing labour needs. The first step in harvesting was cutting the crop. Binders were pulled into the ripe grain field by teams of horses. The binder contained a moving blade that cut the standing grain a few inches above its roots. The stalks fell onto a moving belt and were carried to a knotting device which tied them into sheaves, which were dropped onto the stubble. Manpower took over the process at this point, and two or three men followed a binder to stack the sheaves into stooks. Although stooking was "a muscle aching piece of essential hand work"[143] it required more finesse than outsiders imagined. "You take two [sheaves], put them down and then put eight around in a circle," recalled harvester Philip Golumbia. "You would put them in two and put a little on the side to let in the air so they wouldn't shrink. They had to be done just so."[144] The sheaves had to be stacked skilfully, each leaning inward at just the right angle to maintain balance against winds, yet with all grain heads exposed to the drying air. The prospect could daunt even seasoned farm workers. When Bernard Harmstone, a hired hand from Quebec, took a harvest excursion to Caron, Saskatchewan, he recalls that he "looked at the ... bundles [waiting to be stooked] which lay in rows as far as the eye could see & my heart sank down into my boots." After stooking for a while, he was dismayed to turn around and discover that "the stooks which had been so laboriously built were all laying on the ground." But he kept at it, and "with a little more practice I caught on to the trick." The job left an indelible etch:

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[142]. Weyburn R.M. 67 History Book Committee As Far as the Eye Can See p 696

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[143]. S. J. Ferns and H. S. Ferns Eighty Five Years in Canada Winnipeg: Queenston House 1978 p 44

[144]. SAB C55 Philip Golumbia Interview by D. H. Bocking 23/12/1970

> For the rest of my life the memory of all those bundles laying there in rows all the way to the horizon & waiting for me to come along & pick them up, well words really can't express the feeling. [145]

The next step, threshing the crop, separating the kernels of grain from the stalks, called for another type of technology and another infusion of labour. On commercial farms during the pioneer and settlement period, huge steam engines powered the separator that threshed the grain.[146] On an average farm eighteen to twenty men fed the grain and tended the machines. An engineman and waterman supplied fuel and water to keep the steam engine running. Other men kept the separator fed. In the fields, men dismantled the stooks, pitching the sheaves onto horse-drawn bundle wagons to be taken to the threshing machine. The key men were the field pitcher and the spike pitcher. "A spike pitcher had to be a tough, strong and steady man and he had to work ten to fourteen hours a day," according to harvester S. J. Ferns.[147] The field pitcher helped load the wagons, ensuring that the sheaves were evenly distributed in the wagon. At the separator, the spike pitcher took over, climbing onto the wagon and pitching the sheaves into the feeder. Care and efficiency were called for to ensure that the sheaves were placed correctly for the knife to cut the binding twine and to spread the stalks for the header to cut off the heads of grain. The grain fell to a series of rapidly moving tables inside the thresher, which separated the grain from the straw and chaff. Fans blew the straw and chaff out of the machine through a huge galvanised sheet-iron tube, and another metal tube delivered the threshed grain to a wagon or to sacks to be sewn up and loaded for market. Other fall jobs seemed leisurely and secluded by comparison. Hauling the grain to market was solitary work, taking as much as a full day for a single load if the farm were some distance from the railroad. Farm hand Edward Corcoran enjoyed the job. "One always appreciated the nice restful morning when one was sent to Weldon [Saskatchewan] with a load of hay, ... as it meant a comfortable journey on a nice sunny day with nothing to do except smoke a pipe and think philosophic thoughts."[148] Fall ploughing or harrowing was not under the same time pressure as that done in the spring, and field work gradually slowed with the fall frosts and the onset of winter.

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[145]. Brother Bernard Harmstone "The Harvest Excursion. August 1926" unpublished ms. in author's possession p 1

[146]. Ernest B. Ingles "The Custom Threshermen in Western Canada" in David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds. Building Beyond the Homestead Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1985

[147]. Ferns and Ferns Eighty Five Years in Canada p 53

Winter work was deemed even more leisurely, but it consisted of a lengthy round of regular chores. Percy Maxwell dispelled the notion that winter was a time of "enforced idleness":

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[148]. Edward Corcoran "My Experiences as a Farm Hand in Canada" United Empire: The Journal of the Royal Empire Society XX (New Series):3 March 1929 p 151

> Chores take up nearly all day now that most of the cattle are in the stable ... There are 15 horses and a cow and three calves in my stable and it takes more than five minutes to clean and feed that little crowd. Besides the chores there is hay and wood and straw to be drawn from the bush and stacks respectively.[149]

All jobs were made twice as time-consuming and onerous with frozen wells and blizzards, as Maxwell's lengthy description of the relatively simple task of "drawing wood" illustrates:

> It is not a pleasant job. We get up in the middle of the night and do the chores then have breakfast in as big a hurry as if we were going for the 8:34 train instead of the 9:4 [sic] and start off at daylight. Arrived at the bush we cut down the trees and load them on to the sleighs and immediately start back for home and just manage to get in before dark. There is no time to stop for dinner and we have to munch a few bits of bread and butter (generally frozen solid) sitting on the load and even that is at the risk of upsetting because the roads are very bad and if we don't give all our attention to driving, the load will probably turn over. We have to cross the creek three times and there are exciting moments rushing down one bank on to the ice and up the other bank again; it is a tricky business too driving round the stumps and trees, and by the time we reach home we are pretty well tired of the 22 mile drive, especially when a snow storm comes on and your face is covered with a kind of wet ice and eyelids freeze down whenever you blink, as happened to us one day.[150]

Winter was also the time to begin preparations for next year's crop. There was no rest, as hired hand Ray Coates recalled, for "as soon as dinner was swallowed the boss got an uneasy look on his face and ... we were hustled out to bluestone wheat."[151] Seed had to be fanned and selected against weeds, and implements and machinery repaired.

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[149]. Maxwell to Mother 29/11/1903 in Maxwell Letters home during his years as a homesteader p 44

[150]. Maxwell to Mother 18/1/1904 Ibid. p 53

The lengthy roster of farm tasks described above only scratched the surface of work on a prairie farm. The experience of farm workers encompassed much more, since they were expected to turn their hands to any task that might turn up. They cleaned stables, milked cows, collected eggs, butchered pigs, dug wells, hauled manure and pulled sow thistle. The list was endless.

The picture that emerges from the accounts of the working experiences of prairie agricultural labourers is one of continual variety. In May 1909 Fred Pringle hired on for a month with George Hoskins near Stettler, Alberta.

Pringle spent the first day at work discing, a tiring and monotonous job. The next day found him "puttering around", basking in the "fine weather these days."[152] He was soon back to more serious work, sowing oats one day, drag-harrowing the next, and ploughing two days later. Pringle did not record the countless number of small tasks he performed every day; he noted only those he deemed the major part of the day's work. Thus, in one week he "sawed wood all day", "plowed all day", "broke in one of the big mares", and "sorted potatoes." The next week, he was "cutting brush" (and taking time to "bath in a pond"), discing, and fanning grain on a rainy day. By the following week the weather was right for planting, and he ploughed, seeded, disced, and fought off the mosquitoes, which were "getting bad."[153] By the time Pringle finished his month on Hoskins' farm, he had added to his list of work hauling hay, hauling coal and repairing machinery.

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[151]. SAB II/A/49 Ray Coates Reminiscences ms. "To the Golden West 1903-1931" p 10

[152]. GAI M1008/A .P957 Frederick Pringle Papers, diary p 129

The variety of the work does much to explain why men chose this low-paying, arduous labour. Edward ffolkes described to his mother his "decided interest" in farm work: "there is at least one feature in it which you know I like - change, a great variety of things to do and attend to."[154] Rural sociologists have long recognized that the "irksomeness of farm work ... is greatly relieved by its variety ... [which] lessens the monotony of toil and affords rest thru [sic] change."[155] Farm workers might spend hours and even days at the same work, but they interspersed it with different jobs, and sooner or later were compelled by the inexorable agricultural cycle to move on to other tasks. Hired hand W.N. Rolfe of Manitou, Manitoba, found farm work a "continual round of exciting adventure."[156]

The alienation that beset workers in most mass-production industries was largely absent in agriculture.[157] The variety of agricultural tasks meant that in their daily and yearly round farm workers were called upon to employ a wide range of skills. They made discretionary judgements and had to adapt to a varied and changing environment. Their labour processes were not fundamentally directed by agricultural technology, and they were closely and tangibly bound up in the processes of production. Percy Maxwell remarked upon the difference between "the useless sort of existence" at his previous employment and his work on a farm. "There is something to show for your work every day, so many acres of land ploughed, etc. and not simply one more day over and wasted as it was in the office."[158] Farm workers were able to see immediately the fruits of their labour.

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[153]. Ibid. pp 130-31

[154]. ffolkes to Mother 14/8/1881 in Wells Letters from a young emigrant p 82

[155]. Newell LeRoy Simms Elements of Rural Sociology New York: Thomas Crowell 1946 p 429

[156]. MLL "Local History - Manitou" Acc: 8/1/1951 Rolfe "A Citizen of Canada" p 3. I am indebted to Donald Loveridge for bringing this manuscript to my attention.

There were many rewards. The ability to learn and exercise new skills provided a satisfying sense of accomplishment. George Shepherd and his father were proud of their growing knowledge. "We were no longer 'green Englishmen'" bragged young Shepherd, "but trusted hired men."[159] Men also found satisfaction in the physical demands made upon them. "I am doing first rate," wrote John Stokoe to his father, "thriving like a young bullock, growing out of my clothes & enjoying myself immensely."[160] In later years, farm hands could be nostalgic about the hard work. Recollecting his 1905 harvest experience, S.J. Ferns declared that "there was a real joy in feeling one could do a man's job in the sunshine and the wind in Manitoba."[161] And since agriculture was expected to provide more than mere livelihood, farm workers could also be captivated by the more esoteric aspects of the agrarian life. Noel Copping was moved by the beauty of his physical environment. In his description of breaking the virgin prairie, he digressed to record the vanishing scene. "Little yellow violets grew among the prairie grass, and in some spots there are minute strawberries sweet to the taste." As he followed the plough after his boss, kicking down improperly-fallen sods, he had watched "a pretty blue bird hover, reaching for insects in the sod turned up by the plough, its note like liquid poured from a bottle."[162]

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[157]. James W. Rinehart The Tyranny of Work: Alienation and the Labour Process 2nd edition Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich (1975) 1987; Braverman Labor and Monopoly Capital pp 45-58. For a study of modern migrant farm workers which finds that have a surprisingly low level of social alienation, see William A. Rushing Class, Culture, and Alienation: A Study of Farmers and Farm Workers Lexington, Massachusetts D.C. Heath and Company 1972

[158]. Maxwell to Mother 10/5/1903 in Maxwell Letters home during his years as a homesteader p 11

But the aspect of agricultural labour that held the greatest appeal was independence. Men were drawn to the west for the independent future it offered. They expected to work independently in building their own farms, and as a prelude they sought the type of waged labour that offered the highest degree of on-the-job independence. Hired men put in long hard days, yet they found the autonomy they sought. They were seldom kept under an employer's watchful eye.

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[159]. Shepherd West of Yesterday p 18

[160]. GAI A.5874 John Stokoe Correspondence Stokoe to father 9/8/03

[161]. Ferns and Ferns Eighty Five Years in Canada p 53

[162]. NAC MG 30 C63 Noel Copping Papers "Prairie Wool and Some Mosquitoes" p 18

The men who were drawn to agricultural labour thus worked under conditions that suited themselves as much as their employers. Self-sufficiency of labour was a necessary requirement in an industry that suffered a chronic labour shortage, and in which capital also performed the bulk of the labour. The most valued qualification of a hired hand was independence, the ability to work at a complex array of farm tasks without supervision or instruction. Even a newcomer was required to carry on unsupervised. Gaston Giscard began his "apprenticeship in ploughing" with the boss at his side. But after "one or two rounds to show me how to operate the levers, ... he leaves me, telling me to go on doing the same for the rest of the day."[163] It is no surprise that prairie farm workers were independent.

But from the perspective of labour-capital relations, independence was a double-edged sword. Capital sought to harness this independence in order to produce a workforce that was self-sufficient in its abilities, yet dependent in its need for waged labour. Labour responded by building its strategies of resistance upon the foundation of independence.

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[163]. Giscard Dans La Prairie Canadienne p 13

The promise of independent ownership ensured that farm workers did not challenge the basic nature of labour-capital relations in agriculture. Yet farm workers, for all they may have found general satisfaction in their work, found fault with many aspects of it: the uneven and onerous conditions of work, the poor living conditions, the long hours, and the low pay. But rather than interpret their grievances in the broad terms of a fundamental conflict between their aims and those of capital, they regarded them as merely occasional or specific complaints against the conditions of a particular job or the demands of a particular employer. When they did object, it was to specific problems.

Like workers in other industries, farm workers tried to soften the harsh realities of their experience of class. They sought to exercise control over the pace of work, to avoid the more burdensome tasks, and to resist the demands of harsh employers. They gained a measure of control over their conditions of work by employing strategies that were highly individualistic. With the crying shortage of agricultural labour, they could easily find other work at conditions that were better, whether their criteria for 'better' meant higher wages, or better food or a better chance to learn. Their criteria depended greatly on their individual circumstances and aspirations, and could shift dramatically in the course of their work cycle.

Men set their own limits to what conditions they would tolerate. At times they were willing to accept low wages, at other times poor conditions. When Fred Pringle found work on a threshing crew, he remarked that "Men mad as wildcats" because "Beds not in." By the next day he was "Mad as a wildcat" himself. Although the men let their anger be known, they were willing to put up with the conditions because wages were high. Pringle made at least $73.00 and felt that the inconvenience was worth it. But Pringle's tolerance was limited, and before the job was finished, he reported that he "Got fired because I wouldn't work in the night."[164] At this point Pringle had the option of finding work with another threshing crew, or hiring on with a farmer until freeze-up, or of moving out to his homestead. He chose the latter. Pringle was acting in his capacity first as a farm labourer and then as a farmer.

Thus the strategies men developed in their position as apprentice farmers dovetailed neatly with those they pursued in their position in the agricultural workforce. In the short-term, the success of these tactics led to their continued use. In an industry dominated by a large number of employers, with abundant opportunities for at least short-term employment, and under constant pressure of time from the seasonal nature of its production, farm workers were able to respond quickly and most effectively to rapid fluctuations in demands for their labour by acting autonomously.

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[164]. GAI M1008/A .P957 Frederick Pringle Papers p 144

They drew upon a large arsenal of tactics of resistance, manipulating their conditions of work in subtle ways to provide temporary relief. When Ebe Koeppen was put to work pulling stinkweeds, he declared it "the most senseless thing you ever seen [sic] in your life. ... Absolutely insane." He "worked faithfully for a while" but was soon fed up, and "Just layed [sic] down in the field and snored away."[165] Other tactics required sensitivity to personal relationships. Harry Baldwin worked out an understanding with his employer in which "swearing was the staple of our conversation." Each morning, Baldwin would "prepare for the duel," which gave tacit recognition to the fundamental antagonism between himself and his boss over the amount of work to be performed, but which at the same time recognized the cooperative and egalitarian nature of the labour: "On such terms we worked well together."[166]

The common feature of these tactics was their autonomy. They could best be practised individually, with farm workers taking immediate advantage of a situation in which they could exercise control. The ultimate tactic was simple and direct: if they were dissatisfied with their wages or conditions of work, hired hands simply walked off the job. Gaston Giscard, farm worker, was unrepentant about leaving his employer to find different job experiences. But Gaston Giscard, established farmer, took a different attitude when he brought out a hired man from his native France, advanced the man's fare and paid him the going rate, only to have the hand move on, in "a not-very-considerate manner...at ten o'clock that night without even unharnessing the horses." To Giscard's chagrin, he learned the next day that his man had "met a settler on the way and made an agreement to go and work for him."[167]

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[165]. Koeppen in Knight Stump Ranch Chronicles p 53

[166]. Baldwin A Farm for Two Pounds p 262

Job-jumping was such a common feature of farm work that men who moved from job to job were called "boomers" or "thirty-day men". Job-jumping was more than a simple inconvenience to farmers. It was a pragmatic response to an industry characterized by inconsistency and rapid flux in its labour demands, and it was a potent weapon in both the defensive and offensive arsenal of agricultural labourers. It was also one that was used widely by many other segments of the Canadian labour force, particularly workers in other resource and extractive industries, in construction, and even in mass-production industries.[168] It disciplined employers, it influenced wages and working conditions and it shaped the contours of labour-capital relations.

Withholding labour is one of the most powerful weapons of collective labour action, yet it can be used effectively by individuals as well. Farm workers in prairie agriculture employed it as individuals. They had to be able to respond quickly to rapid changes in labour demands, and individual mobility emerged as the most adaptable tactic. It is not surprising to find farm workers employing a strategic package that was strongly characterized by short-term pragmatism and individualistic responses. They demonstrated the independence that was both cause and effect of their class experience, yet demonstrated, too, that their experience was determined by their class.

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[167]. Giscard Dans La Prairie Canadienne pp 149-50

[168]. Ian Radforth Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987; Craig Heron Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935 Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1988

Farmers could do little but rail against this independence. Georgina Binnie-Clark and her neighbour Si Booth shared the common feeling that for a hired man to leave his job abruptly was the "meanest trick I've known any man play."[169] But the time was approaching when labour practised the tactic so widely that it began to hamper production seriously. The agricultural industry would be forced to reassess the nature of its reliance upon such a recalcitrant workforce.

This was perplexing. Labour and capital had reached an alliance that ensured enough benefits to make both feel well-served. Farm hands who were fundamentally dissatisfied with their position could find many avenues of escape. Those who chose to remain in waged work enjoyed a demand for their labour that gave them a high degree of independence. At the individual level, farmers were faced with independent men like Charles Drury who admitted "I was a funny fellow -- no odds where I was working." Drury used the labour situation of the wheat boom to pick and choose his jobs according to his own criteria. His sense of independence was enhanced when he could say "Go to it" in the morning and find another job in the afternoon.[170] Farmers who needed labour found that although they could rely upon the availability of land to subsidize their labour costs, they still had to be cautious about conditions of work and had to temper their demands to the objectives of their workers. The partnership that resulted was an accommodation of necessity, but it was no less real. Despite instances of antagonism and even the effective use by farm workers of tactics of resistance, relations between labour and capital in prairie agriculture during the early years of the wheat boom were characterized not by conflict but by cooperation.

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[169]. Binnie-Clark Wheat and Woman p 247

IV

This partnership continued even after the boom began to slump in 1912. It was a time of distress for farm workers and their employers alike, but they did not see the economic changes as a portent of the fundamental alteration in the relationship between labour and capital. They shared a common concern for the fortunes of the agricultural industry, whatever their place in it, and they looked forward to a return of prosperity.

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[170]. PAM MG 8/B9 Charles Drury Papers pp 22, 24

Ironically, the prosperity of the First World War was the catalyst in redirecting the course of labour-capital relations. War-time prosperity was of a different nature from that of the period of settlement expansion. If the wheat boom had appeared to have happened overnight, the war boom was even more sudden. And following on the heels of three years of depression, it was even more striking. In the first crop year of the war, a bumper wheat crop found a ready market, pushing agricultural profits to a new record. Prairie wheat production rose to more than 360 million bushels in 1915, from the average of almost 185 million bushels of the previous three years. The farm value of the 1915 wheat crop was $324.8 million, compared to $135.9 million in 1914, and the farm value of the 1915 harvest of all major crops rose to $441.3 million from $220.9 million.[171] There was an urgency to this round of fortune, since the war was expected to be short-lived. With apparently unlimited markets and an anticipated increase in the price of wheat, farmers rushed to expand their acreage. Prairie wheat acreage began a steady rise in 1915, going to 13.9 million acres from the 10 million acres of 1914.[172]

Farm workers also took advantage. When they could, they began farming on their own account, and more than 89,000 homesteads were taken up during the war years.[173] In order to encourage this movement, homestead regulations were relaxed. An Order-in-Council under the War Measures Act provided for homesteaders to count farm employment "as a like period of residence in connection with their respective entries," provided that they were engaged in "actual farm labour" and could provide "sworn evidence satisfactory to the Minister of the Interior" to that effect.[174] High wages in war-time industries outside the prairies lured many, as did the high enlistment rate among young single men. Those remaining were catapulted into a strong bargaining position. For the first time, the inability or unwillingness of farmers to pay wages competitive with other industries began to take a serious toll. Without adequate farm help, farmers would not only have to temper their expansion, but would have to face the possibility of curtailing their operations just when they could reap the greatest profits.

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[171]. See Table III-5 Wheat Production; Table III-6 Wheat Farm Value; Table III-3 Major Crop Farm Value. "Major crops" are defined here as wheat, oats, barley, rye, mixed grains and flaxseed.

[172]. See Table III-4 Wheat Acreage

The partnership that had been built upon mutual accommodation begin to show signs of strain. Observers warned that the familiar and satisfying relationship between farmers and their hired hands might not survive the determination of each to profit from the fragile prosperity. "Unless the war speedily ends[,] farm labor of the better sort will be scarce," warned the Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal in 1915. "It may be that the scarcity of labor will develop conditions that will revolutionize methods of employing and handling workmen on the farm."[175]

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[173]. See Table I-4A Homestead Entries. This was actually lower than the rate for the previous decade. But the period 1904-13 was a time of rapid immigration when good lands were still plentiful.

[174]. "Homesteaders as Farm Hands" Agricultural Gazette of Canada Vol 4 1917 p 252

The newly articulated antagonism between labour and capital was manifested in familiar ways. Labour continued to use its most effective strategy, withholding its services, to push up wages. Capital continued to look for cooperation in its own ranks, buttressed by government support, to provide a labour supply and to hold wages down. Neither tactic was new, but the special circumstances of war added a new force to the demands.

Farm workers sought higher wages immediately. Despite farmers' resistance, wages began to move upward, but the rise did not at first appear dramatic. Monthly wages increased slowly in the first year of war. But cumulatively, by 1916 in Saskatchewan, farm workers' wages were more than twenty-five percent above their 1914 level. Harvest wages also showed slow initial upward movement. From $2.50 per day in 1914, Saskatchewan harvest wages rose to $3.00 per day in 1916.[176]

But as the war dragged on, increasing recruitment and manufacturing employment continued to draw men from the prairies. As labour shortages became more acute, farm workers pressed their advantage. In 1917, both monthly and harvest wages shot upward. In Saskatchewan, annual wages went to $458 in 1917 from $215 of the previous year. Harvest wages rose to an unheard-of $4.00 per day. By the next year, Saskatchewan annual wages were up to $549, more than three times the pre-war figure, and were matched by harvest wages of more than $4.50.[177]

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[175]. "Farm Workmen" Farmer's Advocate and Home Journal 8/12/1915 p 1530

[176]. See Table II-5A Annual Farm Workers' Wages; Table II-5D Saskatchewan Farm Workers' Wages; Table II-5E Harvest Wages

Given the high wheat prices, farmers might well have been able to manage higher wages, but they first attempted to do without help. Some important agricultural practices, such as proper fallow tillage or fall ploughing, were easy to neglect.[178] The greater difficulties arose at harvest time, when the demand for labour drove up wages. Farmers importuned the various levels of government to regulate both labour supply and harvest wages, complaining bitterly that they were "being held up by unscrupulous laborers."[179]

Government response was cautious. "I have read your remarks concerning the hired man with interest," was the reply of a Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture official to one such farmer's complaint, "and I think probably some of the difficulties you have encountered at this time would arise from the fact that high wages are being paid, and a laborer has a tendency to become independent under such conditions."[180]

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[177]. See Table II-5D Saskatchewan Farm Workers' Wages; Table II-5E Harvest Wages

[178]. John Herd Thompson "'Permanently Wasteful but Immediately Profitable': Prairie Agriculture and the Great War" Historical Papers/Communications historiques 1976 p 198

[179]. PAM MG 10/E1 United Farmers of Manitoba Papers Box 5 "Resolutions to be considered at the Grain Growers' Convention, Brandon 9-11/1/1918"

Indeed, farm workers did take advantage of the labour shortages to demand higher wages. They were met by more concerted action on the part of their employers, a legacy of the cooperative and associational activities of farmers during the pioneering and settlement period. Acting through the organizations that they had been building to protect their marketing interests, farmers tried to use their influence to force government action. In 1916 the Balcarres Grain Growers' Cooperative Association passed a resolution and forwarded it to the Saskatchewan Bureau of Labour in the form of a petition: The membership objected to farm workers taking "advantage of the present European War, in order to force up the price of farm labour. We do not consider it a fair deal to farmers of Western Canada." They petitioned both the federal and provincial governments "to introduce a measure to regulate the wage question for farm labour during 1916 or until PEACE has been declared."[181] Their particular target was "the foreign element of our Country."

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[180]. SAB 266/1/1609 Department of Agriculture, Statistics Branch Movement of Threshing Machines E. Oliver to Geo. Adams 28/10/1915

[181]. SAB M1/IV Walter Scott Papers: Labour p 46109 "Petition" from The Balcarres Grain Growers' Cooperative Association 1916

They demanded that wages be set at $350.00 per year for foreign farm workers, and although they were willing to allow the wages of Canadian men to rise above that figure, insisted that men earning more than $350.00 "shall be called upon to contribute at least $5.00 per month to Red Cross or Patriotic funds."[182] Other farm organizations across the prairies followed suit, translating the wage demands of foreigners and recent immigrants as disloyalty. But their real desire was for a cheap and docile labour force.[183] The resolution from the Municipality of North Cypress to Manitoba Premier T.C. Norris was explicit:

> That this council go on record as being opposed to the exorbitant wages demanded by the aliens throughout the province and would suggest that $3.00 per day or $65.00 per month be the highest wages paid for harvest laborers and further we consider any alien asking higher wages should be interned.[184]

Such drastic proposals were not carried out, but immigrants expecting higher wages were faced with severe measures. When fourteen Austrians near Brandon demanded $4.00 per day instead of the $3.50 that local farmers considered reasonable, they were charged under the Alien Enemies Act. After getting off with only a fine, they were willing to work for $3.25 per day.[185]

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[182]. Ibid.

[183]. On Ukrainian workers, for example, see John Herd Thompson "The Enemy Alien and the Canadian General Election of 1917" in John Herd Thompson and Frances Swyripa, eds. Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians in Canada during the Great War Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies 1983 pp 29-30

[184]. PAM MG 13/HI T.C. Norris Papers p 931 "Resolution" from Municipality of North Cypress 4/8/1917; see also PAM MG 14/B45 Valentine Winkler Papers

Even more serious for farmers than the question of wages was the supply of labour, and it was here that the increasing tensions between labour and capital were most visible. Farmers felt beleaguered by the new-found strength of farm workers, and used their organizations to urge governments to make "the most strenuous efforts" to provide farm labour. The Manitoba Grain Growers' Association petitioned the Union Government to close "all non-essential businesses and [draft] men for farm work who are not engaged in essential operations", to return immediately to farms all "bona fide farmers and farm labourers who have been called under the Military Service Act", and to fix a maximum wage for "competent men and a minimum for boys and inexperienced men."[186]

Governments took no official action to regulate wages, but they did continue to work with the agricultural industry to find an adequate supply of labour. There would be no compulsion. "I am unable to see in what way the Government can interfere and insist on laborers accepting any particular pay," declared Manitoba's Minister of Agriculture and Immigration, "as we have no power to make anyone work who does not want to." He expressed regret at government powerlessness: "I know the situation is serious, but we are unable to do anything that I can see, I wish we could."[187]

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[185]. NAC RG 76 Immigration Branch Vol 132 File 29490 part 7 "Extract from a weekly letter from Mr. Bruce Walker to Mr. Scott" 24/8/1917

[186]. PAM MG10/E1 United Farmers of Manitoba Papers Box 15 "Report of Proceedings of Annual Convention Manitoba Grain Growers' Year Book, 1918 p 61

But if governments could not force men to accept the farmers' conditions, there were indirect ways of providing a more pliant workforce. The agricultural industry was able to enlist government aid in finding new sources of labour in groups more susceptible to control, such as soldiers-in-training. In Saskatchewan in 1916, the Bureau of Labour reported that "the Militia Department at Ottawa granted a furlough of thirty days to any non-commissioned officer or man who desired to accept work on a farm," and about fifteen hundred soldiers were granted leave. The following spring a Leave of Absence Board was established to grant leave to "any draftee who was a bona fide farmer and whose services were urgently required on the land."[188] In Alberta in 1916, "a little over one hundred hand-picked men from Vancouver, late in the season, [were selected] to fill the places of soldiers who returned early for camp duty."[189] Members of patriotic organizations consisting of "able bodied volunteers ... professional and business men, merchants, clerks and artizans [sic]" were also pressed into service.[190] In Saskatchewan, the Bureau of Labour mounted a campaign to ensure an adequate supply of farm labour. It charged local committees with obtaining the "kinds of labour not heretofore fully or regularly employed in farming operations such as boys, girls, women, retired farmers, elevator and implement men, etc." Teen-aged boys were recruited under the auspices of the Canada Food Board and the Bureau of Labour. Arrangements with the Department of Education allowed the boys to leave school for farm work without loss of school credits. Those who worked steadily for at least three months were rewarded with a bronze badge for their service as "Soldiers of the Soil."[191] In Alberta, special provisions were made to allow children to work on farms, with lowered grade requirements for "qualifying examinations in the high and public schools."[192]

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[187]. PAM MG 14/B45 Valentine Winkler Papers p 2379 Winkler to W.R. Wood 11/7/1917

[188]. Saskatchewan Bureau of Labour Annual Report 1916 p 22

[189]. Agricultural Gazette of Canada Vol 3 1916 p 248

But even these sources of labour were insufficient to meet the demand, and the agricultural industry insisted that the net be cast wider. This carried new hazards, for it was a tacit recognition that farm workers were operating with a new strength. This in turn elicited a powerful response.

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[190]. SAB M4/I/101 W. M. Martin Papers: Labour: Farm: N. De Wind "Patriotic Harvesting Clubs" pp 30079-30082. See also the offer from the Canadian Credit Men's Trust Association of its members' services to the Canadian Council of Agriculture. PAM MG 10/E2/1 Canadian Council of Agriculture Minutes Winnipeg 1/2/1917

[191]. Saskatchewan Bureau of Labour Annual Report 1916 p 21

[192]. Agricultural Gazette of Canada Vol 3 1916 p 248

The spectre of radical labour organizations haunted government and industry. For farm workers on the prairies, this was especially serious, since efforts to organize them came only from those groups against which strong measures of control were aimed. The Industrial Workers of the World, characterized by the press as "that mysterious organization of restless anarchical unskilled labourers rapidly spreading throughout North America," bore the brunt of the attack.[193] The experience of the "Wobblies" on the Canadian prairies clearly demonstrates the range and strength of concerted government and police reaction, as the IWW laboured under the double burden of espousing radicalism and of threatening the major western Canadian industry when it was most vulnerable.[194]

In 1916, faced with an acute wartime labour shortage, the federal government issued a call for additional harvest help from the United States. This was an extreme measure, in view of the recent IWW success in American wheatfields where aggressive organizing tactics had caused membership in the newly-formed Agricultural Workers' Organization to burgeon to eighteen thousand members in its first year of operation. With 116 chapters by 1916, the AWO became the largest unit of the IWW, financially and organizationally underwriting expansion into the lumber and mining industries.[195] Anxious though it was to secure American harvest help, the federal government was diligent in its campaign to curtail labour radicalism. Compared to the pre- and post-war movement of harvesters from the United States, relatively few men actually crossed the line during the war.[196] Nonetheless, immigration inspectors were instructed to "use great care and caution that no I.W.W. agitators under the guise of harvesters ... attempt to enter the country."[197]

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[193]. The Albertan [Calgary] 22/8/1917

[194]. The material on the IWW has appeared in Cecilia Danysk "'Showing Those Slaves Their Class Position': Barriers to Organizing Prairie Farm Workers" in David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds. Building Beyond the Homestead Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1985 pp 170-172

IWW organizers were undeterred. By October, 1916, Industrial Solidarity was able to report with satisfaction that there were already "quite a few Wobblys [sic] on the job."[198] The local press responded less favourably: "The

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[195]. Philip Taft "The I.W.W. in the Grain Belt" in Stanley Coben and Forest G. Hill, eds. American Economic History: Essays in Interpretation Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott 1966 pp 349-350. On the IWW generally see Philip S. Foner History of the Labour Movement in the United States Vol 4 The Industrial Workers of the World 1905-1917 New York: International Publishers 1984; Melvin Dubofsky We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World Chicago: Quadrangle Books 1969; Paul F. Brissenden The I.W.W., a study of American syndicalism New York: Columbia University 1919. For a contemporary sociological view, see Carleton H. Parker The Casual Laborer, and other essays New York: Harcourt Brace and Howe 1920

[196]. Only 957 harvest excursionists came from the United States in 1917, and 224 in 1918, compared to 5000 in 1911 and 2204 in 1926. John Herd Thompson "Bringing in the Sheaves: The Harvest Excursionists, 1890-1929" Canadian Historical Review LIX:4 December 1978 p 472

[197]. NAC RG76 Immigration Branch Records Vol 619 File 917093 Part 1 J. B. Walker to R. J. Reid 28/8/1917

[198]. "Threshing in Canada" Industrial Solidarity 21/10/1916

I.W.W. ... are causing some alarm in different parts of Southern Alberta," warned The Albertan in August 1917. "Reports of activity come to the city from Vulcan where they have been endeavouring to tie up harvest operations."[199]

Official response was swift and stern. Fearing an invasion of "IWW agitators who will certainly create ferment and foment disturbances," bringing "dissension among the threshing gangs, causing strikes or even burning up outfits,"[200] federal immigration officials worked closely with dominion and provincial police to prevent their entry to the prairies. Deportation proceedings were "obviously insufficient and ineffective" in combatting the expected influx of Wobblies, according to J. Bruce Walker, the federal Commissioner of Immigration, who sought to bypass the usual arrest and trial procedures in order to "cope expeditiously with numbers of these persons."[201] In his internal correspondence, Walker admitted that "our legal action in these cases has not rested upon a very solid foundation."[202]

In the meantime, his department was "making the most stringent regulations and taking the utmost precautions to prevent any descent upon Canada from Dakota of the I.W.W.'s who are in strong force there."[203] Farm workers at border points were carefully scrutinized "as to their connection with the I.W.W. movement, and upon the least suspicion of being in sympathy, were turned back to Uncle Sam."[204] In addition, immigration inspectors were sent to the United States to work with local officials who were equally anxious to put a stop to IWW activities. Fear of harvest disruptions and sabotage prompted cooperation among law enforcement agencies on both sides of the border. In 1917, a Montana sheriff warned his counterpart in Fernie, British Columbia

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[199]. The Albertan 22/8/1917. I am indebted to Paul Voisey for bringing this information to my attention.

[200]. NAC RG76 Immigration Branch Records Vol 619 File 917093 Part 1 J. B. Walker to R. J. Reid 28/8/1917; S. R. Waugh RNWMP Report 3/8/1917

[201]. Ibid. J. B. Walker to W. D. Scott 11/8/1917

[202]. Ibid. J. B. Walker to W. D. Scott 18/9/1917

> that we have a gang of I.W.W.'s who are enlisting men, or swearing them to go to Canada to burn the crops and destroy property, and I am going to put the fly-cops on them tonight and may make a cleanup. I am putting you wise so you put the Canadian officers on the lookout, as I get it they are to go there to work.[205]

If the Wobblies managed to enter Canada, they were carefully watched. Under the direction of the federal Department of Immigration, close surveillance was maintained on one such farm worker employed near Champion in 1917. Philip Lintz, a naturalized American of German origin, was "a rabid socialist," according to his employer, "and strongly in favour of the I.W.W. organization."[206] Superintendent of Immigration W. D. Scott declared that "His name is in itself sufficient cause to pick him up for examination as a suspected enemy subject." Immigration officers were advised that "If he carries no proof of his United States naturalization, I would detain him until he gets proof." Scott was anxious to have Lintz deported, suggesting that an American interpretation of regulations dealing with enemy subjects "might be useful in a case like this," or that a possible irregularity in his entry to Canada would "enable you to deal with him."[207] When this proved unsuccessful, a RNWMP sergeant was assigned to keep continuous watch on his mail, his movements, and his contacts.[208]

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[203] Ibid. J. B. Walker to W. D. Scott 2/8/1917

[204] Ibid. "I.W.W. Not Allowed to Cross into Canada" Montana Record-Herald 14/9/1917

[205] Ibid. J.E. Brook to W.D. Scott 28/8/1917

[206] Ibid. S.R. Waugh RNWMP Report 3/8/1917

Continuously under the watchful eye of the police, IWW organizers in Canada could do little. "There have been a few arrests for being too patriotic to the cause", reported Industrial Solidarity, when threshers at Weyburn were jailed and fined because "they kicked on the grub they had for breakfast". Others near Regina were sentenced to ninety days in jail "for refusing to work after 6 o'clock at night."[209] Finally, in 1918, an Order-in-Council declared the IWW illegal; membership in the organization became subject to a penalty of from one to five years in jail.[210]

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[207]. Ibid. W. D. Scott to Dunlop 23/7/1917

[208]. On the Lintz case, see also Barbara Roberts Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada, 1900-1935 Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1988 pp 76-7

[209]. "Threshing in Canada" Industrial Solidarity 21/10/1916

[210]. Order-in-Council 2384 28/9/1918

Other controls upon the agricultural labour force were less direct, but no less effective. During the conscription debate and the 1917 federal election campaign, farmers, their sons, and their hired help were promised exemptions in exchange for support of conscription. But just as planting was about to begin in 1918, the blanket exemptions were withdrawn. Then, provincial governments took up farmers' pleas for relief from the labour shortage. Saskatchewan struck a Special Committee on Farm Labour that recommended that

> all men drafted, or who will be drafted, under the Military Service Act who have been farming land, bona fide farm labourers, ... be given leave of absence as soon as possible, such leave to continue while such men are actually engaged in farm work.[211]

The report made a number of other recommendations to draw upon unlikely or reluctant sources of labour, including women and children (recommending compulsion in the case of teen-aged boys), and proposed offering exemptions for married men with children who would agree to engage in farm labour. To add teeth to the plan, the report recommended registering all militarily eligible men "for the purpose of assigning them to farms should the necessity arise." Finally, it urged amendments to the criminal code "to make the vagrancy provisions more readily available to unemployed persons."[212]

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[211]. SAB M12/II/39 Motherwell Papers: European War: Farm Labour Exemptions p 5608 "The Report of the Special Committee on Farm Labour"

The federal government did agree to grant exemptions for farm labour, but farmers in need of help, and men who wished to undertake the work, had to apply individually, calling upon provincial governments to support their applications.[213] Men who were thus released from war service had been carefully screened and were compelled by the terms of their exemption to remain in the service of the farmers who had requested their release. Leslie Hutchinson was a hired hand from Saskatchewan who found himself tied to his farm employment by the red tape of exemption regulations. His former employer, who had already secured a short-term exemption for him the previous year, requested another release. "Leslie Hutchinson [is] a young man who has always worked on a farm and is well experienced in the use of all farm machinery," explained his employer. "I would like to have this man to help me run my machinery, as I find it almost impossible to get help of this kind."[214] Hutchinson no doubt welcomed the release from military service, but he was forced to pay a heavy price: losing his independent bargaining power just at the time when it was the strongest.

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[212]. Ibid. pp 5608, 5609 "The Report of the Special Committee on Farm Labour"

[213]. See for example PAM MG14/B45 Valentine Winkler Papers; SAB M6/X-203-3 Charles Dunning Papers: Exemptions from Military

[214]. SAB M6/X-203-3 Charles Dunning Papers: Exemptions from Military p 42622 Isaac West to Charles Dunning 15/5/1918

Individually, farm workers and their employers continued to work out compromise solutions to the problems created by their divergent interests. But in the composite, labour and capital were adamant in their determination to wrest all they could from the short-term prosperity of the war. Labour continued to withhold its services and to demand high wages, while capital continued to expand production. Calling for government aid tipped the balance in favour of capital, and farm workers found that their extra bargaining strength was severely curtailed by the alliance between the agricultural industry and government. Still, labour did not capitulate, as witnessed by the soaring wages in the later years of the war and by the increasing desperation of farmers for more help. In self-defence, the agricultural industry moved in a new direction: to replace labour with machinery.

The starting point in this manoeuvre was the reduction of labour-intensive farming practices. The imperatives of profiting from high prices and of managing farm operations with a shortage of labour caused prairie farmers to increase their specialization in wheat, and to abandon recommended agricultural practices such as summer-fallowing and plowing-under stubble. In terms of production, the short-term result was higher profits while the long-term result was decreased yields. In terms of labour needs, the short-term result was a further concentration of labour demand at harvest time while the long-term result was a new perspective on agricultural technology.

Throughout the pioneering and settlement period, agricultural technology had been geared to agricultural expansion. Improvements in machinery and implement design that were labelled as labour-saving did make more efficient use of labour, but the agricultural expansion they made possible resulted in an overall increase in labour needs. Especially in wheat growing, rates of agricultural production increased faster than the growth of the agricultural workforce. By 1911, the total male agricultural workforce was more than six-and-a-half times what it had been in 1891, but wheat acreage by 1911 was close to ten times what it had been in 1891.[215] The war-induced crisis of labour supply gave a new meaning to the term "labour-saving."

But the steps toward replacement of the labour force by improved technology were slow and halting. There was little innovation in implement design, and such machinery as gasoline tractors were not widely adopted. Despite the need to find solutions to the labour scarcity, the alliance of government and capital was unable to come to a working arrangement that would provide a permanent resolution of labour problems.

As late as 1918, the federal government seemed still to be coming to terms with the fact that agriculture was indeed suffering from a shortage of labour. The Department of Agriculture in that year warned that the supply of farm labour was "gradually but surely falling off, with wages just as surely and even more rapidly rising".[216] Farmers had finally come to realize that the shortage would not be solved by long-standing methods of recruitment and control. At its annual convention in 1918, the Manitoba Grain Growers went on record as recognizing that "the scarcity of competent farm help must be replaced by labor-saving machinery, in order that vast acres of fertile lands now lying idle may be brought into use". They petitioned the Union government "to place all farm machinery and implements required in the production of food-stuffs on the [duty] free list."[217]

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[215]. See Table I-3 Agricultural Workforce; Table III-4 Wheat Acreage. Author's calculations.

Such a costly measure was unpalatable to the Union government, although it did agree to remove the tariff on gasoline tractors valued at less than $1400.[218] It agreed that technology could be used more effectively to meet the labour shortage and encouraged farmers to increase crop production while reducing labour needs. "Work Less Do More" urged the circular from the Minister of Agriculture. "Save Time, Men and Money by using More Horses and Larger Machines." Farmers were given a detailed list of minor technological improvements that would prove to be "highly profitable even in times of normal wages". Disc harrowing with a single disc and team of two horses would cost $1.00 in labour to cover an acre twice, but the same operation "and a much better job" could be performed for only 60 cents if a double disc and four horses were used. More importantly, "One man does the work of two." Even a minor improvement could result in a substantial saving of labour. "If a double disc harrow is not available", counselled the circular, "attach a single disc throwing the soil inward to one throwing it outward and put on four horses. One man's time is saved." Most farm operations were susceptible to such labour economies. A modification in the hay rack, using end pieces right across the rack, changed the job of building the load from "a good man's job" to "boy's work." Adding a sheaf carrier to the binder added two acres to the amount of stooking a man could accomplish in a day.[219]

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[216]. Canada Dominion Experimental Farms Labour Saving on the Farm Special Circular No. 16 Ottawa: Department of Agriculture 1918 pp 1-2

[217]. PAM MG 10/E1 United Farmers of Manitoba Papers Box 15 Manitoba Grain Growers' Year Book, 1918 "Report of Proceedings of Annual Convention" Brandon 1918

[218]. Thompson Harvests of War p 154

Such modifications and even minor additions to the store of farm equipment were not major technological breakthroughs, but they were a recognition that technology was the key not simply to agricultural expansion but to the elimination of labour. The war-time demands of labour pushed agricultural technology along a new course, appropriate to the new climate of labour-capital relations.

The First World War drove a wedge between labour and capital in prairie agriculture. The fundamental antagonism muted by the early years of the wheat boom was articulated openly, as worker and farmer used whatever tactics necessary to reap greater benefits from the fragile wartime prosperity. As individuals, farm hands and their bosses coexisted cooperatively; as labour and capital in the west's predominant industry, they eyed each other with suspicion and hostility.

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[219]. Dominion Experimental Farms Labour Saving on the Farm pp 1-2

CHAPTER 5

"You're working for yourself you might say"*: The dialectic of consent and resistance

Robert Yates was an easterner who came to the harvest fields in 1926 and stayed on as a hired hand. "The work was drudgery of the worst sort," he declared. Prairie farm hands faced significant changes in their lives and labour during the 1920s. As the agricultural industry moved increasingly into the commercial web, and as agrarian society adjusted to new economic imperatives, their social and economic positions deteriorated. Yet men found many reasons for choosing this line of work. For Yates, it was rewarding in itself. He insisted that "a worker's sense of loyalty to his task can make a passion of any toil."[2]

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* The title of this chapter comes from an account of a Danish immigrant employed on a farm near High River in the mid-1920s. His words explain why he chose agricultural labour. PAA 73.167 Phono Interview with Jens Skinberg by Ellen Nygaard and Reevan Dolgoy 31/1/1973

[2]. Robert Yates When I Was a Harvester Toronto: Macmillan 1930 p 46

Jens Skinberg is an example of a hired hand who found an echo in the words of Robert Yates. Skinberg was drawn to the prairie west from his native Denmark by the anticipated autonomy of farm ownership. But by the time he arrived, agricultural labour no longer provided an easy entry. He continued working as a hired hand. The autonomy of his job gave him a good deal of satisfaction, creating the illusion of "working for yourself." Yet Skinberg was not simply indulging in delusion. His conviction was tempered by realism about the labour involved and resonated with his own ability to influence the nature of his work and social conditions. His experience is illustrative of the men who laboured in agriculture at a time when their position was becoming more fixed, and their relations with capital were taking on new dimensions.

Skinberg had come to the prairie west with every intention of becoming a farm owner. He expected that his stint as an agricultural labourer would be a short one, while he accumulated the necessary capital to start up on his own. But the closest he came to operating his own farm was the short period when he rented a half-section in partnership with another man. For many similarly disappointed newcomers, the alternative was to leave agriculture altogether. In fact, in his years as a farm labourer, Skinberg at times drifted off to Vancouver and "various other places" in search of winter work. But the spring planting season invariably drew him back to the prairies. He "moved around quite a bit" in his pursuit of farm work, but he never seriously considered abandoning it.

Despite the hard work and low pay that agricultural labour offered, Skinberg chose it for advantages he did not find in other lines of work. He found a ready welcome in the agricultural community that was not duplicated anywhere else. He returned year after year to work on the same farms and was part of a social network that encompassed all elements of the rural society. As a member of the Dalum [Alberta] Bachelor's Club, he was invited to "a fancy dinner" as often as once a week. Although membership in the club theoretically was restricted to men who were over thirty years of age and owners of property, Skinberg was a member in good standing and enjoyed the "drinking, poker, dancing or hymns" along with the other "thirty or so bachelors." He was proud to be part of a band that would play free of charge for "various little do's."

The close network of rural society was reinforced for Skinberg by kinship in his ethnic community. The conviviality of "Danish traditional entertainment" was an important feature of the social life. Each year the Bachelor's Club would hold a party for all the local families and would regale them with spontaneous songs about local events and people, a favourite Danish pastime. Skinberg's working life was also centred in the Danish community. He found most of his farm jobs within the district, and even when he worked farther away in the sugar beet fields near Raymond, Alberta, he returned to Dalum as soon as he heard the crops were ripening.

Skinberg's loyalty was rewarded by mutually satisfying relations with his employers. "Especially in the tough times," he recalled, he "was almost the same as one of the family." The work, too, held its own rewards. Skinberg's independence was nourished when he was able to have the latitude to "sit down if I felt like it" or adjust his own pace and schedule, choosing whether or not to "work after supper." Skinberg spent his years in the prairie west as a hired hand out of choice, finding in the nature of the work and in the farming community sufficient satisfaction to tie him to agricultural labour.

In the post-war decade, the interests of labour and capital in agriculture began to diverge. Still wedded to their dream of farm ownership, farm workers faced an ever-widening gulf between this hope and the possibility of its realization. They faced, too, important changes in the economic fortunes of prairie agriculture. The economic circumstances of the waged sector of the agricultural workforce came more clearly to reflect its objective economic position. The social circumstances of farm workers were more problematic, presenting many holdovers from an earlier time of social equality, yet diverging from that experience in often subtle ways. Increasingly, the lives of farm workers were refracted through the prism of class.

This chapter explores the complex nature of a relationship that was becoming conflictual, yet one in which the conflicts were played out in muted form. It looks closely at three different avenues by which farm workers arrived at a delicate balance between consent to their new position and resistance to their conditions. Their resistance was restricted by externally-imposed repression. Their consent was procured by internalized constraints. Ultimately, though, the contest was played out in the workplace, where farm workers and their employers negotiated an uneasy truce. As hired hands were well aware, there are many reasons - both coercive and liberating - that cause a worker to "make a passion" of his toil.

I

Jens Skinberg's arrival in the west coincided with a decade of uncertainty for prairie agriculture. Overall, there was growth. By the end of the decade, there were more farms, more land under cultivation, and more agricultural production, but compared to the boom years of the pre-war settlement period, and to the surge of the First World War, the increase was uneven.[3]

Prairie agriculture emerged from the war with highs in production and prices, but at the cost of lower grain yields and a heavy burden of debt. European agricultural recovery as well as increased competition from other grain-producing countries caused grain prices to fall by 1920, then to continue to drop, then to fluctuate widely over the decade.

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[3]. See Table II-1 Prairie Farms; Table III-5 Wheat Production

The post-war slump did not strike immediately. In the first year of peace, when the federal government removed its $2.21 ceiling, the price of wheat rose to $2.24 per bushel. The following year it fell slightly to $2.18, but then began a sharp decline. By 1923-24, it bottomed out at $1.07. The relatively low prices for wheat during the first half of the 1920s reflected a generally depressed state for agriculture. The second half of the decade showed continued decline. Wheat prices rose to $1.69 in 1924-5, then declined to an average of $1.38 for the remainder of the decade.[4]

In the immediate post-war period the industry actually contracted, as farmers abandoned unproductive areas. In Manitoba, the interlake district and the area west of Lake Manitoba suffered population losses. The most severely hit area of the prairies was the dry region of Palliser's Triangle in southeast Alberta and southwest Saskatchewan. Originally ranching territory, the area was opened to agricultural settlement at a favourable time in the climatic cycle, which coincided with high prices for wheat. But by the end of the war, the area returned to its normal aridity. After five crop failures in a row, from 1917 to 1921, disillusioned farmers began to move off the land.[5] The CPR colonization office reported that large numbers of farmers in southern Alberta were "so discouraged that there is bound to be an exodus from certain sections which are hit the hardest."[6] Between 1921 and 1926, farmers in the Palliser's Triangle abandoned fifty-five percent of their farms.[7]

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[4]. See Table III-8A Wheat Prices

[5]. Vernon C. Fowke The National Policy and the Wheat Economy Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1957) 1973 pp 78-80; G. A. Elliott "Problems of a Retrograde Area in Alberta" in W. A. Mackintosh Economic Problems of the Prairie Provinces Toronto: Macmillan 1935 pp 291-4

In other areas, new farms were created, especially in the northern part of Saskatchewan, in the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, and in Alberta's Peace River country. At the middle of the decade, settlers began to move into the Peace River country, the wooded areas of Cold Lake and Beaver River in northeastern Alberta and northwestern Saskatchewan, and the Torch and Carrot River areas in Saskatchewan.[8] The census of 1931 revealed that occupied land had increased more than thirty-five percent since 1921, with almost all the increase taking place since 1926.[9]

Farming continued to attract a hard-working and ambitious population, but the financial rewards were very unevenly distributed. The surest route was expansion. Successful farmers enlarged their holdings by renting or buying the smaller farms of their unsuccessful neighbours.

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[6] GAI BN .C212 G CPR Papers P. L. Naismith Correspondence File 154 P. L. Naismith to Sir Augustus Nanton 4/1/1922

[7] R. W. Murchie Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier Toronto: Macmillan 1936 p 20. See also David C. Jones Empire of Dust: Settling and Abandoning the Prairie Dry Belt Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 1987

[8] Murchie Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier p 20

[9] See Table II-1 Prairie Farms

shoestring, in debt to a range of creditors, from mail-order stores and implement dealers to mortgage companies and banks. Farm obligations doubled and trebled in real terms with the collapse of prices after the war.[10] Even increased production gave no guarantee of an exit from the economic dilemma as farmers came face-to-face with the great problem of agriculture: high yields and large crops usually brought a reduction in prices.[11] Individual farmers were part of a commercial economy over which they had little control.

Although agriculture as a whole was prospering, individual farmers were faced with day-by-day and year-by-year decisions as they were hailed out, or dried out, or bottomed out of the market in years when good crops and high yields led to a glutted market and depressed prices. The pressing question was whether they could keep on farming until the next upward movement in yields and prices coincided with adequate rainfall, affordable labour, and no major disasters. The answer lay in their ability to predict the uncontrollable elements in farming, and to manipulate those over which they could exercise some control.

During the 1920s, they began to move more forcefully in directions that would give them control over their industry. In their attempt to influence the larger economic world in which they operated, they relied upon their agricultural which they operated, they relied upon their agricultural associations, they built upon co-operatives to establish pools, and they created political parties. In their attempt to control costs on their own farms, they stretched the traditional limits of relationships with their workers, and they found a new purpose for agricultural technology. These initiatives had direct consequences for farm workers and, in some cases, were precipitated by a labour force that was facing changes of its own.

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[10]. Fowke The National Policy and the Wheat Economy p 78

[11]. See Graph III-1 Wheat, 1905 to 1930

II

Proletarianization came piecemeal to prairie agriculture. It was an uneven and ongoing process, unplanned, unheralded, and largely unremarked. In an industry based upon a synthesis of labour and capital, there was no provision for a permanent waged labour force. Rather, small-scale agriculture assumed that capital would also be labour. Undercapitalized prairie farmers could act as a cohesive and rational unit by providing labour for one another and thus furthering not only their own economic interests but the interests of their industry as a whole. It was a neat package, but one that did not work as planned.

Economic necessity did result in the provision of the bulk of the labour from within the agricultural community. But the availability of free or cheap land during the pioneering and settlement period weakened the ability of farmers to hold on to their hired help. And for the busiest season, the labour force was simply too small. Harvest excursionists solved part of the problem. They were recruited explicitly as agricultural proletarians, even though for many the dream of farm ownership was an underlying theme. They did not own the means of production and they sold their labour for wages. But their position in the agricultural economy was temporary, and the transiency of their work reflected the perceived transiency of the economic position of waged agricultural labour. Excursionists provided supplementary labour during the harvest season, but labour needs during the rest of the year could not so easily be met by a workforce that so compliantly disappeared once its work was completed.

A permanent waged sector of the agricultural workforce did not appear by design or by distressed economic circumstances. A similar tendency toward a growing agricultural wage labour sector in the United States had been revealed in the census of 1910, prompting V. I. Lenin to undertake a detailed study of American agriculture. He concluded that the "principal earmark and index of capitalism in agriculture" was the growth of an agricultural proletariat.[12] What Lenin anticipated was that proletarianization in agriculture would come about through the downward mobility of marginal farmers who would be forced to give up their farms and enter the waged labour force. But this prospect was anathema to prairie farmers and central Canadian policy makers alike, since it struck at the very heart of the ideal of agricultural self-sufficiency as the key to economic independence. That this ideal was a myth for most prairie farmers, both in Canada and south of the border, has been well-documented.[13] These men hung onto their farms as long as they could manage to supplement their farm income with off-farm work. The fear of sinking permanently into wage labour caused them to move out of agriculture altogether when they realized that they could not make their farms into viable economic units or when they finally fell off the debt treadmill.

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[12]. V. I. Lenin Capitalism and Agriculture in the United States (1915) New York: International Publishers 1934 p 2

The agricultural proletariat in the prairie west was thus not made up of failed farmers but of ambitious men who aspired to farm ownership and were willing to work hard to attain it. Farm workers were not, as were so many workers in the mass-production industries, former craftsmen and independent commodity producers trapped in wage labour. They were not, if from a working class or peasant background, content to remain in agricultural waged labour on a permanent basis. They were not, if from Canadian and American farm districts that had filled up, farm workers and farmers' sons who were willing to spend the rest of their lives in an economic dead-end.

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[13]. Vernon C. Fowke "The Myth of the Self-Sufficient Canadian Pioneer" Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada LIV Series III June 1962; D. McGinnis "Farm Labour in Transition: Occupational Structure and Economic Dependency in Alberta, 1921-1951" in Howard Palmer, ed. The Settlement of the West Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1977; Gavin Wright "Whatever Happened to Proletarianization" Agricultural History 62:3 1988

Agricultural wage labour thus did not represent a decline in fortunes, but rather an intended first step out of wage dependency. The criteria for proletarianization in the case of prairie agriculture must therefore extend beyond the simple evidence of a sizeable permanent sector of the workforce that is waged labour. Farm workers had always sold their labour for wages, but their ultimate goal was to remove themselves from the ranks of wage labour. For them, the most significant development in the continuous process of their proletarianization was the constriction of the possibility of farm ownership.[14]

It became extremely difficult in the 1920s for farm workers to become farm owners. The simplest route, through homestead entry, was becoming much more difficult to travel. The best homestead lands had already been taken by 1908. Land still available was agriculturally marginal -- dry land in the southern parts of Alberta and Saskatchewan which had already been claimed then abandoned, or in the brushy or wooded areas to the north, far from transportation and marketing links and supply centres.

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[14]. For similar developments elsewhere, see Joy Parr "Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour in Comparative Perspective" Labour/Le Travail 15 1985 pp 96, 100; David Gagan Hopeful Travellers: Families, Land and Social Change in Mid-Victorian Peel County, Canada West Ontario Historical Studies Series Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1981; LaWanda F. Cox "The American Agricultural Wage Earner, 1865-1900: The Emergence of a Modern Labor Problem" Agricultural History XXII:2 July 1948

The reservation of lands under various schemes to aid British settlement during the 1920s further reduced the amount of land available to farm workers already in Canada.[15] And making a homestead entry carried no guarantee of success. The attrition rate was high. For the period from 1870 to 1927, the number of cancellations stood at more than forty-one percent of entries. In Alberta, the figures for the period 1905 to 1930 indicate a cancellation rate of nearly forty-six percent.[16] For later years the figures are even higher. On the prairies between the peak year of homestead entries in 1911 and the onset of the depression in 1930, the cancellation rate was about sixty percent.[17] Homestead entries on the prairies declined steadily after 1911. During the 1920s the average number of entries was 6,394 per year, a far cry from the annual average of 34,638 in the decade leading up to the war.[18]

Purchasing land also became much more difficult in the 1920s as the combination of scarce homesteads and wartime inflation drove land prices to record highs. Land prices fluctuated, but the overall trend was upward. In 1912, the average price of Canadian Pacific Railway lands was $15.20 per acre.[19] By 1921, prices of railway and Hudson's Bay Company land were selling for nearly twenty dollars per acre, and land close to railways were fetching twice that amount. Good grain land during most of the 1920s cost twenty to thirty dollars an acre.[20] Thus, the quarter-section grain farm that could have been obtained for a ten dollar filing fee before 1914 cost between three and five thousand dollars in the 1920s. Interest rates, which had already begun to move up by 1913,[21] soared during and after the war, to eight, nine and ten percent.[22] In the 1920s the CPR land sales' propaganda discarded its emphasis on a 20-year payment plan in favour of a 34-year amortization plan.[23] Farmers who bought lands had trouble holding on to them. Only in the last two years of the decade did the number of CPR land sales exceed the number of cancellations.[24]

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[15]. Robert England The Colonization of Western Canada: A Study of Contemporary Land Settlement (1896-1934) London: P.S. King and Son 1936 pp 76-81; E. C. Morgan "Soldier Settlement in the Prairie Provinces" Saskatchewan History Spring 1968; R. A. MacDonell "British Immigration Schemes in Alberta" Alberta HIstorical Review Spring 1968

[16]. Chester Martin 'Dominion Lands' Policy (1973) Lewis H. Thomas, ed. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1973 p 172

[17]. Calculated from figures in Table I-4B Homestead Cancellations

[18]. Calculated from figures in Table I-4A Homestead Entries

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[19]. W. Kaye Lamb History of the Canadian Pacific Railway New York: Macmillan 1977 p 255

[20]. Mackintosh Economic Problems of the Prairie Provinces p 285; James B. Hedges Building the Canadian West, The Land and Colonization Policies of the Canadian Pacific Railway New York: Macmillan 1939 pp 388-89; Canadian National Railways Own a 'Selected Farm' to fit your needs along the line of the Canadian National Railways. Read, think, act. Chicago 1925 p 3; Canadian Pacific Railway Tell Me -- why should I leave my farm and home and move to Western Canada Winnipeg 1924 p 3

[21]. Saskatchewan Royal Commission of Inquiry into Grain Markets Report of the Agricultural Credit Commission of the Province of Saskatchewan Regina: Government Printer 1913 p 20

[22]. Mackintosh Economic Problems of the Prairie Provinces p 266; E. C. Hope "What the Price of Wheat Means to Western Farmers" Proceedings of the Conference on Markets for Western Farm Products Winnipeg: Government of Manitoba 1938 p 149

In the meantime, technology had transformed prairie agriculture, adding the necessity of purchasing expensive equipment to bring large acreages under cultivation in order to pay off the cost of the land. In 1920, the *Nor'-West Farmer* pointed out the high cost of equipping a half-section farm:[25]

6 horses	$1200.00
1 wagon (complete)	160.00
1 set breeching harness	80.00
2 sets general purpose harness	100.00
1 gang plow (12 or 14 in. with extra shares)	150.00
6 section harrows or 4 section lever harrows	45.00
22-rim double disc drill	265.00
8-foot binder	275.00
Mower and rake	160.00
Hay and sheaf rack	25.00
Cultivator and packer (probably)	400.00
Total for equipment	$2860.00

As the decade progressed, machinery costs increased as farmers began to purchase tractors, trucks and even combines. These developments drove the cost of farm ownership well beyond the reach of a farm hand earning the $425 or $450 a year he might have earned during most of the 1920s.[26]

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[23] Hedges *Building the Canadian West* pp 315-6

[24] Lamb *History of the Canadian Pacific Railway* p 339

[25] "Equipment for a Half-Section Farm" *Nor'-West Farmer* 20/2/1920 p 230

[26] See Table II-5A Annual Farm Workers' Wages

Despite the obstacles farm workers faced in their efforts to take up farming on their own, immigration propaganda, official literature and popular opinion refused to recognize that the position of agricultural labourers had become institutionalized. Contemporary observers fostered the conviction that farm work was merely a step toward farm ownership. There were always examples giving credence to the claim that any hard-working man could become an independent farmer. Even in the depressed 1930s, a hardy minority did establish self-sufficient farms. But during the 1920s, such an achievement was expected to be commonplace. In 1926, the International Labour Office of the League of Nations asked the Canadian Council of Agriculture about agricultural labour in Canada. John Ward, the secretary of the CCA, reported proudly that "The status of the hired agricultural worker in Canada is entirely different from that of the agricultural laborer in European countries". He described the transitory nature of the work, whether seasonal or as a prelude to farm ownership. Even though a "very large percentage of the male population" was employed in farm labour at some time or another, Ward explained that "in almost every case such employment is engaged in with the idea that it will only be temporary." The result, insisted Ward, was that "In Canada we have practically no permanent agricultural laborer class."[27]

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[27]. PAM MG 10/E1 United Farmers of Manitoba Papers pp 924-5 L.E. Matthaei to J.W. Ward 8/1/1926 and p 922 John Ward to L.E. Matthaei 8/2/1926

This view is reflected in current historical writing. Historians acknowledge that hired men occupied a disadvantaged economic and social position and that farm ownership was beyond their grasp, but they have been reluctant to define prairie farm workers as a proletariat. They are troubled by the transient nature of the agricultural labour force and by its lack of the usual criteria by which to measure working class consciousness.[28]

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[28] Few historians have actually addressed the question of the class position of farm workers. Those who do are not in agreement. Cecilia Danysk argues that by the 1920s, farm workers were a proletariat. Gerald Friesen says that agricultural labourers were members of the working class, but they did not exist as a working class for any length of time. Lyle Dick draws upon Michael Katz' industrial model, and says "farm labourers did not conform to the usual definitions of class," because they did not engage in open class conflict and because of social interaction between themselves and their employers, p 124. Paul Voisey argues that class was seldom a factor in conflicts in the west. W.J.C. Cherwinski avoids characterisation. John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager have found proletarian behaviour among sugar beet workers, but they are beyond the scope of this study. Cecilia Danysk "Farm Apprentice to Agricultural Proletarian: The Hired Hand in Alberta, 1880-1930" MA McGill University 1981; Gerald Friesen The Canadian Prairies: A History Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1984 pp 316-20; Paul Voisey Vulcan: The Making of a Prairie Community Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1988 pp 221-4; Lyle Dick Farmers 'Making Good': The Development of Abernethy District, Saskatchewan, 1880-1920 Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History: National Historic Parks and Sites, Canadian Parks Service, Environment Canada 1989 pp 123-5; W.J.C. Cherwinski "In Search of Jake Trumper: The Farm Hand and the Prairie Farm Family" in David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds. Building Beyond the Homestead Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1985; John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager "Workers, Growers and Monopolists: The 'Labour Problem' in the Alberta Sugar Beet Industry During the 1930s" Labour/Le Travailleur 3 1978. Compare with the view of proletarian behaviour in Peter Argersinger and Jo Ann E. Argersinger "The Machine Breakers: Farmworkers and Social Change in the Rural Midwest of the 1870s" Agricultural History 58:3 July 1984; Allen Seager "Captain Swing in Ontario?" Bulletin of the Committee on

Farm workers have left little evidence of collective class action. There is no record of such recognizable characteristics of class consciousness as union membership or political activism. And even though farmers were often quick to accuse their employees of working against their interests, the men themselves do not leave evidence of developing a comprehensive and effective campaign of class struggle. Farm workers did not seem to be collectively engaged in class warfare, and my own previous work reflected the historical consensus that they had "failed to develop a class ideology appropriate to their objective position".[29]

But how accurate is this assessment? Certainly, farm workers as a group remained outside the mainstream of union growth and radicalism that characterized western Canadian labour activity before 1920 and outside the political activity that typified its endeavours during the 1920s. In the historiography, farm workers are absent from the path of class formation, yet in the evidence they appear at every step along the way. Research has uncovered many instances of their involvement in activity that is characteristic of class struggle, ranging all the way from the very basic tactic of walking off the job to strikes and sabotage. Were these isolated incidents, or were they part of a larger and

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[29] Cecilia Danysk "'Showing Those Slaves Their Class Position': Barriers to Organizing Prairie Farm Workers" David C. Jones and Ian MacPherson, eds. Building Beyond the Homestead Calgary: University of Calgary Press 1985 pp 167-8

a comprehensive response to capital? Capital and the state certainly recognized the class nature of these tactics and responded vigorously, attempting to control strictly the activities of union agitators among farm workers.

The attitudes of farm workers themselves are less clearly deciphered. Close study reveals that they did not develop a sustained critique of capitalism, and although they used specifically working-class tactics, it was only sporadically that they demonstrated self-consciously collective class strategies. But increasingly throughout the 1920s, their lives were being refracted through the prism of class. Farm workers responded by acting in ways that reveal working-class approaches to their employers and to their status as an agricultural proletariat. The bottom line, in the words of Communist Party theorizer J. M. Clarke, was that "the nexus between [the farmer] and the proletarian he employs is that of the wage contract. They must, and do, face each other as class enemies, as exploiter and exploited."[30] Few farmers and their hired hands would have put it so starkly. But what emerged by the 1920s was a labour force that was attempting to hold its own in a contest becoming more heavily weighted in favour of its opponent.

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[30]. University of Toronto Thomas Fisher Library, Ms. 179 Robert S. Kenny Collection Box 9 J. M. Clarke "Draft Agrarian Program of the CPC" June 1930. For a discussion of Clarke's theorization on labour-capital relations in prairie agriculture, see David Monod "The Agrarian Struggle: Rural Communism in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1926-1935" Histoire sociale/Social History XVIII:35 mai-May 1985 pp 103-8

III

"If you talked unions you would be ostracized."[31] Thomas Stillwell, a hired hand in Alberta, explained the prevailing attitude to working-class collectivity in the farming community where he worked. Agricultural labourers had to exercise caution in their struggle for better wages and working conditions, and they could not afford to antagonize prospective employers. The structural barriers to collective proletarian action were strong.

Farm workers in the 1920s were at a crossroads. The strategies they had developed to deal with capital during the formative years of the agricultural economy were effective because they were individualistic. Hired hands had acted autonomously, using the availability of homesteads, the nascency of the industry, the shortage of labour and even the seasonality of production to reach satisfying bargains with their employers. But changing conditions called for new strategies. As free lands were taken, as the industry developed new tactics for dealing with its labour force, and as the labour shortage turned into a labour surplus, individualistic methods of dealing with capital lost their edge.

Yet farm workers did not easily switch their tactics. Pragmatism explains their continued use of strategies they had developed during the early years of settlement, with the result that their relations with capital reflected greater continuity than discontinuity. Even though the growing strength of capital resulted in a shifting of the delicate balance of power with labour, farm workers found that individualistic strategies still remained the most effective method of exerting control over conditions of work. More significantly, a wide range of constraints operated to reduce the possibility of collective action, and its effectiveness as well.[32]

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[31]. PAA 80.218/20 Thomas E. Stillwell Interview 17/9/1978

Unified action required the agricultural proletariat to forge links with the wider labour movement. Even before moving on to this demanding stage, however, farm workers had to take the first step of uniting within their industry. This was a difficult task.[33]

Some hurdles to collective action were due simply to the organization of the industry. Unlike workers in other industries, farm hands were widely and thinly dispersed. Small family farms relied as little as possible upon hired labour. The ratio of paid agricultural labourers to farms in 1921 was only one farm hand for every four prairie farms.[34] Even though the waged workforce in agriculture grew by almost forty-one percent between 1911 and 1921, and another thirty percent during the 1920s, there were always more farmers than hands. During the course of the two decades, the ratio of farm workers to their employers went from 1:4.5 in 1911, to 1:3.9 in 1921, to 1:3.1 in 1931.[35] And most farmers who employed permanent help had only one hired hand.[36]

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[32]. Some of the material in this section is taken from Danysk "Showing Those Slaves Their Class Position" pp 165-174, although the analysis has been revised.

[33]. For material on farm labour organizing in the United States see [Stewart Jamieson] Labor Unionism in American Agriculture United States Department of Labor Bulletin 836 Washington 1945; Melvyn Dubovsky We Shall Be All: A History of the Industrial Workers of the World Chicago: Quadrangle Books 1969; Paul Brissenden The Launching of the I.W.W. Berkeley: University of California Press 1913; Carey McWilliams Ill Fares the Land: Migrants and Migratory Labor in the United States New York 1941; Judith Chanin Glass "Conditions Which Facilitate Unionization of Agricultural Workers: A Case Study of the Salinas Valley Lettuce Industry" PhD University of California, Los Angeles 1966

These logistical problems stumped farm hands and union organizers alike. "The farm workers are at the mercy of their masters,' declared the One Big Union. "Being scattered, or in very small lots, over this vast country, they have no cohesion, no chance to meet together and safeguard their interests."[37] The great distances separating prairie farms, as well as the lack of leisure time, meant few farm workers could attend organizational meeting, as the Communist Party was acutely aware. "It hardly seems likely, does it," asked J. M. Clarke, that "the rich, exploiting agrarian is going to donate his car to the hired man to go to a union meeting at which wages, hours of labor, working conditions, etc. are to be discussed."[38] Organizers who hoped to engage in union activities while employed on a farm were equally hampered. The Department of Immigration might have saved itself the effort of attempting to have Philip Lintz deported during the war for his IWW activities. The Alberta Provincial Police noted with satisfaction that he was "working all day and had no opportunity of leaving the farm during the week to go out into the country or elsewhere to do any organizing."[39]

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[34]. See Table II-1 Prairie Farms; Table I-3 Agricultural Workforce. Author's calculations.

[35]. Author's calculations

[36]. 1936 is the first census year for which figures are available. Of the 26,475 permanent male employees reported on farms, 19,738 or 74.6 percent were the only full-time hands on each farm. Canada Dominion Bureau of Statistics Census of the Prairie Provinces 1936 Vol II Table 144 pp 321, 795, 1243; Table 208 pp 353, 827, 1275. In a survey of 13 farming communities during the 1930s, George Britnell found that hired labour never accounted for more than "one-half an adult unit in the farm household." George E. Britnell The Wheat Economy Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1939 p 162

[37]. "Life in the Harvest Fields" OBU Bulletin 16/8/1928 p 1

Even had the luckless Lintz been able to attempt to organize his fellow farm workers, he faced a deep division within their ranks. The interests of short-term seasonal workers conflicted with those of full-time hired hands. Seasonal workers who drifted into farm work during seeding and harvest were not a permanent part of the agricultural industry, and they were uncommitted to the long-term effort needed to improve their position within the industry. They were interested only in short-term goals, primarily higher wages. But long-term or full-time workers had to be cautious in their demands. The hired hand who had worked all summer or even all year on a single farm could not afford to jeopardize his accumulated wages for the chance of an extra dollar or two at harvest.

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[38]. UTL Robert S. Kenney Collection Ms 179/9 J.M. Clarke "Memo on the Agricultural Proletariat" 26/4/1930 p 3

[39]. NAC RG76 Immigration Branch Records Vol 619 file 917093 part 1 S.R. Waugh RNWMP Report 3/8/1917

Such a threat became more serious during the 1920s, as farm workers lost the labour market advantage they had enjoyed during the boom years. In the post-war decade, farmers continued the clamour for an ever-larger labour supply. But a substantial difference in the nature of the labour shortage went unrecognized in farmers' demands. A distinction must be made between an absolute labour shortage, one that results from a real scarcity of available labour, and a relative shortage that results from an inability to compete with other industries in wages or conditions. In prairie agriculture both situations pertained, but the balance shifted as the population grew.

During the pioneering period, the labour shortage was absolute. The ready availability of land kept the labour force in continuous flux and in short supply. Even though many new farmers spent part of their year "working out" in order to establish their farms, the labour supply could not meet the demand. With the advance of settlement, and especially with continued immigration in excess of settlement possibilities, the labour force grew and labour needs could be more easily met. But the apparent problem of a labour shortage continued. The difference was largely one of definition. The shortage was becoming less absolute and more relative to the wages that farmers were able or willing to pay. In the language of economists, there was no "effective demand" for workers. By the 1920s, even though extra harvesters were needed for several weeks each year, the west had a labour surplus.

The larger labour force was only the most visible sign of the increasing strength of capital during the decade. Other changes in the farm labour force created more roadblocks to unity among farm workers. Newcomers to the prairie west in the decades before the First World War had come in greatest proportions from eastern Canada, Great Britain, the United States, and northern Europe. When immigration resumed after the war, however, and particularly after the 1925 Railway Agreement passed immigration selection into the hands of the railways,[40] there was a relative increase as well as a larger proportion of central and eastern Europeans.

The ethnic mix in the agricultural labour force divided the workers. In some industries, the existence of a strong ethnic identity and institutional network served to provide a strong core around which organizing activity might coalesce.[41] Groups with a strong tradition of collective labour action could provide the leadership and the impetus for organization, especially when the newcomers were overwhelmingly of the same class. Ethnic groups that entered prairie farming often fit this mould, but they saw themselves as owners and potential employers in the agricultural industry, not as waged labourers. They were small-scale farmers, or aspiring farmers. Their common struggle was to adjust to new farming conditions and to establish themselves as farm owners, as well as to strike a delicate balance that would allow them both to retain their ethnic identities and to carve out a social and economic niche. Although they were not always cohesive, they tended to divide themselves from other farmers rather than along class lines within their own ethnic group. Where the ties of ethnicity were strong, they tended to focus on common solutions to agricultural problems.

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[40] Federal guidelines for immigration during the 1920s aimed at encouraging bona fide agriculturalists and domestic servants (PC 183). The Railway Agreement, which came into effect on 5 September 1925 and was renewed in 1928, allowed the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National Railways to determine for themselves whether or not prospective immigrants met the criteria. There were annual limits on the numbers of men classified as agricultural labourers, and the railways were responsible for the costs of returning men who became public charges within a year of their arrival. Despite these restrictions, the numbers and proportions of immigrant men who entered as agricultural labourers was much higher than the numbers who actually engaged in farm work. A high proportion of immigrants came from central and eastern Europe under Sections 1, 2, 3, 4 and 8 of PC 183 Donald Avery _'Dangerous Foreigners': European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932_ Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1979 pp 100-101; England _The Colonization of Western Canada_ pp 82-84

When farm workers from eastern and central Europe sought work beyond their own communities, they met a cool reception. Immigrants were accused of cutting wages and of lowering the standards of working and living conditions. "It is extremely difficult," declared the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League, "for local citizens ... to get work when foreign immigrants cut wages in half in order to get placed."[42] These accusations were not unfounded, since farmers regularly offered the more menial farm jobs and lower wages to eastern and central European farm hands than to those of British or northern European backgrounds.[43]

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[41]. See for example Varpu Lindstrom-Best "'I Won't Be a Slave!' -- Finnish Domestics in Canada, 1911-30" Looking into My Sister's Eyes: an Exploration in Women's History Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario: 1986; Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando, eds. Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada Toronto 1981; Canadian Ethnic Studies 10 1978; Ian Radforth Bushworkers and Bosses: Logging in Northern Ontario, 1900-1980 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1987; Donald Avery "Continental European Immigrant Workers in Canada, 1896-1919: From 'Stalwart Peasants' to Radical Proletariat" Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology 12:1 1975

Reserving the worst agricultural jobs for immigrant workers was often defended in terms of the immigrants' lack of experience or inability to speak the employers' language. But the practice was based on a more direct economic rationale. The principle has long been understood by governments and employers, and much of Canada's immigration history is synonymous with the story of underpaid menial labour.[44] Farmers in the prairie west joined their voices to the demand for a surplus immigrant labour market. "I like to get cheap labor," explained one Saskatchewan farmer. "Naturally we can get these immigrants cheaper than we can get men who are raised in the country."[45] To farm workers who were facing increasing job competition, however, economic explanations were often clouded by intolerance. "Farmers wont [sic] you to work for $30 a month and know [sic] keep", stormed farm hand F. H. Dudley, "& if there is other work the Bor-Hunks [sic] get the first chance & the English men can starve."[46]

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[42]. PAA 73.307/54 Department of Agriculture Papers: General Administration, Memorandum for Mr. Stewart 18/6/1927

[43]. Greater detail is found in Danysk "Farm Apprentice to Agricultural Proletarian" pp 29-31 from GAI BN. C212 G CPR Papers James Colley Papers, Farm Help Applications

[44]. Avery _'Dangerous Foreigners'_; Parr "Hired Men: Ontario Agricultural Wage Labour" p 94; H. Clare Pentland _Labour and Capital in Canada, 1650-1860_ ed. and intro. by Paul Phillips Toronto: James Lorimer and Company 1981; Ruth Bleasdale "Class Conflict on the Canals of Upper Canada in the 1840's" _Labour/Le Travailleur_ 7 1981; Fowke "The Myth of the Self-Sufficient Canadian Pioneer"; Robert England _The Central European Immigrant in Canada_

The flooding of the labour market with immigrants created other obstacles to farm labour unity. The degree of agricultural expertise that the newcomers possessed varied. Although the techniques of dry-land farming were still being learned in the early years of prairie settlement, the pre-war farm workers often came from an agricultural background that enabled them to adapt to prairie conditions and to learn with their employers. Post-war immigrants were more likely to come from urban areas or regions of small-scale peasant agriculture. And in the interim, prairie agriculture had been transformed into a highly technological enterprise to which adaptation was more difficult. The lack of appropriate agricultural experience helped to maintain

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Toronto: Macmillan 1929.

[45]. SAB RC-M6/13 Saskatchewan Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement 1930 Vol VII:13 Sebastian Holizki

[46]. PAA 65.118 Employment Service Papers F. H. Dudley to W. Smitten 5/2/1930

the distance between the inexperienced newcomers and the seasoned hands. Moreover, a surplus of inexperienced labour afforded employers the possibility of dispensing with lengthy periods of employment for experienced hands. They could be more cost-conscious in relegating tasks, allotting the unskilled work to the cheaper inexperienced men and saving the complicated and skilled tasks for the more expensive seasoned hands. In a labour market that was becoming more and more crowded, experienced workers could ill-afford the competition.

The disciplining power of a glutted labour market was reinforced by other more direct pressures against collective action. As the major western Canadian industry, agriculture could count on widespread support in controlling its workforce. Although conditions of labour in agriculture were among the most loosely defined, indirect methods of control were felt at every stage of farm work, and when these failed, more direct measures of discipline were employed.

The legal position of farm workers was strictly circumscribed. Specifically excluded from ameliorative labour legislation, agricultural labourers were nonetheless bound by the stringent regulations of the Masters and Servants Acts.[47] The Acts made the carrying out of farm duties a legal matter and encroached upon the personal lives of farm workers as well, legally enjoining them to sobriety and obedience, prohibiting "ill-behavior, drunkenness, refractory conduct or idleness," and forbidding them to leave the farm at any time, "day or night," without their employer's permission. Nor did the Acts provide any real protection. In the case of non-payment of wages, for example, farm workers could not collect more than two months' back pay, and this they had to do within three months. Since it was customary to withhold wages until after harvest, hired hands might work for the better part of a year only to discover that civil suits were their only recourse. But even these measures applied only to workers who had been "improperly dismissed." Farm hands who left their jobs before the agreed time were deemed to have violated their contracts, were not entitled to payment for any work already performed, and were subject to a fine or imprisonment.[48]

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[47]. "Revised Statutes of Manitoba, 1913" Masters and Servants Act, R.S., c.108, s.1, Chapter 124; "Revised Statutes of Saskatchewan, 1920" Masters and Servants Act 1918-19 c.61, s.2, Chapter 205; "Revised Statutes of Alberta, 1922" Masters and Servants Act 1904, c.3, s.7, Chapter 180, all cited in Canada Department of Labour

There were other controls as well. The Saskatchewan

Labour Legislation in Canada as existing December 31, 1928 Ottawa: King's Printer 1929 pp 392-4 (Manitoba), pp 486-7 (Saskatchewan), pp 531-2 (Alberta)

[48]. Ibid. pp 393, 486, 531. The Masters and Servants Acts' provisions for the servant "to obey the lawful commands of his master" was doubly constraining, for it called upon the conscientious hired hand to ignore concurrent Sunday labour legislation in Alberta and Saskatchewan forbidding "workmen [and] labourers ... to do or exercise any worldly labour, business or trade of his [sic] ordinary calling," subject to a $100 fine. Canada Department of Labour Labour Legislation in Canada as existing December 31, 1915 Ottawa: King's Printer 1918 pp 492, 524-5

Employment Service boasted that it had helped to mitigate "the spirit of unrest as evidenced by labour troubles the world over during 1920 and 1921." Had it not been operating, "the conditions of our farmers with respect to help would have been ten-fold worse than they actually were."[49] Employment agencies, immigration and colonization companies and farmers' organizations, working in close cooperation with federal and provincial departments of immigration, agriculture and labour, formed a strong organizational network.

Their purpose was to provide a labour force that was large, cheap and tractable. "I know you big farmers would like us to flood the cities and towns with men so that you could get them as cheaply as possible," wrote Saskatchewan's Minister of Labour in 1921, promising to try to secure "a number sufficient to do the work without creating a scarcity such as would encourage the boosting of wages."[50] Agricultural districts were canvassed to discover their requirements for both seasonal and full-time help, and immigration and employment agencies tailored the supply to the demand, effectively reducing the potential strength that might arise from a shortage of labour.

Newcomers to Canada were especially susceptible to the informal controls integral to immigration regulations. Entry to Canada or subsidized ocean passages was often conditional upon their undertaking farm employment; under the British settlement schemes of the 1920s, it was "absolutely essential."[51] In the early years of the decade, immigration from eastern and central Europe was restricted to "bonafide" agriculturalists and farm labourers. Yet even after the Railway Agreement, the federal Immigration Branch reserved the right to deport any who failed to find farm work or to settle on the land. Although this provision was not very strictly enforced, threats of deportation or imprisonment hung constantly over the heads of these newcomers. In 1927, the OBU reported that in Winnipeg "destitute immigrants are sentenced to go to work on a farm for anything the farmer cares to offer, or be evicted from the immigration hall and then arrested for vagrancy."[52]

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[49]. SAB M6/X-11-0 Charles Dunning Papers "Memo on Farm Wages" c1922

[50]. Ibid. C.A. Dunning to Ira B. Cushing 16/8/1921

Follow-up services reinforced the control. Farm workers were encouraged to turn to placement agencies if problems with their employers arose. In such cases they were generally told simply to make the best of it. A CPR investigation of one such complaint revealed that the farm hand "seemed to be a nervous wreck and he stated that his position on [the] farm was unbearable." Nonetheless, he was urged, and finally convinced "after lengthy arguments," to remain on the job.[53] The Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture was even more direct. Its booklet of Practical Pointers for Farm Hands warned employees not to "dispute the plans of a boss, [or] demand things of the boss, [or] resent a harsh criticism. Don't try to bluff the boss by telling him where you can get higher wages," continued the advice, warning that "dissatisfied men are the first to be let go."[54]

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[51]. Canada Department of Immigration and Colonization Assisted Settlement of Approved British Families on Canadian Government Farms 1925 p 4

[52]. "Go to a Farm or Go to Jail" OBU Bulletin 15/12/1927

These indirect methods of labour control were supplemented at times by stricter and more formal tactics. During the harvest period when workers were needed in large numbers for a relatively short time, their strategic position was greatly enhanced. Work stoppages or even delays could be crucial. But a careful monitoring of the harvest labour supply undercut this potential strength. The annual harvest excursions were carried out under the joint auspices of the railways and the federal and provincial governments. Although local agents canvassed farmers each year in order to determine the number of harvesters required, distribution proved a major problem. There were always some areas that faced labour shortages for part of the season, but when workers used these opportunities to bargain for higher wages, they were quickly suppressed. "We have had some trouble with agitators," reported the Nanton

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[53]. GAI BN.C212 G CPR Papers File 678 B.A. Pickel to J. Colley 13/11/1926 and 9/12/1926

[54]. Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture Practical Pointers for Farm Hands Regina: Government Printer 1915 passim

Cooperative Association, "but when we found them we got the police to run them out of town."[55] Agitators might also face imprisonment. The Alberta Provincial Police reported that a number of harvesters who refused to work for the going wages "were brought into court and given the privilege of going to work or going to jail."[56] Many others were not given any choice, but were simply jailed for vagrancy.[57]

The strictest controls were reserved for radical organizations. As the largest employer in the prairie west, and as the most important industry, agriculture had long been able to rely upon the state to help control its workforce. In the highly-charged "Red Scare" atmosphere of the 1920s, federal and provincial governments were diligent in suppressing any organization with even a whiff of radicalism about it. Self-declared revolutionary organizations such as the IWW were prime targets. Suppression of the IWW in the First World War continued in the following decade, reinforced by legislation arising from the war and the 1919 General Strike.

In 1918 an Order-in-Council declared radical organizations such as the IWW illegal, and membership in the organization became subject to a penalty of from one to five years in jail. The following year the Criminal Code was amended to cover illegal associations.[58] In agriculture, the prosecution of radical organizations could be carried out under a number of sections which defined crimes against the state in both general and specific terms. Section 134 of the Criminal Code declared "bolshevism" illegal, while Sections 511 and 513 specifically singled out arson to barns and to wheat stacks. More informally, the RNWMP, and even the Alberta Provincial Police for about one year, were given authority over deportation and enforcement of passport regulations.[59]

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[55]. PAA 70.414/407 Alberta Sessional Papers W. Frantzen to Director of Employment Service 4/9/1920

[56]. PAA 72.370/6a Attorney General Papers Alberta Provincial Police Report "C" Division W. Brankley 1923

[57]. Ibid. T. Hidson 21/10/1925

Although much of the finances and energies of the IWW in the years following 1919 were taken up by legal proceedings, it continued its organizational work in the wheatfields. Its message was unequivocal. "To the farm hand the I.W.W. offers [a] modern labor union," declared The One Big Union Monthly, voice of the IWW, "one that knows how to fight the boss, a union that understands how to use the strike and the boycott."[60] In 1921, Industrial Solidarity, another IWW newspaper, publicized a harvest strike in southern Manitoba, warning members to "take notice, and keep away" lest they be used as unwitting strike breakers.[61]

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[58]. Order-in-Council 2384 28/9/1918 to 2/4/1919

[59]. Barbara Roberts Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada, 1900-1935 Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press 1988 pp 71-97

[60]. "What the I.W.W. Offers to the Farmer and the Farm Hand" The One Big Union Monthly Vol II No 12 Dec 1920 p 34

[61]. "Harvesters' Strike is on in Canada" Industrial Solidarity 8/10/1921

The RCMP had done their best to keep American Wobblies from entering Canada, responding to a warning that they were riding boxcars into Canada. "Very close watch is being kept on the boundary for this class of person," reported the RCMP in an echo of similar diligence during the First World War, "and whenever they are located, they are summarily rejected and sent back to the United States."[62]

The efforts to keep IWW members from Canada continued every harvest. In 1922, RCMP Inspector R.A. Gerrie and his officers were rewarded with a letter of commendation for their vigilance in keeping out the IWW who operated in North Dakota, a reputed "hot bed of I.W.W. bootleggers, whiskey runners and all kinds of criminals." Inspector Yardley was proud to report that he had "refused admission to 75 or 100, whom he considered were undesireables, and who, besides, carried I.W.W. cards."[63] The authority to keep Wobblies out of Canada rested upon a broad interpretation of immigration regulations. The latitude that border patrols had enjoyed during the war, when immigration official Thomas Gelley had admitted that "our legal action in these cases has not rested upon a very solid foundation,"[64] continued. In 1922, Gelley expressed hope that the IWW was an

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[62]. NAC RG 76 Immigration Branch Records Vol 619 file 917093 Part 2 R.S. Knight to The Commissioner, RCMP Ottawa 10/9/1921

[63]. Ibid. Thomas Gelley to The Secretary, Department of Immigration 2/11/1922

[64]. Ibid. Part 1 Bruce Walker to W.D. Scott 18/9/1917

"organization of the class mentioned in 3(0) of the Immigration Act" and that prosecution for concealing an IWW card when applying for entry could be allowed under Section 33-2.[65] At deportation proceedings for notorious IWW organizer Sam Scarlett, the fact that he had declared his intention to find harvest work but had arrived in Canada too early in the season was introduced as testimony in an attempt to have him deported.[66]

In 1923, the federal Department of Immigration increased border surveillance when it received word from a "very reliable source" that "the I.W.W. element intend to pull a large strike in the harvest fields of North Dakota about August 20th and extend it into Alberta and Saskatchewan." IWW members might conceal their membership, warned the commissioner of immigration, "but will have the number of card written on inside of their hat or on a piece of paper or in a note book." More seriously, continued the commissioner, "it is also their intention to walk across the line and smuggle in cards and literature for the purpose of getting new members." Instructions were given that all authorities were to be notified, and "should any agitator be found among the harvesters he be severely dealt with."[67] The RCMP were kept busy trying to catch men who found the Portal, North Dakota crossing "too 'Hot' for the I.W.W. element", and who resorted to jumping off the train which ran along the border.[68]

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[65]. Ibid. Part 2 Thomas Gelley to The Secretary, Department of Immigration 2/11/1922

[66]. Ibid. "Deportation Proceedings: Samuel Scarlett" p 7. See also Donald Avery "British-born 'Radicals' in North America, 1900-1941: The Case of Sam Scarlett" Canadian Ethnic Studies X:2 1978; Roberts Whence They Came pp 92-4

Some Wobblies slipped through the net. When "a few I.W.W. Agents" appeared at Weyburn, Saskatchewan, they were apprehended by the Saskatchewan Provincial Police, and "were promptly dealt with ... and returned to the other side."[69] Officials also found ways to deal with men who could not be expelled. In southern Saskatchewan, RCMP Constable R.F.V. Smyly received a warning that men were striking for higher wages in the harvest fields of Montana and might move northwest. His investigation uncovered men "working quietly amongst harvest hands near Shaunavon." He discovered that they were "trying to induce men to hold out for high wages, higher than those that are fair and reasonable." For the moment he was powerless, reporting that the "town Constable has tried to do something about these men but cannot 'Vag' them as they all have funds," but he assured his commanding officer in Weyburn that he would continue his investigation.[70] Other prosecutions were more successful.

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[67]. NAC RG 76 Immigration Branch Records Vol 619 file 917093 Part 2 A. L. Jolliffe to T. Gelley 6/8/1923

[68]. Ibid. C.B. Fryett to F.W. Schultz 5/9/1923

[69]. SAB AtG/4/C Attorney General Papers, Saskatchewan Provincial Police Annual Report Weyburn 1923

[70]. NAC RG 76 Immigration Branch Vol 619 file 917093 Part 2 R.F.V. Smyly to F.W. Schutz 3/9/1923

When John Spears of Vancouver found work in the Rosetown district of Saskatchewan, he began to spread the Wobbly message. He was promptly arrested for vagrancy and sentenced to thirty days at Prince Albert. His case appeared in the federal Department of Labour's Report on Labour Organization in Canada, which was alarmed at the reappearance of the IWW. It reported that "Spears had been distributing I.W.W. literature and was carrying an I.W.W. card at the time of his arrest."[71]

Hopes ran high that the IWW could meet the challenge. In 1923 Industrial Solidarity issued a call for organizers to go to Moose Jaw, where "Delegates are badly needed as they are very scarce" but where "Sentiment was never better."[72] The following year an organizer in Edmonton promised that "6,000 members of the I.W.W. were coming into the harvest fields of Alberta to show the workers of that province that the eight-hour day could be put into effect in the agrarian industry."[73] A well-planned campaign dividing the prairies into districts and assigning travelling delegates was presented at the 1925 meeting of the Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union, the first IWW convention to be held in Canada. Demands were formulated for the next harvest season: "(1) ten hours per day on threshing rigs; (2) minimum wage of $6 per day; (3) transportation to and from the job; (4) blankets to be provided by the employers."[74]

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[71]. Canada Department of Labour "I.W.W. Reappears in Canada" Report on Labour Organization in Canada 1923 p 182

[72]. "Canadian Harvest is Paying Better Wages" Industrial Solidarity 29/9/1923

[73]. Canada Department of Labour Report on Labour Organization in Canada 1924 p 173

But results failed to live up to expectations, as organizers were thwarted by continued government and police action. Continuously under the watchful eye of the police, IWW organizers in Canada could do little. Saskatchewan Provincial Police found the easiest method of dealing with them was simply to keep them "on the move as much as possible", and the Alberta Provincial Police handled them "without gloves." The Alberta police deplored the lack of legislation "dealing with this class of gentry", regretting that "the vagrancy act does not bring them in this scope of the code, and to a certain extent the police are powerless unless we can charge them with mischief or some other misdemeanour." In fact, vagrancy charges were frequently laid against organizers who were "raising trouble" among harvesters. "The only remedy for this condition is through the police," wrote the Premier of Saskatchewan to one of his constituents, "and you may have noticed in the press, during the last few days, that a number of such men have been arrested by the Regina police for vagrancy."[75]

Arrests continued. The "Canadian harvest attracted quite a number of our members," Wobblies were told at their general convention in 1924, "and arrests over the line were more numerous than last year."[76] In Alberta, a number of harvesters, some of whom "had I.W.W. literature in their possession, and who it was asserted were endeavouring to create discontent among the harvesters," were convicted in Alberta of vagrancy. Their cases were challenged from IWW headquarters in Chicago, which hired lawyers to appeal the cases. Three out of four convictions were quashed.[77] Such successes may have heartened Wobblies, but they were achieved at high cost in both finances and time, reducing the available resources for organizational work.

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[74]. Ibid. 1925 pp 176-177

[75]. SAB AtG/4/C/7 Attorney General Papers, SPP Annual Report 1923; PAA 72.370/7a Attorney General Papers APP Annual Report 1924; SAB M6/Y Charles Dunning Papers, Charles Dunning to W.J. DeGrow 12/9/1922

Insubstantial though they were, vagrancy charges were a powerful weapon against farm labour organizers and the men they hoped to reach. Even a few days in jail spelled disaster for a hired hand who needed to supplement his yearly farm income with the high wages offered at harvest. Provincial police in Alberta voiced a common sentiment when they declared with confidence that their ability to secure "a number of convictions" on unspecified charges would have "a salutary effect" upon organizers in the harvest fields.[78]

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[76]. Walter P. Reuther Archives of Labor and Urban Affairs 130/44/3 IWW Papers Minutes of the 16th Constitutional General Convention of the IWW 13 October to 10 November 1924 p 89

[77]. Canada Department of Labour Report on Labour Organization in Canada 1924 p 1173

[78]. PAA 72.370/7a Attorney General Papers APP Annual Report 1924

IWW organizing activity among farm workers peaked in mid-decade, then declined. In 1925 a new agricultural unit was formed Winnipeg but folded the next year, victim of the strong network of controls demanded by capital and provided by the state. These exacted a heavy toll from the Canadian labour movement in the 1920s, and farm workers were only one of the groups to suffer.[79] With leadership in disarray and radicalism suppressed, IWW farm labour organizers were able to achieve only local and temporary results, seldom more than "agitation, and disruption of work."[80] Farm workers did not achieve effective unified action among themselves.

IV

The next step, forging links with the larger labour movement, was even more difficult. Workers in resource and construction industries travelled a seasonal route from job to job, from industry to industry. Farm work was a stop along the way. High harvest wages were the obvious draw, but workers might be working to improve their own strategic position, as the Beverly miners in 1923. "At least 5000 more men than ever before would be needed in the harvest fields", declared 'Red' McDonald of the United Mine Workers of America, "there would never be so good a chance for the miners to enforce the claim for union conditions."[81] While this kind of job itinerancy might present the opportunity for cooperation between farm workers and their counterparts in other industries, it needed an initial link. Where connections with other labouring groups had not been established, the result could be to undercut farm workers, as a similar instance in the United States the previous year illustrates. In 1922, the striking railroad shop craftsmen of Chicago planned to sustain their action by seeking harvest work. Their plans drew an angry response from the Agricultural Workers' Industrial Union of the IWW:

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[79]. Roberts Whence They Came pp 71-97; Norman Penner The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1977; Ian Angus Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada Montreal: Vanguard 1981 pp 131-143; S. W. Horrall "The Royal North-West Mounted Police and Labour Unrest in Western Canada, 1919" Canadian Historical Review LXI 1980; Donald A. Macgillvray "Military Aid to the Civil Power: The Cape Breton Experience in the 1920s" Acadiensis III:2 1974. For developments in the United States see William Preston Aliens and Dissenters: Federal Suppression of Radicals, 1903-1933 New York: Harper and Row 1966

[80]. PAA 72.370/7a Attorney General Papers APP Annual Report 1924

> From the tools and minions of the employing interests we expected no other treatment than what we have received; but from workers, particularly striking workers, we expected an understanding sympathy and active co-operation. It is with pain then, and with some surprise, that we learn of striking railroad shopmen, through their organizations, preparing to invade the harvest fields with a total disregard of our efforts to win living wages and decent working conditions.[82]

When it came to the more difficult task of actively establishing a labour organization of farm workers, most unions were either ineffective or indifferent. Neither the traditional trade unions nor the fledgling industrial unions directed much attention to labour in agriculture.

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[81] PAA 75.126/4613 Attorney General Papers, Alberta Provincial Police Report, F. Lesley 13/8/1923

[82] WPR 171 E.W. Latchem Collection "Published Letter from Tom Doyle, Secy and Tom Connors, Chairman GOC AWIU 110 IWW to the Striking Railroad Shop Crafts" 28/7/1922 (emphasis in original)

Industrial labour organizations were fighting for their lives and had little energy and few resources to extend their efforts to the least rewarding field of labour. The difficulties that the IWW had tackled in its attempt to organize farm workers were considered insurmountable by the other major industrial labour organization in the west, the One Big Union.

Initial attempts to reach farm workers were directed at itinerant harvesters. "With [a] little display of solidarity," promised the OBU's The Searchlight in 1920, "we will enforce during the harvest the $6.00 minimum for an 8 hour day."[83] But these forays became part of a struggle within the OBU over leadership and direction of the new union. The lumber workers unit gathered strength and extended its efforts into lumber mills and harvest fields. Changing its name to the Lumber, Camp, and Agricultural Workers' Department of the One Big Union was a signal to Victor Midgley, Executive Secretary, that they were encroaching upon territory that rightly belonged under the direct control of the OBU.[84]

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[83]. "Farm Workers" The Searchlight 2/9/1920

[84]. David Jay Bercuson Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson 1978 p 166

The lumber workers saw their move as the logical solution to the itinerancy of western workers. Industrial unionization was the only vehicle that could "provide the machinery whereby a proper and efficient organization of the 'migratory' worker can be effected," they argued, asserting that "one unit embracing all migratory workers is the spirit of today." Until the farm workers were "sufficiently organized, or rather numerous enough throughout the Prairie Provinces for the formation of a separate Agricultural Unit", they were to remain "under the auspices" of the expanded lumber workers' unit.[85] The issue was put to the test at the Port Arthur OBU convention in 1920 when the lumber workers asked for the submission of a question to the membership: "Are you in favor of maintaining a Lumber, Camp & Agricultural Workers' Department of the One Big Union?"[86] The Central Executive Committee concurred and the question was carried, but Midgley used the financial delinquency of the lumber workers to have them expelled from the OBU.[87]

Farm workers were casualties of the fall-out. It appears that OBU efforts on their behalf were largely rhetorical, and agricultural labourers were exhorted to organize themselves:

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[85]. "Agricultural Workers Organizing in O.B.U." The Searchlight 28/5/1920 p 3

[86]. PAA 72.159/23 Farmilio Papers Minutes of General Convention, OBU, January 1921 "General Executive Report" 56 B p 1

[87]. PAM MG 10/A3 One Big Union Papers "A report from Midgley, General Executive Board to All Units of the OBU" Winnipeg 2/2/1921; Bercuson Fools and Wise Men p 167

> Now, it is up to the farm-workers and others in the prairie Provinces to line up with us, or rather line up with themselves. Don't wait for a Moses to lead you out of bondage; he can not come. Get together! Call meetings of your fellow-workers in your nearest town or village, and form Branch Units. If there is [sic] not enough of you to do so, any worker willing to assist his class can become a delegate (shop steward) and get his fellow-workers signed up in this Union, then get them organized! It does not take education; it takes a man with backbone.[88]

For its part, the OBU seems to have given little more than lip-service to organizing farm workers, a reflection of the general disarray into which the organization was sinking. In 1924, peak year of the decade for IWW activity, the OBU spent more time discussing the problem than coming up with any concrete action. In February, the General Executive Board spent "some time" addressing the matter of "arrangements to handle the harvesters' proposition" for the coming summer. A chain of command was proposed, with instructions to

> again get in touch with Com. Roberts, asking him to forward any suggestions he had as to the best method of tackling this question, and that the Board Member McAllister by [sic] also asked to forward any suggestions he might have as to how to handle and organize this class of labor.[89]

In May, the board asked the OBU Bulletin to run a weekly notice "calling upon all class conscious workers who were contemplating going into the harvest fields to get in touch with the General Secretary of the O.B.U." It was not very hopeful of results. By way of inducement, it added a cryptic rider that respondents "would hear something to [their] advantage" and planned that in the dubious event that "any answers were received in response to this appeal" they might be considered as job delegates.[90] In August, the Joint Executive Board was asked by Comrade Tommy Roberts, the leader of the Sandon, British Columbia branch, the only "healthy and functioning" OBU unit in the west,[91] about the organizing activities of the IWW in the Saskatchewan harvest fields. His question "was discussed for some time" but it was not followed up until he goaded them into action with another inquiry in September. The JEB then planned to make enquiries of the Moose Jaw delegate, since it was learned that the IWW regularly opened a hall there "for the purpose of capturing the migratory workers."[92] The matter of organizing harvest workers was raised again the following spring, when JEB members gave the whole matter a "thorough discussion," concluding that "a plan should be worked out at a very early date."[93]

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[88]. "Agricultural Workers Organizing in O.B.U." The Searchlight 28/5/1920 p 3

[89]. PAM MG 10/A 14-2 R. B. Russell Papers #18 Minutes of the OBU General Executive Board 27/2/1924

Organizing in the agricultural industry was clearly a low priority for the OBU, but logistical problems were not the only reason. The OBU had little regard for workers who did not readily enter the union fold. "The task ... in showing these slaves their class position is almost beyond description," declared the OBU Bulletin in 1925.[94] By 1928, the OBU was ready to throw in the towel. After a summer of inaction, the JEB decided "that it would be foolish to put an organizer in the fields to organize harvesters at this time." Instead, it continued to rely on members who might engage in harvest work themselves to act as job-delegates, receiving "a bonus of 50c for every dollar which they procure for initiation fee[s] for new members."[95] And it continued its exhortations, urging farm workers to organize: "Use the grey matter in your skull once in a while and you will realize that by combining you can improve your conditions a great deal. ... Don't shirk your duty." If that failed, a call to pride might succeed:

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[90]. Ibid. Minutes of Meeting of the Resident Members of the G.E.B. of the O.B.U. 5/5/1924

[91]. Bercuson Fools and Wise Men p 230

[92]. PAM MG 10/A 14-2 R. B. Russell Papers # 19 Minutes of General Executive Meeting 29/7/1924; Minutes of the Joint Executive Board 30/9/1924

[93]. Ibid. # 18 Minutes of Joint Executive Boards of the G.E.B and the C.L.C. of the O.B.U. 14/4/1925

> We appeal to your honor as common laborers. ... The country still relies on your muscle, sturdy laborers. At Sunset when you ride home on the bare skin of your heavy steeds, caparisoned with the entanglement of the work harness, think of the beautiful picture you make: The Knights of Toil coming back home in the dusk after a day of the great task on which the country relies. You are the builders of an immense wealth.[96]

Ultimately, it was up to the farm workers to organize themselves. "Get your share out of that tremendous wealth," insisted the Bulletin, "not only in the shape of wages, but also in proper conditions of work, in good grub and decent bedding accommodation."[97]

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[94]. "In the Harvest Fields" OBU Bulletin 24/9/1925

[95]. PAM MG 10/A 14-2 R.B. Russell Papers # 24 Minutes of Joint Executive Board of the O.B.U. 26/6/1928

[96]. "Life in the Harvest Fields" OBU Bulletin 16/8/1928

These were minimal demands and of the type generally sought by established trade unions. But if farm workers were unable to find a satisfactory place within industrial unions, their position in trade unions was simply non-existent. Traditional trade unions had never expressed interest in unskilled, poorly-paid and transitory agricultural labourers. During the 1920s, prairie farm workers were doubly excluded. As labour began to move into politics, farm workers found it even more difficult to forge links with the larger labour movement. Instead, labour sought an alliance with another dissident prairie group that had begun a similar foray into the political arena.[98]

The labour movement was recovering from the backlash of the 1919 strike year. In the climate of strident attacks by business and governments upon the organized strength it had won and the radicalism it had displayed in the previous decade, it was attempting to consolidate its position. Its own movement into politics was weak, leaving it the option of an ineffective solitary voice, or of throwing in its lot with a more powerful group, with the danger of having its own voice drowned out in the process. As Reginald Whitaker has explained,

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[97]. Ibid.

[98]. William Irvine The Farmers in Politics (1920) ed. and intro. by Reginald Whitaker Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1976; W. L. Morton The Progressive Party in Canada Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1950) 1971; C. B. Macpherson Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1968 pp 44-54; David Laycock Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1990

> The most politically advanced elements of the working class movement were forced to choose sides in a struggle predominantly featuring the large bourgeoisie of central Canada, along with its middle-class allies, against the petit bourgeoisie led by the independent commodity producers of the western wheat provinces and rural Ontario. Not surprisingly, they chose the side of those farmers struggling for what was called 'economic democracy,' under the leadership and ideological hegemony of a class whose interests and outlook were significantly different from those of the organized working class.[99]

The ground for an alliance or even for cooperation between labour and agriculture was by no means substantial. Both groups could agree that they had common enemies in large business interests and the railways, who skimmed off the economic benefits that were rightfully theirs, and the federal government who did nothing to protect them. But on issues closer to home, such as maximum hours of work, workers' compensation and daylight saving time, they disagreed sharply.

The agrarian movement was supported by farmers who saw themselves as a distinct class, or at least as a separate group with their own economic interests to protect.[100]

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[99]. Whitaker "Introduction" Irvine The Farmers in Politics p xii

[100]. For this view among the leadership see W. K. Rolph Henry Wise Wood of Alberta Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1950; W. L. Morton "The Social Philosophy of Henry Wise Wood, the Canadian Agrarian Leader" Agricultural History 22:2 July 1948

Their decision to do this directly through politics meant they had to make some choices about where to woo support. Almost entirely, and in keeping with their vision of cooperative rather than conflictual class relations, they chose not to extend their constituency beyond their own members. They might be willing to cooperate with labour, but they would make no concessions. An editorial comment in The Farm and Ranch Review in 1920 illustrates the suspicion underlying the tenuous relationship:

> Agriculture and Labor can walk a common path just so long as the latter confines its activities to improving the existing order of things by legitimate constitutional means and with due consideration of the interests of other classes.... As a matter of humanity, the farmer wants to see all classes able to live in comfort and decency, but that is as far as his real interest in organized labor goes.[101]

When farmers created the Progressive Party for their assault upon federal politics, they made few active attempts to gain the support of labour. They preferred to concentrate on issues that affected themselves directly and to leave labour to represent its own interests, supporting the Progressives or not, as it saw fit. In each of the prairie provinces, there were different possibilities for affiliations between the labour and the agrarian movements. Manitoba was still reeling from the General Strike in Winnipeg, which had received open opposition from farmers' organizations. The Grain Growers' Guide had denounced the strike for advocating "the doctrines of Bolshevism, confiscation and rule by force."[102] Although there was a good deal of rural support for the aims, if not the tactics of the strike,[103] labour was still licking its wounds. It eyed the agrarian movement suspiciously and, as it turned out, with just cause. When the United Farmers of Manitoba entered the political race in 1921, it severed what tenuous ties had existed with the labour movement. In Dauphin for example, where a labour candidate had been elected with agrarian support in 1920, the UFM in 1922 repudiated the association.[104]

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[101]. W. Peterson The Farm and Ranch Review 6/9/1920

In Saskatchewan there were more favourable signs of cooperation, although that was an acknowledgement of labour's weakness in an overwhelmingly agrarian province. Some farmers' groups actively supported not merely cooperation but partnership. In 1921 at Ituna, Saskatchewan, the Farmers' Union of Canada was organized, immediately opening lines of communication with the One Big Union, and declaring as its slogan: "Farmers and workers of the world, unite."[105] But these attempts at cooperation did not find backing at the local constituency level. Labour candidates either ran under their own banner in 1921, or as Labor-Liberal candidates in 1925 and 1929.[106] Liberal hegemony remained unbroken until 1929, with the election of a Co-operative government that relied not at all upon a farmer-labour alliance. It was not until 1934 that a slate of provincial candidates ran under a Farmer-Labor banner in almost every constituency. Fifty ran, but only five were elected.[107] Finally, it was the drought and depression of the 1930s that would reconcile agrarian and labour interests in the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation.[108]

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[102] "The Sympathetic Strike" Grain Growers' Guide 21/5/1919

[103] David Yeo "Rural Manitoba Views the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike" Prairie Forum 14:1 Spring 1989. This interpretation challenges the widely accepted view that farmers were uniformly hostile to the strike. See for example Morton The Progressive Party in Canada pp 117, 274; Martin Robin Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930 Kingston: Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University 1968 p 206

[104] Morton The Progressive Party in Canada p 227

[105] First minute book of Farmers' Union of Canada, Ituna Lodge No. 1, cited in Morton The Progressive Party in Canada p 276

Alberta seemed the likeliest spot for concerted cooperation between labour and agriculture. By late summer in 1919 the United Farmers of Alberta was committed to enter the political arena as a distinct economic interest group.

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[106] Labor candidates ran in Moose Jaw (and won) and Regina (and lost) in 1921. The Labor-Liberal candidate in Moose Jaw in 1925 won, but in 1925 (with the banner switched to Liberal-Labor), the candidate lost. Provincial Elections of Saskatchewan, 1905-1983 2nd edition Regina: Chief Electoral Office 1983 pp 39, 45, 51

[107] In Moose Jaw, a Farmer-Labor candidate ran against a Labor candidate. Directory of Saskatchewan Ministries, Members of the Legislative Assembly and Elections 1905-53 Saskatchewan Archives Board: Regina and Saskatoon 1954 pp 56-73, 74-124

[108] Walter Young The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932-61 Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1969; Seymour Martin Lipset Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan: A Study in Political Sociology (1950) New York: Doubleday 1968; Gad Horowitz Canadian Labour in Politics Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1968; David Lewis The Good Fight: Political Memoirs 1909-1958 Toronto: Macmillan 1981

It sought cooperation with labour in order to fight a common foe, but its ally was fully expected to look out for its own interests. The newly-politicized agrarian movement could benefit from its ties with labour, but it did not need to make concessions to do so. Labour, on the other hand, lagging far behind the farmers in numerical and economic strength, made overtures to the agrarian movement that had a decidedly conciliatory slant.[109]

The Alberta Labour News, which billed itself as the "official paper of organized labour in Alberta," and which was the unofficial organ of the Alberta Branch of the Canadian Labour party, greeted the entry of the United Farmers of Alberta into the political arena warmly. In its inaugural issue it sought the support of farmers for its own labour-oriented aims and soon promised the cooperation and support of the Alberta Federation of Labour for the UFA in the upcoming election.[110] During the 1921 campaign, labour candidates identified themselves closely with the UFA, promising that "the next Government will be a Farmer-Labor Government."[111] Throughout the decade the News pressed for farmer-labour cooperation, seeking it particularly at election-time.[112] The results of that decision redounded upon farm workers.

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[109]. Alvin Finkel "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Party in Alberta, 1917-42" Labour/Le Travail 16 Fall 1985

[110]. Alberta Labour News 4/9/1920; 2/4/1921

[111]. Edmonton Journal 9/7/1921 cited in Carl F. Betke "Farm Politics in an Urban Age: The Decline of the United Farmers of Alberta After 1921" in Lewis H. Thomas, ed. Essays on Western History Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 1976 p 178

The strong stand that the News took on issues affecting labour was watered down when it came to agricultural labour. Farm workers were seldom mentioned in the pages of the newspaper. When they were, the thrust of the comment was not concerned with wages or conditions of farm work, but rather with reconciling the interests of farmers and labour. Immigration was a case in point. Both farmers and workers agreed that immigration of the unskilled kept wages down. To farmers this was a benefit, but to labour it was a disadvantage. The News tried to resolve the difference by pointing out how few of the recent immigrants were going to farms. In 1927, it showed that only 14 out of 215 newly arrived men were reported to have been directed to farm jobs from the Edmonton Employment Bureau, and of the 1540 orders for spring farm help, only 6 were filled by central Europeans. In Lethbridge, none of the 139 immigrants who received work were sent to farms. The situation was similar in Medicine Hat and Drumheller.[113] Moreover, the News assured farmers that the recent immigrants were unsuitable for farm work. Central Europeans especially were unfamiliar with prairie agriculture and were unable to speak English. "Farmers applying for help stipulate that they do not want foreigners," declared the News, and "farmers simply will not have men who cannot understand simple commands."[114]

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[112]. See for example Alberta Labour News 4/8/1923; 3/10/1926

[113]. "Not the Whole Story" Alberta Labour News 18/6/1927

In the meantime, the farmers used their organizational network to attempt to regulate the farm labour supply and conditions of employment and to curb wages. The United Farmers of Alberta struck a farm labour committee in 1920, when wages were still buoyed by post-war demands. "Farmers are unanimous at the present time in saying that we have been paying entirely too much for farm help," declared W. D. Trego, committee convener, urging the members to use their organization to exert its influence. "Up to the present time the U.F.A. as an organization has taken no part in regulating farm wages," he stated, "but if our members are to continue to produce, it is evident that we must come to a decision as to what we can pay for labor."[115] In early 1921, it concluded that $40.00 per month ought to be the base wage. The previous year Alberta farm hands had received an average about $58.00 for year-long work.[116] An inducement was suggested in the form of a five or ten dollar bonus "in case the farmer secured sufficient crop and sufficient prices to make him 6 per cent. interest on his investment in land and equipment." [117] Farmers across the prairies united to tackle the issue. In March 1921, they held a conference of western farm organizations in Regina, and spent "the whole of one day" discussing wages. They agreed to a prairie-wide rate of $60.00 per month for "fully experienced men if they remained throughout the season," the rate to be dropped by ten dollars per month for men who "quit of their own accord before the end of the season."[118] Throughout the decade, farm organizations across the prairies worked to keep the supply of labour high and the wages low. In its search for support from the larger and better organized farmers' movement, labour voiced no objection.

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[114]. "Immigrants are Taking Laborers' Jobs" Alberta Labour News 21/5/1927

[115]. "United Farmers of Alberta" Grain Growers' Guide 16/3/1921

[116]. See Table II-5A Annual Farm Workers' Wages

[117]. "The Labor Problem" UFA Official Circular #1 Calgary 11/2/1921

On occasion, farm workers were included in the general protests launched by organized labour, and so received its back-handed support. The Alberta Federation of Labour had elicited a promise from the provincial government to end the practice of leasing out prisoners, and denounced its failure to do so. At its 1924 convention, the Federation resolved that it "strenuously protest to the Provincial Government against the continuance of leasing our prisoners to work for farmers and other employers."[119] Similarly, the Federation resolved to urge the Federal Government to amend vagrancy sections of the Criminal Code. It objected that workers should be found liable for conviction "simply for turning down jobs with low wages."[120] The lowest paying jobs were nearly always farm work, and unemployed men were under constant pressure by police to take them. In its 1930 reiteration of the resolution, the AFL bolstered its demand by citing the example of several men who had been sentenced to the Fort Saskatchewan penitentiary "on the charge of vagrancy when the evidence showed that they had only been in Edmonton two days, but had turned down farm jobs offered them at low wages."[121] Yet the incident had occurred two years previously. At the time it had passed unremarked, and it did not elicit any suggestion of protection for farm labour wages.

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[118] Manitoba Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1921 p 61

[119] PAA 75.490/1 Alberta Federation of Labour Papers "Resolution 50" Proceedings of the Eleventh Convention of the AFL November 1924

In 1928, the Alberta Federation of Labor finally passed a resolution "favoring the organization of the Agricultural Workers as a part of our movement" and asking the Trades and Labor Congress "to take steps to bring about" such an organization. The purpose, according to the resolution introduced by the International Hod Carriers, Building and Common Laborers' Union No. 92 of Edmonton, was to ensure that the "trade and occupation" of farm workers "may be elevated to a higher standing and that they may receive the benefits of legislation now already enjoyed by other workers." These were laudable aims, but the resolution was based upon the concern that changes in agricultural technology had made the industry "more dependent upon skilled and efficient labor," while the federal government and railway and colonization companies were "yearly dumping thousands of immigrants into this country under the disguise of farm laborers."[122] The effect of restricting immigration to agricultural settlers and farm workers, combined with the passing of Railway Act, was to create a labour surplus. By the end of the decade, it was turning into a glut. Labour's concern about the plight of the farm worker is suspect. The blame for poor conditions of labour in agriculture was laid squarely at the feet of the "the Farmers' Organizations and Co-operative Societies [in which] no real consideration has been given for the economic betterment of the so-called 'farm hand' or agricultural worker." The AFL even passed onto farmers blame for the exclusion of farm workers from labour legislation such as compensation.[123]

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[120] Ibid. Proceedings of the Fourteenth Convention of the AFL January 1926

[121] Ibid. Proceedings of the Eighteenth Convention of the AFL January 1930

Farmers were merely protecting their own interests. In the case of workmen's compensation, farmers protested vigorously against the inclusion of their own employees. Henry Wise Wood voiced a number of objections while the subject was being investigated in 1917. "I think there would be a great difficulty in the practical working out of it," he explained, "on account of the nature of the relationship between the farmer and the labourer." The variable length of employment, ranging from a day to a year, the lack of control that a farmer had over the price he received for his product, and his inability to add the insurance costs "or get it from the consumer" all made the scheme unworkable.[124] The situation in British Columbia and Nova Scotia where farm workers were covered by workmens' compensation by 1923, apparently held no parallels.[125] Labour appears to have concurred. Despite an International Labour Organization draft resolution in 1921, Workmens' Compensation Acts in all three provinces specifically excluded farm labour, even when the Statutes were revised after the ILO resolution.[126]

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[122] Ibid. Proceedings of the Fifteenth Convention of the AFL January 1928 p 25

[123] Ibid.

The fragile unity of interests between the agrarian and labour movements was achieved at the cost of the men who straddled both groups -- farm workers. As J. M. Clarke explained,

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[124]. PAA 64.11/125 Legislative Assembly Papers Report of Investigation Regarding Workmen's Compensation 1918 Submission by H. W. Wood 19/11/1917 pp 1184, 1185, 1186

[125]. Labour Gazette XXIII 1923 p 265

[126]. Alberta Statutes 1908 Workmen's Compensation Act: "This Act shall not apply to the employment of agriculture nor to any work performed or machinery used on or about a farm or homestead for farm purposes or for the purposes of improving such farm or homestead." Canada Department of Labour Labour Legislation in Canada ... 1915 Ottawa: King's Printer 1918 pp 544-5. The Alberta Revised Statutes 1922 emphasized the provisions in "Exemptions of Farm Labor" Idem Labour Legislation in Canada as existing December 31, 1928 Ottawa: King's Printer 1929 p 515. In both Manitoba and Saskatchewan, the Act applied only to "railway, factory, mine, quarry or engineering work or building repair, construction or demolition." Manitoba Workmen's Compensation Act 1920, C.159, s.1; Manitoba Consolidated Amendments 1924 Ch. 209; Saskatchewan Workmen's Compensation Act 1910-11 c.9, s.1; Revised Statutes of Saskatchewan 1920 in Labour Legislation in Canada 1928 p 439 (Manitoba); pp 496 (Saskatchewan)

> Theoretically a number of farmers favor co-operation with labor organizations, and many are inclined to view organized labor as an ally of the working farmers in their struggles against capitalism. But to suggest that this unity of action should be extended to an alliance with the hired man --. Well, I am afraid it would not be received with open arms except in a few isolated cases. Let us never forget that practically all Western wheat growers are exploiters of labor at some season of the year, and ... this tends to foster a class ideology. It is one thing to speak of co-operation with organized labor in the cities, where the class demands of the workers do not directly affect the farmer's position; it is a different matter to speak of co-operating with the man he is exploiting. The formation of an alliance between poor farmers and proletarians is not quite so simple, nor so mechanical in Western Canada.[127]

Certainly, farmers did work to protect their interests with regard to their own hired labour. They could not be expected to support measures that would cost them money or labour-time. While the small farmer might be sympathetic to the labourer in construction or bush work or mining, especially if he had to supplement his farm income or to underwrite his farming venture by waged work in these industries himself, he drew the line at extending provisions for health and safety protection or minimum wages or paid holidays to his own employees. Farmers who were managing their budgets close to the bone could ill afford the costs of workers' compensation.

The idea of maximum hours on farms drew the greatest criticism from farmers, who scoffed at the idea of an eight-hour day, pointing out that farm work did not move to the rhythm of the factory. Animals had to be tended early in the morning and late in the day, and at harvest-time the demands of ripening crops and the threat of early frosts dictated working days of twelve, fourteen or even sixteen hours. Farm workers who enquired about hours of work were curtly told that such matters were subject to "the custom of the district" or in the absence of any established custom, that they were simply to obey their employer.[128] Farmers objected to any attempt to regulate hours. When Saskatchewan Premier W. M. Martin was invited by federal Minister of Labour Gideon Robertson to send a delegate to the International Labour Conference in 1921, he declined on the grounds that "it is very doubtful as to whether any good can be accomplished by endeavouring to have the Conference agree on the question of the regulation of the hours of work in agriculture." He pointed out the great variations in types of agriculture, systems of cultivation and climate, questioning "how any such legislation is possible." His conclusion was that, especially at seed-time and harvest, "a short hour day seems to me to be simply out of the question."[129] When the International Labour Organization went directly to the United Farmers of Manitoba for a response, it was informed in no uncertain terms that:

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[127]. UTL Thomas Fisher Library, Ms. 179 Robert S. Kenny Collection Box 9 J.M. Clarke "Memo on the Agrarian Question for Comrade Morris" March 1930

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[128] "Employer and Hired Man" Employer and Farmers' Manual: Legal Advisor and Veterinary Guide Winnipeg: The Nor'-West Farmer 1920 p 152

[129] SAB M4/I/100 W. M. Martin Papers pp 30017-8 W. M. Martin to G. D. Robertson 1/8/1921

> the great majority of farmers in Canada appear to be of the opinion that an eight hour day on the farm would make profitable agriculture impossible, and if such proposals were seriously considered I am sure that you would hear from us.[130]

Nor were farmers particularly sympathetic to calls for better working or living conditions for their workers, since they had once endured the same conditions themselves. Farmers reasoned that there was no logical basis for providing their hired hands with better conditions than the ones with which they themselves had had to contend. No other industry provided its workforce with even equal, let alone better conditions to those of its employers. Some farmers carried the argument even further, declaring that the hired hand owed a debt of gratitude to his employer that transcended the wage agreement. One farmer's wife was explicit:

> In a new country like this, where every man -- the farmer as well as his 'hand' -- is himself a labourer, to hold the hard worked and harassed farmer at harvest time for wages that he cannot afford to pay and continue to function save at a loss, is a poor return for a sincere effort on the farmer's part to give a home and a living to the stranger within his gates.[131]

And in those cases where farmers' conditions were superior to those of their employees, this was considered only fair. After all, most of them had started out in the same condition, and they had put up with hard work and pioneer hardships. There was a pride and even status attached to those who had suffered and survived extreme hardship.[132] Moreover, the rewards of that hardship were directly translated into material improvement for the farmer. As long as it was believed that farm workers could win the ultimate prairie prize of farms of their own, their hard work and thrift would present them with the opportunity to face challenges as the early settlers had done. They were enabled to build up a healthy moral bankroll with which to participate fully in the agricultural community.

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[130] PAM MG 10/E1 United Farmers of Manitoba Papers pp 924-5 L. E. Matthaei to J. W. Ward 8/1/1926; p 922 John Ward to L. E. Matthaei 8/2/1926

[131] Winnifred Reeve "Alberta, 1923" Alberta History 28:1 Winter 1980 p 30

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The social side of labour-capital relations in prairie agriculture is thus of particular significance. The relations were forged at the point of production but extended well beyond it. Agrarian culture and ideology proved to be as powerful constraints in mitigating the conflictual relationship as were the structural barriers discussed above.

Productive relations determine the basic contours of social relations. However, the nuances in and between each relationship are coloured by the configurations of other affiliations.[133] Although hired hands were not members of the farm family, they were accorded a special position within the farm household and within the farm community. To a greater extent than in most other industries, farm workers developed a relationship with their employers and with agriculture as a whole that, although firmly rooted in the relations of production, stretched far beyond the purely economic. In this relationship can be found another key to the particular position farm workers occupied and additional insight into the way they responded to that position.

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[132]. Dick finds that "hardship prestige" was a factor that conferred social status upon the settlers of Abernethy. Dick Farmers 'Making Good' p 128

Material on social alliances in the previous chapter explained the way farm workers entered the agrarian society of the prairie west. With logistical barriers to forging links with the working class, and with economic reasons for finding common ground with the dominant class, agricultural labourers saw themselves as agriculturalists first and as labourers a distant second. In pioneer communities, the sparseness of population led to necessary cooperation, while the availability of land led to a common sense of purpose. Hired hands found a welcome in the dominant culture of the agricultural west. For prairie farm workers, this alliance continued during the 1920s, and the social relations served to mediate their basically conflictual relationship with capital.

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[133]. For a discussion of the intersection of domestic relations with productive relations, see Max Hedley "Relations of Production of the 'Family Farm': Canadian Prairies" Journal of Peasant Studies 9:1 October 1981 p 73

Yet the relationship itself was in flux. The 1920s witnessed strains upon agriculture's economic base, which found reflection in social relationships. This was a capitalist economy, but it was small-scale, in that it was based upon individual family farms, which were nonetheless attempting to engage in large-scale production. As agriculture moved from a pioneer economy toward a greater involvement in a market economy it became more enmeshed in the structures and style of capitalist production. The culture was thus a complex amalgam of values and institutions that were traditionally rural and agrarian and those that were emerging from the pioneer era with ambitions to embrace the objectives of maturing capitalism. Farmers hoped to achieve the best of both worlds. Wheat pools were but one attempt to "create a new form of enterprise which blended economic viability with social purpose."[134] Farm workers adopted tactics to bring the best return for their labour as they sold it on the open market, yet looked, too, for employers with whom they could get along. A difficult farmer would soon find that his "field of labour is narrowed down to strangers and those who have not yet heard of his reputation."[135] The result was a combination of oftenutopian ideals about social relationships with hard-nosed economic strategies, on the part of both labour and capital.[136]

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[134]. Ian MacPherson and John Herd Thompson "The Business of Agriculture: Farmers and the Adoption of 'Business Methods', 1880-1950" in Peter Baskerville, ed. Canadian Papers in Business History Vol. I Victoria: Public History Group, University of Victoria 1989 p 260

[135]. PAA 69.289 Premier's Papers File 503 Agricultural Labour 1921-29 Employment Bureau A. Redshaw to W. Smitten 23/5/1928

In the social realm, this combination produced diverging ideologies. The view of bachelorhood is a case in point. Bachelorhood was a masculine identity, but a particular variant. In the prairie west, it had been constructed to suit the needs and to fit the ideology of a pioneer agricultural community. As that community moved towards capitalist values, with increasingly divergent viewpoints between labour and capital, the identity was reconstructed to suit both the individuals who carried it and those who observed it. The most important cause of the transformation was the changing material conditions on the prairies as the agricultural economy developed and as the agricultural community matured. The greatest determinant of the contours of the reconstruction was economic relations.

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[136]. For a discussion of the persistence of traditional rural "yeoman" values and attitudes into the era of capitalist agriculture, see Allan Kulikoff "The Transition to Capitalism in Rural America" William and Mary Quarterly 3rd Series XLVI January 1989 pp 141-144. Kulikoff finds that "Yeomen were embedded in capitalist world markets and yet alienated from capitalist social and economic relations." p 144 In the prairie west, this applies to a much greater extent in theory than in practice, as evidenced by the disjuncture between ideology and reality. Conflicting attitudes were often held at the same time. See MacPherson and Thompson "The Business of Agriculture"; David C. Jones "'There is Some Power About the Land' -- The Western Agrarian Press and Country Life Ideology" Journal of Canadian Studies 17:3 Fall 1982. See also Steven Hahn and Jonathan Prude, eds. The Countryside in the Age of Capitalist Transformation: Essays in the Social History of Rural America Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1985; Christopher Clark "Household Economy, Market Exchange, and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800-1860" Journal of Social History 13:2 1979; John Shover First Majority - Last Minority: The Transformation of Rural Life in America Northern Illinois University Press: DeKalb, Illinois 1976

What was of particular importance for bachelors during the original construction of the identity was that even though the ideology upon which it was based was rooted in material conditions, an individual's actual economic position did not figure highly in whether or not he was accepted into the society. It likewise did not figure highly in the identity of bachelors. Most of them were not wealthy, but their capital-poor position was to be a temporary phenomenon. Thus it was that the link between the economy and the ideology, although very strong, was blurred during the pioneer era and, consequently, in the identity that bachelor homesteaders constructed for themselves.

But the pioneer era did not last. Homestead lands filled up, purchased lands were taken, more land came under cultivation, economic and social institutions were established and matured. Sparsely settled and underdeveloped pioneer areas made the transition to mature agricultural communities. A significant marker of the transition was the increase in the number and proportion of farm families. By 1921, more than fifty-five percent of the rural male population aged fifteen years and older was married, bringing the prairie marriage rate into line with the Canadian average.[137] The ideal of a family-oriented economy and society had become the reality.

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[137]. See Table I-2M Married Men as Percentage of Total Adult Males; Graph I-2 Marriage Rates

With the transition to a fully-developed commercial economy, the social position of bachelors came to be more narrowly defined by their economic status. The new equation between bachelorhood and economic position was a reflection of the growth of capitalist agriculture. Increasing economic stratification within the farming community was coming to be reflected in social stratification as well. Social distinction based on economic position was a phenomenon that had been denied and deplored during the pioneering years and had been held in check by the sharing of pioneer hardships. But it came to be recognized and even -- somewhat sadly and reluctantly -- accepted as the price of progress.

At the same time, men who had not yet achieved farm ownership and the headship of farm families were faced with serious impediments to doing so. Entry into farming was becoming extremely costly, and thus extremely difficult. This did not stop the movement of single men onto the prairies, but it did change their position. Instead of being bachelor homesteaders, they were now bachelor hired hands.

The distinction was not always clear-cut. In the early days, nearly all homesteaders and probably most men who had purchased farms had worked out as agricultural labourers, but they had been regarded primarily as farm owners. Now there were many more men who were identified only as farm labourers, who faced seriously diminished opportunities to become farm owners and heads of farm families. As late as

1931, only fifteen percent of waged farm workers were listed in the census as heads of families.[138]

The family-orientation of prairie agriculture achieves particular importance with the new position of bachelors. As indicated in the previous chapter, the bachelor identity encompassed attributes that were characteristic of masculinity, of agriculture, of pioneering and of frontiers, but that were not particularly restrained by class position. However, the cultural construct of bachelorhood came to have a very different meaning as it became defined within narrower economic parameters.

The resulting shift in attitudes toward bachelorhood presents an interesting glimpse of a culture in flux. Aspects of the prairie culture that had provided a special place for all bachelors within the agricultural community came to be applied primarily to the workforce. Bachelorhood was now more restricted. It came to be seen as part of the definition of agricultural labourers, in contrast to its earlier application as part of the definition of a great many newcomers to the agricultural community, whether owners or workers.

This cultural change thus reflected an important structural condition. Bachelorhood was, and continued to be, a precondition of most agricultural employment. Low wages, job insecurity, a high degree of mobility, and a lack of accommodation for families, all continued to preclude marriage and family from the lives of most farm workers. In 1931, only 13.6 percent of farm workers and farmers' sons were married, compared with 79.1 percent of prairie farmers.[139] According to the federal Department of Immigration and Colonization, "nine out of ten farmers want to have nothing at all to do with a family." Although some farmers welcomed the services that a farm hand's wife could provide, most saw a family as trouble and expense. "It is only the one out of ten that will even consider giving employment to a man and his wife, and the number who will take care of man, wife, and several children is much more limited still."[140] One farmer went so far as to refuse to honour his agreement to take on a hired man when he discovered that the man's wife was pregnant.[141] It was a circular process that was reinforced as bachelorhood came to be associated with hired hands. Farmers often recognized the advantage of employing married workers whom they regarded as steadier and more reliable, but by far the majority of them hired single men.[142]

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[138]. Author's calculations. The number of farm workers listed as heads of families was 12,669. Census 1931 Vol V Table 45 pp 786, 796, 802

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[139]. Author's calculations. The figures are 150,038 single and 23,632 married farm workers and farmers' sons, and 51,549 single and 195,822 married farmers. Census 1931 Vol VII Table 54 pp 644-5

[140]. NAC RG 76 Immigration Branch Records Vol 234 File 135755 part 5 John Barnett to W. J. Egan 2/4/1927. See other letters in this file. See also GAI BN .C212 G CPR Papers James Colley Correspondence; P. L. Naismith Correspondence

[141]. Ibid. part 6 C. W. Vernon to Barnett 20/5/1927

Judgments about bachelorhood began to change.[143] In the early years, bachelor farmers were expected eventually to settle down, own a farm, marry and raise a family. Those who had not yet done so were excused on the grounds that they were still economically unprepared, or there was a shortage of women. But as the male-to-female imbalance was redressed, and as farmers began to make economic progress, these reasons lost their validity. And as bachelorhood came to be more restricted to farm workers, it was perceived as evidence of an unambitious nature. Manitoba's Department of Agriculture began to characterize farm workers as men "who have failed in pretty nearly every walk of life."[144] Advertisements in farm journals contrasted the "ambitious man" with those who were satisfied to pitch hay for $4.00 a day or do chores for $3.50.[145]

Hired hands were often seen as too shiftless to settle down and own farms or raise families. Those who were not making definite plans to take up farming on their own account were dismissed as "drifters."[146] And since they had little opportunity to become farm owners themselves, they were no longer eligible to marry the farmer's daughter and thus solve their dilemma. A contemporary observer explained a common perception that placed the farm hand in a double bind:

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[142] For example, the CPR's Colonization Department, which was involved in farm labour placement, reported in 1926 that the local colonization boards placed orders for only 53 married couples and 98 families, but 13,494 single men. This was typical of placements throughout the decade. GAI BN.C212 G CPR Papers Advisory Committee Papers "The Departmental Organization in Western Canada" [1926]. See also Danysk "Farm Apprentice to Agricultural Proletarian" p 30

[143] See for example NAC RG 76 Immigration Branch Records Volume 234 File 13577 part 5 John Barnett to W. J. Egan 2/4/1927 and other letters in the file.

[144] Manitoba Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1920 p 12

[145] "What your Ambitious Friends are doing" The Farm and Ranch Review 5/11/1920 p 6

> As the labourer nears thirty-five years of age, at which period in his life he should have accumulated substantial savings, he approaches a transitional period. This phase is noticeable for his desire to be independent. If the labourer fails to show this characteristic restlessness and settles down to the acceptance of agricultural employment as a life task, he has past [sic] beyond that period of most effective service and has entered the final stage indicative of the stagnatory period.[147]

The new economic position of bachelors led to a decline in their status as their relationship with the dominant ideology shifted. The earlier bachelor homesteaders had achieved acceptance within the dominant culture because as they constructed their identity, they both appropriated and embodied features of the prairie ideology. It was in their interest to do so, since social acceptance was an important component of agricultural success. In addition, however, it must be noted that they embraced the ideology because it coincided with the type of future they sought for themselves. In this regard, they even had a hand in shaping the ideology. They shared the majority vision of agricultural progress based on sacrifice, hard work and a willingness to endure harsh conditions.

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[146] Duncan Marshall Farm Management Canada: Imperial Oil Ltd. 1931 p 65

[147] Maurice Fitzgerald The Status of Farm Labour in Saskatchewan MA McMaster University 1926 p 35. This thesis contains much personal observation and is useful as a primary source.

But bachelor hired hands did not seem to adopt this view. Their interests, and those of the dominant ideology, began to diverge. They were not eager to bear the risks of agriculture for the dubious possibilities of future success. Hired hands would have scoffed at the proposal of the disgruntled farmer who wanted "some system for dividing with the hired man under which the farmer's interest will be protected in case of a deficit."[148] They were unwilling to work for the meagre rewards that most farmers offered and to tolerate the wretched conditions. Farmers were urged to recognize that conditions of labour had changed over the past fifteen to twenty-five years. "Labor looks upon life in an entirely different way now than it did then," insisted the Nor'-West Farmer in 1920. "Laboring people ... insist on more pay, a shorter day and more comfort in life than were customary then. Labor is through being driven to work. In the future it must be led to work."[149] Farm workers were working for their own individual betterment and were not willing to sacrifice their own interests for that of the farms upon which they were working, nor of the farmers by whom they were employed nor, it seemed, for the agricultural community of the prairie west.

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[148]. "Wants Farmer Protected" Nor'-West Farmer 20/2/1920 p 230 letter from Farmer, Saskatchewan to Editor

[149]. "Labor for Live Stock" Nor'-West Farmer 20/7/1920 p 1057

The economic contribution to the agricultural community that the bachelor hired hand did make was measured by different criteria than those used for the bachelor homesteader. Even though a bachelor homesteader made slower progress than did a married one, his work on his own land, and his potential for developing his own farm, were the benchmarks of his success. But the economic contribution of a bachelor hired hand was measured only in his present ability to help his employer bring in a good crop or otherwise improve his employer's farm. His contribution was indirect, undervalued and suspect. When farmer H. A. Kuhn reported to the CPR that the farm he had purchased from them was not doing well, he was blamed for placing too much reliance upon his hired man. "Our experience is that where there are such valuable improvements and equipment as you apparently have on the farm, that it requires somebody who is personally interested in the place, to get the best results out of it."[150]

The social contribution of a bachelor hired hand was likewise altered by his economic position. Again, it was a shift in emphasis from potential to present reality. As a bachelor homesteader he would have been judged on his probable ability to find a wife who would provide a higher level of culture, sophistication, and gentleness not only to himself but to the broader community as well. As a bachelor farm hand, however, he was less likely than ever to marry, and was thus less susceptible to the civilizing influence of a wife and family. His social contribution was often measured only in terms of whether he brought harmony or discord into his employer's home.

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[150]. GAI BN .C212 G CPR Papers P. L. Naismith Correspondence File 189 P. L. Naismith to H. A. Kuhn 25/2/1925

The behaviour of bachelors was likewise examined, and received harsh judgement. Women played an important role in this assessment. They were charged with the mission of bringing moral and cultural uplift to a male-dominated society and with providing the guardianship and discipline necessary for a morally and socially upright future generation.[151] Their task was to create a climate of social well-being that was unlike the rough masculine behaviour that had dominated the frontier.[152] While farm women continued to express special concern for young single men who were incapable of taking care of themselves, they also worried about the moral standards of their families. Social conduct such as drinking, gambling, fighting and visiting houses of ill-repute were much less easily forgiven.[153] This type of behaviour did decline with the advent of families,[154] so its occurrence stood in stark contrast to the behavioral norms of the developing agrarian community.

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[151]. See for example Mrs. George [Marian] Cran A Woman in Canada Toronto: Musson nd [c1908] pp 108-110; Susan Jackell, ed. A Flannel Shirt and Liberty: British Emigrant Gentlewomen in the Canadian West, 1880-1914 Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press 1982; Voisey Vulcan p 213; Jean Burnet Next-Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1951 p 69. For the American experience see Julie Roy Jeffrey Frontier Women: The Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1880 New York: Hill and Wang 1979; Sandra Myers Westering Women and the Frontier Experience, 1800-1915 Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press 1982; Glenda Riley Frontierswomen: The Iowa Experience Ames: Iowa University State Press 1981

[152]. Mark Rosenfeld has found that even in a non-frontier area, men who were temporarily without their wives engaged in a "bachelor culture of recreation." Mark Rosenfeld "'It was a hard life': Class and Gender in the Work and Family Rhythms of a Railway Town 1920-1950"

In the home, personal habits of farm workers were subject to scrutiny. Mothers were instructed to protect simultaneously the morals and the health of their families. "Is the average home sanitary?" asked the women's section of the Grain Growers' Guide, deploring the use of the common water dipper. Even trusted neighbours might pass on disease through such a practice, and "Then there are the hired help, about whom you may know nothing. Is it right that they should drink out of the same vessel as you and your

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Canadian Historical Association Historical Papers/ Communications historiques Windsor 1988 pp 262-3

[153]. Compare with similar attitudes towards other groups of single men: Robert Harney "Men Without Women: Italian Migrants in Canada, 1885-1930" Betty Boyd Caroli, Robert F. Harney and Lydia F. Tomasi, eds. The Italian Immigrant Woman in North America Toronto: The Multicultural History Society of Ontario 1978; Karen Dubinsky "Sex and the Single Industry Community: The Social and Moral Reputation of Northern Ontario, 1900-1930" unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting Kingston 1991

[154]. Voisey Vulcan p 163

children?"[155] Farm women were becoming increasingly concerned to "observe the little niceties and decencies on the farm where we are making a real home and trying to bring up the children."[156] Farm hands were rated on cleanliness, manners, and as an example for the children. Many a bachelor hired hand failed the test. As "A Mother of Two" cautioned:

> I think if a woman does her duty in the home, in the training of her children, she cannot be too particular as to those she admits to the privacy of her home, especially on the farm, where the hired help ... are bound to associate with and influence the children to a certain extent.[157]

These changes were taking place within the context of a transition in the position of agrarian life in the larger Canadian economy and society. As industrialization challenged the economic and political hegemony of agriculture, as scientific thought and method came to dominate the business world, and as the bright lights and economic opportunities of cities began to lure young farm people, rural life came under attack.[158] The most visible effect was the depletion of rural population in central Canada, a problem that governments, churches and concerned citizens addressed.[159] But westerners worried too. Farm journals expressed the common fear that people did not recognize that agriculture was the "anchor" of the nation, the "great untroubled reservoir of sanity and common sense."[160] Farm people grew alarmed that agriculture could not hold onto young people. The finest, who possessed "as much courage and capacity for hard work as their forbears," were finding that "the game has not been worth the candle" and were being drawn to the cities by "the spirit of adventure, which is the will to success."[161]

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[155]. "Is the Average Home Sanitary?" Grain Growers' Guide 13/9/1922 p 13

[156]. Grain Growers' Guide 23/9/1925 p 18

[157]. "A Mother of Two" to editor of "Sunshine" column Grain Growers' Guide 16/10/1912

[158]. See Table III-10 Canadian Exports; Graph III-2 Export Values; James Forbes Newman "The Impact of Technology upon Rural Southwestern Manitoba, 1920-1930" MA Queen's University 1971

The agrarian community responded by formulating and advocating a "Country Life Ideology" that counterposed the land as "the fount of health, peace, virtue and the Spirit" to the city as "unproductive and parasitic, [the] source of dissipation, sham and unfulfillment."[162] This ideology took hold during the first two decades of the twentieth century and shaped the attitudes and actions of farm dwellers throughout the 1920s and beyond. It combined with a growing emphasis on the role of women as homemakers. Women were urged to recognize that their responsibilities toward their families included emotional, psychological and physical well-being. A farm woman from rural Saskatchewan acknowledged the task. "We of the farm must recognize the fact that there must be time and strength for social, religious and intellectual interests."[163] The attitude was echoed throughout the rural prairies, as the farm home was expected to be a "haven of safety and healthfulness."[164] In a contest run by the women's section of the Grain Growers' Guide in 1922, farm women were asked "Do you want your daughter to marry a farmer?"[165] Their answers expressed fulfilment in a life close to nature and free of the social hazards of the city environment. They also expressed desire for an intimate family life that by definition included only members of the family circle.

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[159]. See for example John MacDougall Rural Life in Canada, Its Trends and Tasks Toronto: University of Toronto Press (1913) 1973

[160]. Farmer's Advocate 16/6/1920 p 1028, 17/11/1920 p 1854

[161]. Marjorie Harrison Go West - Go Wise! A Canadian Revelation London: Edward Arnold 1930 p 131

[162]. Jones "'There is Some Power About the Land'" p 96

Bachelors came under fire for failing to live up to the agrarian ideal. Their very bachelorhood served to cut them off from membership in the institution that was extolled as the heart of country life. The nurturing and reformist aspects of the ideology identified the family farm as the source and haven "of lasting democratic values, and the structural basis of ... egalitarian rural communities."[166] The agrarian defence of these values elevated the importance of the family, which was seen to embody the rural virtues. At the same time, as the "family farm and its virtues ... are seen as beleaguered, ... attention is directed at the exploitation which is leading to the extinction of this form of production. Consequently there is a reluctance to associate the farm with the exploitation of labour."[167] In such an ideological climate, there was only a restricted place for bachelor hired hands.

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[163]. Grain Growers' Guide 1/4/1926 p 31

[164]. Canadian Power Farmer June 1923 p 4

[165]. "Do You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Farmer?" Grain Growers' Guide 8 March 1922 p 15. The prize-winning letters appeared in the June and July issues. For an assessment of the entries as a reflection of farm womens' unpaid labour, see Mary Kinnear "'Do You Want Your Daughter to Marry a Farmer?': Women's Work on the Farm, 1922" Donald H. Akenson, ed. Canadian Papers in Rural History Vol. VI Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press 1988

They were very visibly just what city-folk were saying was wrong with the country. Their exclusion from family life made them country bumpkins and their low wages made them poor country cousins. In one study, the farm worker of ten years duration was characterized as "lack[ing] sufficient education or initiative to rise above his present situation or ... mentally incapable of doing so."[168] Moreover, their vision seemed to be narrowly focused on attaining higher wages, not on becoming more efficient producers. Farmers complained that they must have workers of "a class which will work to the interests of the farmer."[169] Farm hands were not recognized as making a significant economic contribution to their industry, let alone to the Canadian economy.

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[166]. Hedley "Relations of Production of the 'Family Farm'" p 78

[167]. Ibid.

[168]. Fitzgerald Status of Farm Labour p 81

[169]. PAA 69.289 Premier's Papers Employment Bureau File 508 F. W. Crandall to Greenfield 5/7/1923

And given the importance of farm ownership in the prairie ideology, bachelor hired hands were often seen as economic failures, in sharp contrast to earlier bachelor homesteaders who had been viewed as successes, or at least potential successes. This was an important distinction in an industry that offered no guarantees. In the uncertainty of prairie agriculture, of the insecurity of rainfall, and frost, and disease, of the threat of crop failures and foreclosures, in the context of a soaring cost-price spiral, farmers in next-year country were haunted by the spectre of sinking into agricultural waged labour.

The bachelor identity came under attack. There were two dimensions to this reassessment and harsher judgement. One was that there were real changes in what was perceived by both bachelors and outsiders as constituent elements of the bachelor persona. Most of these changes were brought about by the economic changes of the post-pioneering period and signalled a deterioration in the social and economic position of bachelors. But the second dimension was that the tolerance for what was perceived as typically bachelor behaviour fell.

What was formerly seen as healthy independence was now seen as irresponsibility. What had been an endearing quality of inability to care for oneself was now slovenliness. What had once been tolerated as youthful letting-off-steam was now imprudence. Hired hands were subject to strong judgements: "From what I can learn, any work that Traynor may have lost has been his own fault," declared the CPR's Assistant Superintendent of Colonization. "He comes into town whenever he gets an opportunity, and spends most of his time in one of the beer parlors, gets full up and then becomes nasty."[170]

In response to these changes, bachelors began to reconstruct their identity. They focused on different attributes, giving new emphasis to some while discounting others, or they reordered them in consideration of their changing importance, or they used them in different ways.

With the opportunities for farm ownership so curtailed, bachelor hired hands focused their energies on immediate issues. "From the farm labourer's point of view," according to the federal Department of Labour, "he is interested first in a suitable wage, next, in reasonable hours for labour and then in stable employment."[171] Unlike bachelor homesteaders who were often as much, or even more, interested in learning to farm as in accumulating capital, bachelor hired hands concentrated on improving their wages and their working and living conditions, and on adjusting to their new economic position. In doing so, they called upon old attributes of their bachelor identity, which had been shaped by an ideology with which they were now sharply at odds, and they used these attributes in different ways.

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[170]. GAI BN .C212 G CPR Papers James Colley Correspondence Memorandum James Colley to Van Scoy 10/10/1928

[171]. Labour Gazette 1929 p 496

The construction and reconstruction of identity is a complex process, a response to the practical needs of the group and to the values of the larger ideology. The anticipation of marriage, which had played such a significant role in shaping the identity of the bachelor homesteader, was a smaller consideration for the bachelor hired hand.[172] Indeed, remaining a bachelor was a positive asset, since the work paid such meagre wages, required great mobility, and seldom made any provision for the accommodation of a wife and family. A 1922 United Farm Women of Manitoba survey revealed that only 37 out of the 366 respondents reported a separate house for the hired help.[173] The hired hand who was unencumbered stood a better chance to make a living.

The steadiness that was an important attribute of the homesteader bachelors, the willingness to put off present pleasures for future rewards, was less important, indeed often irrelevant, to bachelor hired hands. When the United States Industrial Commission studied hired hands in 1899, it reported that the breakdown of the agricultural ladder undermined the ambitions of bachelor farm workers. With farm ownership beyond their reach, "there seems to be a decided tendency for the farm laborer, if he is unmarried, to work for money without a very definite object." Any money earned "is likely to be used for what his fancy dictates, most likely for a horse and buggy of his own."[174] A quarter century later, Canadian prairie farm wife Kathleen Strange reported that all hired hands yearned for a car. "Automobile agents reaped a fine harvest out of hired men by selling them second-hand cars," she recalled, "and often took the best part of their wages every month in payment for them."[175]

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[172]. Nancy Forestall has discovered a "homosocial bachelor culture" in a predominantly-male mining community in Northern Ontario, in which the ideology of the family was largely absent and emphasis was placed on the "rough" rather than the "respectable" elements of masculinity. Nancy Forestall "The Rough and Respectable: Gender Construction in the Porcupine Mining Camp, 1909-1920" unpublished paper presented at the Canadian Historical Association Annual Meeting Kingston 1991

[173]. PAM MG10/E1 United Farmers of Manitoba Papers Box 12 United Farm Women of Manitoba Survey of Farm Homes, Questionnaire 1922

The most significant changes occurred when the men called upon old attributes of their bachelor identity and used them in different ways. A case in point is the characteristic of independence. As earlier indicated, this was an important attribute of agricultural pioneers, and it held a revered place in the prairie ideology. It is not surprising, then, to see it surface in the identity of bachelor homesteaders, who needed liberal doses of this trait if they were to carve a farm out of the virgin prairie. And when bachelor homesteaders became bachelor hired hands, the attribute retained its significance, although the reasons for its importance changed and so did its uses.

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[174]. Dean Davenport to the Industrial Commission 1899 cited in Paul Taylor "The American Hired Hand: His Rise and Decline" Land Policy Review VI:1 Spring 1943 p 12

[175]. Kathleen Strange With the West in Her Eyes: The Story of a Modern Pioneer Toronto: George J. McLeod 1937 p 253. See also Barons History Book Club Wheat Heart of the West Barons, Alberta: Barons History Book Club 1972 p 246

Farm workers applied their own meaning to the attribute of independence, using it in their own interests, and in a way that was inimical to those of their employers. This appropriation of a characteristic of the dominant ideology, and its subversion, was most clearly expressed in the "independence" of farm workers within their economic position. As indicated in the previous chapter, they were notorious for job-jumping, for quitting work at the slightest provocation or for no reason an employer could understand. The independence that job-jumping expressed was an important attribute of bachelorhood, and something that farmers deplored -- they agreed that married men were much more reliable than bachelors. From the farmer's point of view, single men had a "tendency ... to wander from place to place."[176] But to the men who were using their independence in this way, it was an effective strategy to discipline bosses, to achieve better working or living conditions, and most importantly, to maximize earnings.

The seasonal nature of agriculture resulted in jobs that were short-term and a workforce that was highly mobile. Both factors discouraged collective action and encouraged individualistic responses to wages and working conditions.

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[176]. GAI BN .C212 G CPR Papers James Colley Correspondence File 692 James Colley to Vanscoy 7/4/1926

In the positive sense, farm workers were able to parlay the immediacy of seasonal demands for their labour into high wages. When farm worker Sydney Metcalfe left the farm of Robert Stuart, the CPR farm placement office commiserated. Farm workers "are always looking out for a higher wage," declared James Colley. "Many of them prefer to work for higher wages for short periods and take the chance of being out of work during the winter."[177] Acting individually, farm workers were able to demand and receive high wages when the farmer was hard-pressed to bring in his crop and could not afford the time to search for cheaper labour. Farmers were forced to recognize that their hired men might want to "quit forthwith without cause or grievance" when the prospect of higher wages beckoned. "Some men get that way about this season when help is scarce and prospects for higher wages in harvest are good," mused the editor of the Nor'-West Farmer, "or [when] somebody offers them a better wage than they are getting."[178] In the negative sense, collective action was simply too risky. Farm labourers could ill-afford the possibility of a prolonged strike during the brief high-paying season. Especially at harvest, the demands for their labour were so urgent and so strong that an individual refusal to work was often a better strategy than was an attempt at collective action which took time and organization and was likely to bring down the force of law. It was much faster and more cost-effective simply to scout out better-paying jobs.

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[177]. Ibid. File 1484 James Colley to Robert Stuart 25/10/1925

[178]. "Hired Men Want to Quit" Nor'-West Farmer 20/7/1920 p 1052

Moreover, the nature of farm employment and the organization of the industry gave further impetus to individualistic action. Most farm hands spent far more time with their employers than with other farm labourers, and their work required individual initiative rather than cooperative effort. The many small employers in this extremely time-pressured business could be more quickly and effectively disciplined by immediate direct action, such as job-jumping, than by the slower method of large strikes, which require planning and central organization, and money, and time. Farm workers may have had little opportunity to develop the habit of collective action, but their continued use of strategies of individualism were based on past success, both in gaining employment and in exercising some measure of control over the conditions of that employment.

Independence, expressed as job-jumping or other individualistic methods of dealing with the working-class realities of farm labour, was thus a significant form of worker protest and, as such, sharply at odds with the agrarian ideology in which it had been nurtured. As the interests of the bachelors and the larger agrarian community began to diverge, the men redefined their identity. They carved a new niche for themselves, still within the parameters of the dominant agrarian ideology, but one responsive to their own changing needs.

The changes that took place in the 1920s in the social structure of the agricultural community were reflected not only in the institutional forms of the dominant culture but were also evident in ideological developments. This allowed farm workers to maintain what was a very ambiguous position. They were able to keep a foot in each camp, one in labour and one in capital. They subscribed to the dominant culture in its institutional forms, yet embraced and manifested an ideology that was appropriate to their class position. They were able to do this because they shared with the dominant culture an ethos of individuality, which they appropriated ideologically in an oppositional manner.[179]

In the early pioneering period, and even later, the ethos of individualism was an important part of the value system of the agricultural community. Although coming to the west was often a family or group strategy, individualism was a characteristic that was widely celebrated and to varying degrees necessary for agricultural success. It was espoused by those pioneers who were rugged individualists in the first place, having headed west in the exciting days of hard work and free land and the building of a new society. It was an ethos that was embraced to some degree by all members of the agricultural community, whatever their economic situation.

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[179]. My use of the concept of ideology has a particular definition in the prairie agrarian context. I am using it in conjunction with another concept, ethos. I distinguish between ethos and ideology in the following way: both embody ideas about standards of behaviour, attitudes, morals, ideals, and so on. But I see these concepts in a two-tier relationship: ethos is a more generalized concept, less clearly defined, and encompassing a very broad range of attitudes and ideals. Examples of what I include as ethos are values that can even be contradictory, such as those of cooperation or individuality, both of which were embraced at different times and under different circumstances by prairie residents. These values are not the exclusive property of any particular group. Ideology is more specific in that it selects certain features of the ethos and appropriates them for its own use, or interprets them in a way that is consistent with its own needs. An example of this is the way such values as cooperation and individuality are perceived in different cultures.

It was also very practically applied in the workplace, where individual initiative and judgement and resourcefulness were highly valued, indeed essential components of agricultural success, whether as owner or as worker. The farmer was lauded for possessing these qualities, and he hired men who exhibited these qualities as well. A farm worker who demonstrated initiative and good judgement and resourcefulness, and who could be trusted to perform a wide variety of farm tasks with little supervision, was in great demand. Thus not only was the farm worker likely an individualist to begin with, since his purpose in coming to the west was to establish a farm of his own, but this attribute was among the most highly valued as he sought employment and the most highly encouraged as he continued in it.

Individualism was certainly used to serve capital's needs, but it also could serve labour's needs. And farm workers did use it, in ways that served their needs and were antithetical to those of capital. If men were dissatisfied with their employer, their working conditions, or the food on the table, they simply quit. They appropriated the ethos and embodied a particular use of it in their ideology in a way that was consistent with their class position. As a tactic in their struggle with capital, it allowed workers to maintain control over "one's labour power and its disposition."[180] It disciplined employers, it maximized wages, it influenced working conditions and, on a broader scale, it even affected the rate and direction of technological change. It was a vital, aggressive form of worker protest, and one to which farmers were forced to respond.

VI

From the point of view of farmers, agricultural labour was one big headache. But then farming itself held no certainties. The January 1921 cover of Agricultural Alberta summed up the farmer's dilemma. "It's a great game but watch your move" warned the caption illustrating a farmer pondering a chess board. Each chess piece represented one of the many variables in agriculture. Help, a straw-hatted figure with a pitchfork, shared board space with Sunshine, Rain, Frost, Drought, Hail and Price, all clearly as capricious as the farm worker.[181] Hired hands were unreliable, likely to quit their jobs just when they were most needed. And they were expensive. Farm workers demanded wages that made serious inroads into a farmer's often narrow margin of profit.[182] Farmers felt themselves captive to a demanding and erratic labour force. But unlike weather and overseas markets, farm labour was one element over which farmers could exercise some control.

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[180]. Paul Willis "Shop Floor Culture, Masculinity and the Wage Form" John Clarke, Chas Critcher and Richard Johnson, eds. Working Class Culture: Studies in History and Theory London: St. Martin's Press 1979 p 192

Broad attempts to solve the labour problems of unreliability and expense had met only limited success. The types of formal controls the exercised by the state and the informal constraints wielded by agrarian society examined above did work to keep a lid on dissent, but they did little to solve the problem of an unreliable and expensive workforce. The flooding of the labour market was more effective in keeping wages down, but it did not solve the problem entirely, since the cheaper labour force did not have the necessary skills. Experienced men could still command wages farmers were unprepared to pay.

Perhaps the answer lay in technology. During the pioneering period of agricultural development, mechanization expanded production but did not reduce labour needs. But in the 1920s, farmers sought ways to reduce both their labour costs and their labour requirements, especially in light of the wartime experience of increased production despite labour shortages. During the First World War farmers had seen, on a limited scale, how mechanization and the reorganization of farm work could increase the productive capacity of the agricultural labour force. If technology could be used to a greater extent to serve the needs of the agricultural industry, the wage bill need no longer be seen as a necessary expense in order to improve production or to keep other costs down, but as a heavy cost itself that could be drastically reduced or even eliminated. Advertisements for farm machinery reminded farmers that "to make a profit, you must overcome not only handicaps of weather, weeds and pests, but also scarcity of help and high wages." Machinery such as the J. I. Case Threshing Machine could solve the problem. "The bright side of the picture is that your power and labor costs, which are under your control, can be greatly reduced, thereby giving you a profit year after year despite all handicaps."[183]

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[181]. GAI 630.3 A278 Agricultural Alberta January 1921

[182]. See Table II-2 Farm Operating Costs; Graph II-1 Farm Operating Expenses, Prairies 1927

Changes in the techniques and organization of work have been subject to much recent debate on the nature of work.[184] Labour process theory has been revitalized in light of the powerful thesis by Harry Braverman on the relations between labour and capital with the maturation of monopoly capitalism. Marx's formulation of the relationship between the production process and social relations, especially the way that changes in the former resulted in comprehensive and extensive changes in the latter, provided the cornerstone for this work. Braverman found that changes in the organization and technique of work in the twentieth century were designed by management as a conscious strategy to remove control from the workforce by fragmenting and deskilling its work. Braverman's thesis has been acclaimed as a welcome refocusing of attention to the workplace as the locus of labour-capital struggles. Recent and more detailed studies of changes in the labour process remain indebted to Braverman, but they have pointed out that the process and results of technological and organizational change were much more complex than Braverman indicated. While it has been generally recognized that Braverman's crediting of a

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[183]. Advertisement for J.I. Case Threshing Machine Grain Growers' Guide 17/2/1926 p 9. See also the regular Guide column "What's New in Farm Implements". Other farm journals also kept their readers up-to-date about the latest technical developments and machinery. See especially The Canadian Power Farmer

[184]. Harry Braverman Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century New York and London: Monthly Review Press 1974; Paul Thompson The Nature of Work: An Introduction to Debates on the Labour Process London: Macmillan Education 1983; Stephen Wood,

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ed. The Degradation of Work? Skill, deskilling and the labour process London: Hutchinson 1982; Craig Littler The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies: A Comparative Study of the Transformation of Work Organization in Britain, Japan and the USA London: Heineman Educational 1982; Andrew Herman "Conceptualizing Control: Domination and Hegemony in the Capitalist Labour Process" Insurgent Sociologist XI:3 Fall 1982; Richard Edwards Contested Terrain: The Transformation of the Workplace in the Twentieth Century New York: Basic Books 1979; Craig Heron and Robert Storey "On the Job" in On the Job: Confronting the Labour Process in Canada Kingston and Montreal: McGill Queen's Press 1986. For studies which examine the application of labour process theory, see the essays in Heron and Storey On the Job; Radforth Bushworkers and Bosses; Craig Heron Working in Steel: The Early Years in Canada, 1883-1935 Toronto: McClelland and Stewart 1988 conscious management strategy and of complete labour subordination was greatly overstated, the complexities of changes in the work process are still being discovered.

In the case of prairie agriculture, the complexities are especially evident. In an industry that exercised little or no control over most aspects of its economics, the most effective way to increase profits was to increase production while reducing costs. It was a tall order. Agricultural output was subject to the ravages of pests and diseases and the uncertainty of weather. Costs were dictated by interest rates, tariffs and transportation rates, none of which agricultural producers determined. Prices were beyond the farmer's ability to control, set by international market demand and local and world-wide production. One of the few variables over which farmers might exercise some control was labour costs.

In other industries, labour costs could be reduced by manipulating the labour process. One avenue is to reduce the necessary skill-level of individual workers by fragmenting and simplifying each stage of their work and thus being able to draw upon a larger pool of lower-paid labour. Another is to intensify the productive capacity of each worker by speeding up every stage of the production process. Technology can play a significant part in achieving both these objectives. In the prairie west, however, farmers were warned that "factory methods of mass production cannot be applied to agriculture."[185] Although some highly-skilled jobs were eliminated and others were speeded up, the main thrust of technology was to increase labour efficiency. This was not always to be achieved through deskilling and speed-up.

The explanation can be found in the particular nature of labour in agriculture. A significant difference between agriculture and other industries lies in the composition of its workforce. In other industries, capital is counterposed to labour, and the functions of each are clearly defined and separated. In agriculture, the two are juxtaposed: farmers and their hired hands work together in the production process. But because farmers can provide basic production themselves, their purpose in hiring additional labour is to increase production by augmenting rather than replacing their own labour. Since capital itself was providing the bulk of labour, technological innovation and mechanization were not designed to create a two-tier level of skill division. In other industries, labour's strength derived from its possession of special skills necessary for production, skills that management did not share. In order to maintain control of its workforce, management had to appropriate those skills. No such imperative existed in agriculture. Rather, farmers sought hired hands with a skill level equal to their own. The effect upon labour-capital relations was to establish the definition and possession of skill as bargaining tools.

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[185]. "Bonanza Farming" Grain Growers' Guide 15/9/1926 p 7

The question of skill in agricultural labour had long been a point of contention between hired hands and their employers. Farmers in Qu'Appelle were asked in 1899 if they "sufficiently note the difference between the skilled and unskilled man all the way through?" Farmers had high expectations. "Our man should be able to handle a team carefully, be a good plowman, good on mower and binder and able to build a stack that will throw off rain," declared G.C.D. Edmunds in his address to the Farmers' Institute. "The good man is regular in his work, makes fewer breakages, manages his horses better and with fewer cuss words."[186] Twenty years later the question of skill was still not resolved. "While usually looked on as unskilled labour," reported the Alberta Employment Service in 1921, "the farm hand must have as much skill and experience in the handling of horses and machinery as the city tradesman or mechanic has in the use of the tools of his trade."[187] Although it was widely recognized that not all farm workers possessed the same degree of skill, there were no set criteria as to what constituted the necessary minimum. Charles More, in his study of Skill and the English Working Class, provides a definition of skill as "the alliance of manual skill with knowledge."[188] But in agriculture, the technical expertise that agricultural labourers possessed did not achieve a categorization according to industry-wide standards. Braverman points to the turn-of-the-century American census homogenization of all waged farm workers into one category of "farm laborers and foremen", arguing that "there is not even a hint ... of an attempt to sort workers by skill."[189] He argues that this homogenization led to a disregard for the wide range of skills farm workers possessed.

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[186]. "The Hired Man" a paper read by G.C.D. Edwards at the Qu'Appelle Farmers' Institute The Nor'-West Farmer 20/9/1899 p 701

[187]. PAA 65.118 Employment Service Papers Employment Service Conference 1921 p 6

Yet informal working knowledge was widely recognized, even if valued only in its absence, by prairie farmers and their hired hands. Ken Kusterer's application of the term Know-How on the Job provides a better understanding of the combination of proficiencies recognized as genuine skills with those that were essential but that passed unrecognized and unacclaimed.[190] This conceptualization explains the often contradictory regard and recognition among both hired hands and their employers for the degree of competence farm workers possessed. The wide-spread solution was not to label farm work as skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. Rather, the term most commonly used in agriculture to describe the most valuable men was "experienced".

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[188]. Charles More Skill and the English Working Class, 1870-1914 London: Croom Helm 1980 p 15. See also Littler Development of the Labour Process pp 7-14

[189]. Braverman Labor and Monopoly Capital p 433

[190]. Ken Kusterer Know-How on the Job: The Important Working Knowledge of "Unskilled" Workers Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press 1978 especially pp 177-180

The distinction was more than mere semantics. Although it included degrees of technical expertise, the term also encompassed judgement about farming conditions that could only be learned by dealing first-hand with the vagaries that nature could toss out. Prairie farmers and their hands recognized that experience meant more than simply the technical dexterity to perform farm tasks, they knew that knowledge of how to apply the manual skills required training. An experienced man was an all-round man, one who possessed a wide variety of skills that had been tested and refined through practical application. A good man should be able to harness a team of horses and operate the ploughs or harrows or seeders the team pulled, but this task was not simply a mechanical one. It required finesse in the difficult task of cajoling a recalcitrant team or manipulating tricky machinery over variable terrain. An experienced man had be resourceful, to be able to make sound decisions about weather conditions or emergencies.

There was an additional qualification in agriculture. An experienced prairie farm worker had to recognize that the term implied more than technical skill and working knowledge. Equally important was the willingness not to be confined by a certain skill level. On a prairie farm, no task was too large or too small, too elevated or too mundane for the experienced worker. The "good all-round man" should be willing to spend a week picking rocks or repairing fences and just as readily turn his hand to slaughtering a hog or operating a tractor. An experienced hand was expected to have learned that a one-man operation as complex as a farm required the owner, and thus his hired hand, to be competent in every task.

With a designation so susceptible to differing expectations and interpretations, and so determining of wages, it is not surprising to find sharp differences between farmers and their hands over just what enabled a man to claim to be "experienced." Studies of the social construction of skill have emphasized that it is an area of continuing struggle between workers and employers, each attempting to define it by their own criteria.[191] When capital succeeds in providing the definition of different levels of proficiency, it is able to exert hierarchical control over its workforce and to keep wage levels down. When labour is able to determine the definition, it is able to protect segments of its membership, to achieve some autonomy in the labour process, and to raise wages. Farm hands and their employers had strong opinions about what constituted experience and how it should be rewarded.

During the early settlement period, with a scarcity of labour, and the alternative of land, farm workers held the upper hand in determining the criteria and rewards for experience. Near Wellington, Manitoba, in 1882, Arthur Sherwood was confident that even his limited skills could help him land a farm job: "I can milk which is a thing that talks out here."[192] Although farmers were constantly decrying the high cost and inefficiency of inexperienced workers, they had little choice but to accept a prospective employee's own claims. They often learned a bitter lesson when the so-called "experienced" man committed damaging mistakes.

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[191] More Skill and the English Working Class pp 16-26; Littler Development of the Labour Process pp 8-9; Radforth Bushworkers and Bosses pp 67-9 and passim.

But by the 1920s, farmers could afford to be more stringent in their expectations. With the glut of unskilled workers on the labour market, farmers turned down men whom they even suspected of lacking appropriate experience. And even experienced men, unless they were well-known in a district, were often forced to accept a lower wage for a month or two while they proved their experience. Farm placement agents told of newcomers who "expected to get from $50.00 to $75.00 per month" and were "sorely disappointed" to receive only $25.00 because of their inexperience.[193] In the highly competitive agricultural world and the well-stocked labour market of the 1920s, farmers were unable and unwilling to allow their hired hands time to learn on the job. Farmers rationalized their position by concluding that it "was not fair to the man" to expect him to learn on the farmer's time.[194] But costs were the obvious explanation.

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[192]. PAM MG8/B65 Arthur Sherwood Papers, Sherwood to Father 22/7/1882

[193]. GAI BN .C212 G CPR Papers James Colley Correspondence File 692 Geo. C. Peattie to J. Dennis 1/10/1926

[194]. PAA 65.118/17/47 Employment Service Papers W.D. Trego, Labor Committee, United Farmers of Alberta Official Circular #10 29/3/1921

Newcomers were "not worth over $25.00 per month to the Canadian farmer for the first few months," reported the Olds Colonization Board agent, "the farmer who gets him has to oversee and teach him and stand his breakages, etc., and he is really dear at $25.00 per month."[195] For short-term or seasonal jobs, the wage short-fall made a substantial difference in the final wage packet. Some men simply refused to accept these terms. When Gomer Jones and John Thomas, who had been expecting $60.00 per month, were offered $25.00 per month to begin and "a higher wage later in accordance with their ability, ... they immediately left Olds and returned to Winnipeg."[196]

The social construction of skills has an additional complexity in agriculture. The value placed on farming skills was respected and undervalued at the same time. From their own experience, farmers knew exactly what was entailed in every aspect of farm work. In placing high value upon their own skills, they were giving implicit recognition to the value of the expertise that their hired hands demonstrated. This could lead to extremely stringent, even unattainable, criteria by those farmers who had a very high regard for their own abilities.

Theoretically, too, it could lead to a very high wage. This was seldom the case. Farm hands were rewarded for their experience, and could sometimes double the wage of inexperienced men. But the overall low wages in agriculture undercut this advantage. Compared to the rate of difference between much less-skilled harvesters and regular hired hands, it was clear that scarcity of labour was a much more powerful factor in determining wage rates than was skill or experience. In fact, unless a regular experienced hand was given a bonus or put onto harvest rates, his wage during harvest was likely to be lower than that of an inexperienced stooker.

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[195]. GAI BN .C212 G CPR Papers James Colley Correspondence File 692 Geo. C. Peattie to J. Dennis 1/10/1926

[196]. Ibid. James Colley to Vanscoy 7/4/1926

Traditionally, farm workers had accepted the relatively low monetary reward for their expertise because they would not simply be attempting to sell it in an open marketplace but would use it eventually in their own enterprises. Their pay-off was not in the wages they received but in the experience they were gaining, which would enable them to succeed on their own farms. Thus the opportunity to acquire farming skills or experience was likewise a point of contention between farmers and their hands and an arena of continuing struggle. The apprenticeship aspects of farm labour was a powerful draw to men who had no agricultural background and who were eager to learn farming skills. Noel Copping explained the complexity of the learning process:

> [I] am gradually becoming more proficient at the art of driving a sulky plough - and it is an art: when you set in to start a furrow there is a lever to press down with the foot and which is locked by a hand lever. Then there are other levers - two, one on the left and the other on the right, that have to be manipulated, and there are also the reins to hold, and the whip. It can therefore be seen that at least half a dozen hands are

> necessary. I have only two! Then too, one has to keep one's eyes on the four horses, on the furrow wheel, on the sods behind in case they fall back and on everything else.[197]

A particular problem for inexperienced men was that most of the skills required in farming could be picked up informally. Men from a rural background had a definite edge. Percy Maxwell was dismayed to discover the disadvantage at which his urban background placed him:

> It is also a bit sickening, when you think you are going to do great things such as ploughing, etc. and be a real farmer, to find that all the kids in the country have been doing the same things almost since they could walk. A kid of 14 here does a man's work and is expected to earn his own living.[198]

Even the simplest of farm jobs required the uninitiated to spend some time in learning, although they appeared as simple common tasks to those with a rural background. As Kusterer has pointed out, "the use of the 'unskilled' label has led to a gross under-estimation of the amount of working knowledge actually necessary in these jobs. There is no such thing as unskilled work."[199]

As a management strategy for reducing labour costs, fragmentation and deskilling had little place on the small farms that provided employment for the majority of hired hands. Farmers expected their hands to possess at least rudimentary familiarity with agriculture, and they much preferred to hire experienced men. The dispute between farmers and their hands narrowed down to one of the length of time required for learning. The promotion to a higher wage in recognition of expertise and experience was less easily achieved when farmers could draw upon a larger pool of labour. During the early period, farmers were forced to accept men who were "willing" for men who were "experienced", but since experienced men could command a higher wage, newcomers were anxious to have their developing skills recognized. Still, both farmers and their hands agreed that the most valuable hired hand was one who possessed more, rather than less, skill.

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[197]. NAC MG 30 C63 Noel Copping Papers "Prairie Wool and some Mosquitoes" Excerpts from a Diary, Saskatchewan 1909-1910 p 19

[198]. Percy Augustus Maxwell Letters home during his years as a homesteader in the developing period of Canada's West Toronto: Printed for Private Circulation 1967 p 37

[199]. Kusterer Know-How on the Job p 179

Since reduction of labour costs could not be easily achieved through simplification of the labour process, the only alternative was to reduce labour requirements. The major agricultural developments of the decade -- technological innovations and the slow and intermittent increase in mechanization, the growing specialization in wheat, and the consolidation of farm lands -- all combined to secure this result. Although not all of these developments were planned as labour-reducing economies, they either directly or indirectly achieved that effect.

Mechanization is a case in point. Farmers had always complained about the scarcity of farm help. But the "labour shortage" of the 1920s was not absolute, as it had been during much of the pre-war period. Rather, it was a relative shortage resulting from the refusal of men to work for low wages. The thrust of technological improvements and mechanization in the 1920s reflected this situation. Although mechanization in prairie agriculture was still in its infancy, important patterns in its purpose were emerging. During the pre-war period most technological innovations had been designed primarily to increase production, even if this resulted in greater labour requirements. Crews of eighteen or twenty men were needed in steam threshing operations, but they were essential to the expansion of wheat production after the turn of the century. During the 1920s, innovations were still intended to expand production, but the overall purpose was to make the individual family farm self-sufficient with regards to labour, while ensuring it an adequate, if modest, living. When the bonanza farm operated by the Scottish Co-operative Wholesale Society at Hughton, Saskatchewan, "passed out of existence" in 1926, the Grain Growers' Guide editorialized that "industrial methods cannot be applied to agriculture." Farmers were encouraged to adopt business-like methods of farming, but cautioned against travelling too far down that path. "The future of this country," declared the Guide, "depends largely on maintaining a class of free and independent farmers, owning their own farms and running their own business."[200] In the context of world markets and prairie farm debt, this meant a continuing increase in production combined with a relative reduction in labour requirements.[201] The ultimate imperative was to reduce labour costs by reducing or even eliminating the need for waged labour.

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[200]. "Bonanza Farming" Grain Growers' Guide 15/9/1926 p 7

The trend toward mechanization during the 1920s was thus a response of the agricultural industry to a labour force that refused to work for low wages. "Labor conditions make it necessary and profitable to invest in mechanical contrivances that take the place of manpower," declared the Nor'-West Farmer in 1920, when post-war labour shortages were still acute and wages were still high.[202] It was a circular process. By demanding decent wages, farm workers forced the industry to find alternative methods to increase production. The search for technological improvements and the resulting mechanization led ultimately to a shrinking of labour needs. But it was a lengthy process and, as the major component in the drive toward rationalization in the industry, it achieved uneven success. For the most part, mechanization did not bring about an immediate drop in labour requirements. The labour saving that came about from both minor technical improvements to agricultural implements and major technological advances in machinery and equipment resulted not in a reduction of labour but in greater labour efficiency.

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[201] Harriett Friedmann "World Market, State, and Family Farm: Social Bases of Household Production in the Era of Wage Labor" Comparative Studies in Sociology and History v.20 1978

[202] F. C. Birchall "Man Power vs. Barn Machinery" Nor'-West Farmer 20/2/1920 p 234

Technological changes in production methods increased agricultural output. At the beginning of the decade, steam power and mechanization were already used to speed up the process of the most time-pressured farm work. Ploughing, harvesting and threshing could all be done with steam power and machinery.[203] Throughout the 1920s, continued improvements were made to farm implements in order to increase their efficiency, taking advantage of the "progress in the industrial arts" that was shaping other industries.[204] But the most significant changes during the decade were a shift in the source of power and the growing use of more complex machinery.[205] When the Canadian Thresherman and Farmer changed its name to The Canadian Power Farmer, it declared that "the individual farmer is an engineer and uses mechanical power on his farm to an extent that no-one probably dreamt of in 1902."[206] During the

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[203]. David Spector "Field Agriculture on the Canadian Prairies, 1870-1940" in Agriculture on the Prairies, 1870-1940 National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, Parks Canada, Department of the Environment 1983 p 156

[204]. Mackintosh Economic Problems of the Prairie Provinces p 16

[205]. Ibid. pp 16-19; Andrew Stewart "Trends in Farm Power and Their Influence on Agricultural Development" Appendix A in Murchie Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier; Idem The Economy of Machine Production in Agriculture Montreal: Royal Bank of Canada 1931; Wayne D. Rasmussen "The Mechanization of Agriculture" Scientific American 247:3 September 1982; Leo Rogin The Introduction of Farm Machinery in its Relation to the Productivity of Labor Berkeley: University of California Press 1931; John Lier "Farm Mechanization in Saskatchewan" Tijdschrift Voor Economishce en Sociale Geografie LXII:3 Mei/Juni 1971

[206]. Canadian Power Farmer 4/1/1920

1920s the agricultural industry began to adopt three pieces of equipment that had already seen widespread use in the grain fields of the western United States: the gasoline tractor, the small portable thresher and the combination harvester-thresher.

Although gasoline tractors had been available since the 1890s, they did not gain widespread acceptance on prairie farms until the 1920s and, even then, their rate of adoption was slow and sporadic. The early gasoline tractors had little to recommend them -- they were unreliable in the field, were expensive to buy and maintain, were complex to operate and repair, and were too powerful for farm implements that had been designed for the power capabilities of horses.

The introduction of the gasoline tractor was not uniform throughout the prairies, nor did it represent a complete switch from other sources of power. Steam power continued to be used in threshing operations, but it was gradually phased out as the superior efficiency of the gasoline engine was demonstrated.

Horse power was much more slowly given up. Even farmers who did buy tractors seldom gave up all their horses at once. The debate on the relative costs and merits of horses against gasoline tractors was carried on throughout the decade. Expert opinion held that tractors were cost-efficient only on large operations. On small farms tractors were considered a worthwhile investment only when the prices of feed and labour were high, but it was never easy to compute the actual relative costs.[207] Tractors represented a high fixed cost, both in purchase price and in running and maintenance, and the work they could perform was restricted by topography and weather. Horses were much more flexible in all regards. They could reproduce themselves, they could subsist on the by-products of the farm, and their labour was adaptable to all farming terrain and conditions. A study undertaken by Andrew Stewart at the Manitoba Agricultural College in the early 1930s found that it was necessary to operate the tractor for six hundred hours per year in order to make it pay. The hours of work required for any particular task varied greatly across the prairies and even from farm to farm, depending on soil conditions and amount of bush, and was restricted by the plains topography. When translated into the size of cropland necessary to give a tractor the requisite six hundred hours of work per year, Stewart's figures ranged from 282 acres to 857 acres.[208] Since improved acreage on prairie farms during the 1920s averaged about fifty percent of the total area occupied, it was clearly necessary to consider purchase of a tractor in conjunction with the possibility of increasing farm size and increasing specialization in field crops.

Although horses could perform tasks that machines could not, machines and the men who operated them could be worked for much longer periods. By freeing the farmer from the restrictions necessarily imposed by animal power, the tractor reduced his manpower needs as well. In part the shift resulted from a freeing of land and labour from the feeding and care of horses, but in part it was due to the greater labour efficiency of a man operating a tractor instead of handling a team of horses.

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[207]. But for costs for horses and their equipment see Robert Ankli, H. Dan Helsberg, and John Herd Thompson "The Adoption of the Gasoline Tractor in Western Canada" Donald H. Akenson, ed. Canadian Papers in Rural History Vol. II Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press 1980 pp 23-4

[208]. Stewart "Trends in Farm Power" p 313

The overall result was an increase in productivity. Stewart's study concluded that even in the brief period of their use, "tractors adopted on the farms of the Prairie Provinces seem to have added to the acreage of field crops at the rate of about 1,000,000 acres per year".[209] Most of the change came about in the second half of the decade. After 1926, the volume of tractor sales and the acres of field crops both rose, while the numbers of horses began to decline.[210] The tractor was intended to replace the power of horses rather than of men and in doing so not to eliminate labour but to make more efficient use of it.

Tractors were used mainly in the spring and fall, the peak times of labour need. In the spring, they pulled ploughs and harrows to prepare fields for planting, and in the fall they pulled power binders or combines and provided the belt power for threshing. The great advantage of tractors was in the speed with which these operations could be completed and in the flexibility of labour needs. Both had the indirect result of reducing labour needs by allowing greater production in a shorter time. Reducing the man-to-land ratio resulted in greater profits. Explaining the growth of farm size as the impetus behind the necessity for speeding up farm operations, J. G. Taggart, Superintendent of the Dominion Experimental Farm at Swift Current, pointed out that the "increased acreage is being handled without anything like a corresponding increase in personnel [which] makes speed in the performance of both seeding and harvesting operations most essential." Taggart explained the indirect savings in labour costs:

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[209]. Ibid. p 297

[210]. See Table II-6F Tractor Sales; Table III-2 Major Crop Acreage; Table II-6G Numbers of Horses, Alberta

> A study of the relation of the tractor to the evolution of farm practice clearly indicates that the reason for the fairly extensive use of a tractor is that each man can handle a larger acreage, rather than effecting any great saving in the cost per acre of specific operations. It is obvious that if a man can seed and harvest four hundred acres instead of three hundred in the available season for such work, then he will gain by the amount of the net return from the additional one hundred acres.[211]

In 1928, prairie farmers bought more than 6000 small threshing machines to be run by the belt power of gasoline tractors,[212] thus freeing themselves from the expense and time constraints of the large custom steam threshers.

Although the cost of labour was by no means the only consideration in a farmer's decision to buy a tractor, it was an important one. The surge in tractor sales at the end of the First World War was fuelled in part by the escalating wages of farm labour, which peaked in 1920 at more than three-and-a-half times the pre-war figure.[213] A drop in agricultural wages the next year was at least partly responsible for the subsequent decline in sales. By the end of the decade, though, the technology had improved and purchase costs had fallen enough to make the gasoline tractor seem a sound investment.

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[211]. J. G. Taggart "Tractor and Combine" in Duncan Marshall Field and Farm Yard Canada: Imperial Oil Ltd. 1929 p 201

[212]. Ankli, Helsberg and Thompson "The Adoption of the Gasoline Tractor" p 19

Farmers throughout the 1920s were faced with a barrage of advice to improve their farming efficiency. A decade of advertisements extolling the virtues of machines over hired hands may well have induced farmers to take the plunge. "When money is paid to hired help it is gone," declared the Nor'-West Farmer.

> It is true you have had the help -- but nothing else. When money is put into labor-saving machinery, the machinery remains, to give help and save time and labor for the rest of your life. The interest on the investment is repaid over and over again.[214]

Farmers were ready, once they brought in a good crop in 1927 or 1928, to buy a tractor to reduce their dependency upon waged labour. After "Fifteen Years of Tractor Progress," the International Harvester Company declared its Titan 10-20 Kerosine Tractor so simple to operate that "a fourteen-year-old boy can handle the Titan and do a man's work."[215]

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[213]. See Table II-5A Annual Farm Workers' Wages

[214]. F. C. Birchall "Man Power vs. Barn Machinery" Nor'-West Farmer 20/2/1920 p 235

The difficulty of holding on to reliable farm workers was instrumental in increasing tractor sales at the end of the decade. Farmers were urged to solve their labour needs with machinery and technology. "Relieve Shortage of Farm Help" exclaimed the advertisement for Case Power Farming Machinery.[216] The Litscher Lite Plant was "A Hired Man You Can Keep."[217] Farmers looking to solve their problems of labour shortage while increasing their production were told that "the tractor is the only solution for a man who wants to farm a fair sized or a large farm without outside help."[218] The availability of grain separators with their concomitant reduction of labour, provided even more incentive to purchase tractors. Sales mushroomed in 1927 and remained high until the collapse of grain prices in 1930.[219]

The savings in labour costs and convenience with the use of tractor power for threshing made the introduction of the other major step toward mechanization, the combination harvester thresher, even more welcome, and the large crops that the tractor facilitated needed speed and efficiency in their harvest. Here the results upon labour needs were immediate and direct.

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[215]. Advertisement for International Harvester Company of Canada Nor'-West Farmer 5/2/1921 p 119

[216]. Advertisement for Case Power Farming Machinery Farm and Ranch Review 5/7/1920 p 15

[217]. Advertisement for Litscher Lite Plant Ibid. 20/7/1920 p 8

[218]. L.F.R.G. "A Tractor Advocate" Nor'-West Farmer 21/2/1921

[219]. See Table II-6F Tractor Sales

The combine, as it was commonly known, was introduced in the American west in the 1880s, but it did not gain acceptance on the Canadian prairies until the late 1920s, when its use could be adapted to the shorter prairie growing season. Once swathing was developed, the combine was adopted. Swathing allowed the grain to be cut while it was still green, then laid on the stubble to dry and ripen, when it could be collected for threshing. This reduced the dangers to a standing crop of pests or hail or an early frost.[220] The tractor was necessary to provide the power, and sales of combines reflected the spurt in tractor sales in 1928 and 1929.[221]

As the technique was adopted, the demand for harvest labour was dramatically reduced. One study of combine use showed a reduction in man-labour hours per acre "from 4.6 hours for binding, [stooking] and threshing with a stationary thresher, to 0.75 hours for work with a combine."[222]

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[220]. Thomas Isern "Adoption of the Combine on the Northern Plains" South Dakota History 10 Spring 1960 pp 105-11

[221]. See Table II-6E Combine Sales

[222]. L. A. Reynoldson, R. S Kifer, J. H. Martin and W. R. Humphries The Combined Harvester-Thresher in the Great Plains USDA Technical Bulletin 70 Washington 1928 p 23, cited in Mary Wilma Hargreaves Dry Farming in the Northern Great Plains, 1900-1925 Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1957 p 518n

Combines did not come into widespread use on the prairies until after the Second World War, but their appearance in the late 1920s was enough to cause satisfaction among farmers, for whom "the elimination of extra help in harvest at high wages has been long looked for."[223] Farmers calculated the costs and found the combine a worthwhile investment. Farmer Anthony Tyson kept accounts of his harvesting expenses for the three years between 1927 and 1929, when wages were relatively steady. He spent $2897.62 and compared this to the $1549.57 he would have spent if he had bought a combine and done the harvesting himself. His costs for labour were $1369.00, which "would have been halved" if he had purchased a combine.[224] But the advent of combines caused some alarm in the Department of Labour about unemployment, who calculated that "every combine deprives at least 5 men of a harvest job."[225] For farm workers, the change was unsettling. When Ebe Koeppen went to the area around Calgary to "make some money on the harvest," he found that "combines were already coming in, so there was very little work around."[226]

Mechanization proceeded slowly on the prairies, and in the post-war decade it was still in its infancy.

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[223]. Taggart "Tractor and Combine" p 205

[224]. Edna Tyson Parson Land I Can Own: A Biography of Anthony Tyson and the Pioneers Who Homesteaded with Him at Neidpath, Saskatchewan Ottawa: Westboro Printers 1981 p 71

[225]. Labour Gazette 1931 p 866

[226]. Ebe Koeppen in Rolf Knight Stump Ranch Chronicles and Other Narratives Vancouver: New Star Books 1977 p 56

Nonetheless, it did have a significant effect upon labour requirements, particularly since the farmers with the highest labour requirements were the ones who bought combines and other labour-reducing technologies. When farmers did move towards mechanization, it was more often a piecemeal process than an abrupt switch.

For farm workers, too, the change came subtly. The seasonal pattern of agricultural employment meant that farm workers seldom faced outright displacement by machinery. Rather, men who had found work for a specific task in one year might find that by the following year their employer had mechanized his operations and no longer needed their labour. A farmer who bought a combine, for example, needed only two or three men for his next harvest season instead of eighteen or twenty. A farmer who bought a tractor might still hire a man to operate it but need him for only a week instead of two.

Mechanization did reduce overall labour requirements, but at the same time it changed the type of labour needs, providing greater opportunity for steady work, as a 1930 Alberta Department of Labour Report details:

> In the older settled wheat growing sections of the Province, tractors and other machinery have been introduced to such an extent that a complete change in the system has taken place which has brought about a material reduction in the number of men required to handle spring and summer work, and along with this has come more stable employment for men on the farms. Quite a number of farmers, who in past years employed a volume of help in the spring, releasing the men following the spring operations and then hired an additional volume for harvest work, now employ a small number of men steady the year round on their farms, and

> as a result of mechanizing do not require any additional men during any period of the year.[227]

This observation points to other consequences of mechanization beyond the simple and obvious effect of reducing labour needs. There is no doubt that mechanization resulted in increased agricultural productivity, but it did so at the cost of placing the machinery, rather than the farmer and his men and animals, at the centre of the process of production. In the early years of the century, harvesting the prairie crops could take several weeks, and threshing operations could be spread over a period of five or six months. Where combines were introduced in the late 1920s, the time was considerably reduced. Even the bumper crop of 1928 was harvested and threshed in only three months. Moreover, the combine "altered the farmer's work year drastically," by "increasing the need to plant early so as to insure a ripe crop in time for combining."[228]

Mechanization was also closely bound up with two other trends of the decade: growing farm size and increased agricultural specialization. It is difficult to distinguish cause and effect. The increasing mechanization and the development of new technologies allowed more and more acreage to be brought under cultivation, and the consolidation of farms into ever larger units enabled the most efficient use of the new machinery. But machines were expensive, and since the high capital investment demanded their most efficient use, farmers had to increase the size of their holdings in order to justify the expense. The same interrelationship exists with regard to specialization. Mechanization allowed economies of scale that were most readily realized in crop specialization, and once having made the investments, it became more difficult to diversify, something which prairie farmers were reluctant to do in any case. At the same time, the reduction in the use of horses, both on the farms and in the cities, freed large acreages for wheat production that had previously been used for grazing or raising feed.

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[227] PAA 65.118/10 H.A. Craig to W. Smitten 13/9/1929

[228] R. Bruce Shepherd "Tractors and Combines in the Second Stage of Agricultural Mechanization on the Canadian Plains" Prairie Forum 11:2 Fall 1986 p 265

In order for the new technology to pay for itself, farming operations had to be reorganized and geared to the machine. This development dovetailed neatly with the increasing emphasis on efficiency. Mechanization facilitated the trend to more business-like operations that characterized agriculture during the 1920s.

For farm workers, the changes resulting from mechanization were complex, and the immediate benefits often outweighed the disadvantages. Where the capacity of a machine did dictate a worker's performance, the change was often a subtle trade-off of one task for another. A tractor might tie a man to the fields for a twelve- or fifteen-hour day instead of the ten hours that could be expected of a team of horses, but the work of harnessing and unharnessing the horses, and feeding and grooming them after the working day, ate up the extra time.

Machines also eliminated some of the most back-breaking labour and drudgery from farm tasks. The romantic picture of a labourer following a horse-drawn implement leisurely around a field is belied by the description left by Gaston Giscard: "the harrow hasn't got a seat on it, which makes it a tiring job. It wears you out because you're walking all day, swallowing the dust thrown up by the horses."[229] The same job on a tractor might be just as monotonous, but it was less physically demanding and more quickly finished.

For farm workers who preferred a slower pace, there was still plenty of opportunity to practice traditional agricultural methods. Technological advances and mechanization did not occur at a uniform rate throughout the prairies. As in most other industries, the rate of change was uneven and irregular, with the most advanced machinery being operated beside equipment whose design had not changed in decades. The differences were even more striking in agriculture. With thousands of individual farm enterprises, each instituting change at its own pace, an agricultural labourer could find himself working under the most advanced or the most primitive conditions. When W. N. Rolfe moved from the farm of Reg Matthews to that of Percy Scharf, he found "a complete change in every way. Here was pioneer western farming of the first order, rough and heavy and varied as it is possible to find it."[230]

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[229]. Gaston Giscard Dans La Prairie Canadienne trans. by Lloyd Person, ed. by George E. Durocher Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre 1982 p 14

It is not surprising that farm workers greeted the new technology with equanimity. The thrust of mechanization was an attempt to increase the productive capacity of workers but not through pace-setting or skill-reducing technology. Labour in prairie agriculture was thus not faced with the problem of skill dilution. In some cases, entirely new and higher levels of skill were called for. At a time when the College of Agriculture at Saskatoon was offering three-week courses on learning to run a tractor, the man who could operate one was highly prized.[231]

Overall, the new technologies resulted in a complex process of reskilling. Every year brought innovations and improvements to agricultural technology, yet because the changes were irregular and incomplete, farm workers became adept at maintaining old skills while learning new ones. Farm workers who had wrestled to learn the intricacies of the harness were now learning how to diagnose and replace a faulty spark plug. By the 1920s, a "good all round hand" was one who could master the complexity of the internal combustion engine and still know how to treat the internal apparatus of a colicky horse. When farmer A. Schoonover was looking for a farm hand, he specified that he wanted "a man who can handle horses" and who "must understand farm machinery."[232]

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[230]. MLL Acc 8 Jan 1951 Vertical File "Local History - Manitou" W. N. Rolfe "A Citizen of Canada" p 8

[231]. Nor'-West Farmer 5/1/1920 p 17

Machinery did not remove autonomy. Even while making use of the new agricultural equipment, farm workers maintained considerable control over the direction and pace of their work. Mechanization in agriculture involved much more than simple machine-tending. Mechanization was giving rise to "new standards of labor," according to one rural sociologist. "Hence the human ox is a fallen idol, and the man of wits is being exalted."[233] Farm workers' mechanical abilities had to include dealing with the idiosyncrasies of the new machinery, which might break down in the field, which had to be constantly adjusted to the changing physical conditions, and which required skill and dexterity to make it produce to its full capacity.

Machines thus presented new challenges, and rather than harbingers of future unemployment, or dictatorial automatons, they were seen as technology to be mastered. Unlike farm workers on the Argentine pampas or in Ontario or the American Midwest in an earlier period, prairie farm workers did not fight to prevent the arrival of the new technology.[234] Instead, they called upon their ingenuity and resourcefulness to harness it. On a personal level, a hired man could achieve as much satisfaction from learning how to coax new life from an ailing engine as he had from learning how to trick a balky pair of oxen into pulling a load through a muddy creek. In his relationship with his employer, he could parlay his newly acquired skills into higher wages. But in the larger sphere of labour-capital relations in the agricultural industry, machinery was only one weapon that both labour and capital could use in the ongoing struggle.

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[232]. GAI BN .C212 G CPR Papers James Colley Correspondence File 1484 A. Schoonover to James Colley

[233]. Newell LeRoy Sims Elements of Rural Sociology New York: Thomas Y. Crowell 1946 p 429

[234]. Carl E. Solberg The Prairies and the Pampas: Agrarian Policy in Canada and Argentina, 1880-1930 Stanford, California: Stanford University Press 1987 p 99; Argersinger and Argersinger "The Machine Breakers"; Seager "Captain Swing in Ontario?"

Farm workers in the 1920s were caught up in the advancement of capitalist agriculture. Their proletarianization was defined by their increasing difficulty in escaping from wage labour to farm ownership. In their attempts to maintain the social and economic advantages they had previously enjoyed, they clung to the independence that had served them well in the earlier period. Individualism continued to be both a structural and cultural condition of their experience. Farm workers appropriated and reshaped parts of the dominant ideology to suit their needs and to mitigate the increasing tensions in the social sphere.

But they fought back in the workplace. Here, too, independence structurally and culturally conditioned farm workers' experiences and their responses. They resisted the increasing advantage of capital in a daily and individualistic struggle. But in the aggregate, their actions added up to a powerful obstruction for the agricultural industry. Capital responded by using mechanization and technology to overcome an obdurate workforce. Labour responded by using newly-acquired skills as a bargaining tool. The workplace continued to be "contested terrain", where labour and capital worked out an uneasy relationship in which neither side was the clear winner.

CHAPTER 6

Conclusion

"I think Frank was glad of a permanent home," declared a farmer near Three Hills, "and being practically his own boss as far as the work was concerned on the farm."[1] Frank's apparent satisfaction derived both from his inclusion within the farming community and the independence possible in his labour. This has made his role problematic for labour historians, and helps to explain why hired hands have been excluded from accounts examining the growing class consciousness of the Canadian working class. It also helps to explain why farm workers have been submerged in the more heroic accounts of pioneering and the development of the agricultural industry. Despite their numbers and their important role in the prairie west, farm workers have remained shadowy figures, and their story has more often been told by others than by themselves.

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[1] Three Hills Rural Community Group As the Years Go By Betty Kilgour, ed. Printed by D. W. Friesen 1970 p 189

Hired hands worked and lived in ways that showed little surface change during the period when the agricultural economy of the prairie west was developing and expanding. Throughout this half century, they received meagre returns for work that was onerous and dangerous. Employment was irregular, subject to seasonal and economic cycles. Wages were low and difficult to collect. Hours were longer than in other industries, and tasks were often tedious and repetitive. Ameliorative labour legislation specifically excluded farm workers, who received no legal protection beyond the Masters and Servants Acts in each province. Living conditions were likewise very poor, or at best adequate. Although many farmers boasted that they treated hired hands like one of the family, many farm workers complained of filthy conditions and food not fit for animals. Always, the living conditions of hired hands depended on the wealth and generosity of their employers.

However, there were discontinuities as well, as the underlying conditions of farm workers' productive and social relations were transformed. During the settlement period farm workers were part of the pioneering process. They entered the agricultural community as anticipated peers, and were frequently accorded the same social status as men who owned their own farms. Indeed, many farm hands were at the same time farmers themselves, homesteaders who worked on another farm for six months a year in order to gain a stake to last through the winter and to buy seed and equipment in the spring. Their social status was high and assured, and their living standards frequently no worse than the pioneer farmers for whom they worked. When farmers were struggling to create a farm with very little capital, there were few distinctions between employer and employee in living conditions or in working conditions.

But as farming communities passed from the pioneering stages into the more prosperous, businesslike atmosphere of the first World War and the 1920s, the lives of farm workers remained unchanged. In this respect, then, they suffered a relative deterioration of their living and working conditions. As farm homes became cleaner, more genteel places for farm families, the farm hand was less and less welcomed into the household. Although the living standards of farmers improved, those of farm workers frequently remained in the same crude mold in which they had been cast during the pioneering period. Many farm workers did enjoy the improved living standard of their employers, but many others were still relegated to abandoned sod huts, chicken coops or granaries.

Working standards remained low for many farm workers, too. Those who learned to operate and repair machinery were in high demand, but the growing numbers of unskilled workers, whose ranks were swollen as a result of immigration policies in the 1920s such as the Railway Agreement, and increased mechanization, were faced with the same dangerous and onerous tasks that unskilled workers had always performed. But there was little opportunity to cut the tedium by other more specialized farm tasks, and little chance to improve their skills since farmers no longer had the time, nor needed to take it in a more abundant labour market, to teach farming techniques to newcomers.

The most significant change in the lives of farm workers in the 1920s, though few of them realized it, was the breakdown of the agricultural ladder. The hopes for future independence that had motivated agricultural labourers in the period before the First World War continued to check worker discontent, but it did result in subtle differences in the social position of farm workers during this decade. Since they had little real chance of becoming farm owners themselves, their social position deteriorated. Although still welcomed at social functions such as dances and picnics, they could seldom any longer aspire to real entry into the farming community which was becoming more business-oriented, with an increasing drive for rationalization of the industry, increased political and economic power, and a distancing between employers and employees.

Yet these conditions were frequently accepted by farm hands with very little complaint. Farm workers continued to believe the promises of settlement propaganda that they would soon leave the ranks of wage labour and become farmers themselves. Close and continuous contact with their employers encouraged them to regard their grievances as personal ones between their employers and themselves rather than conditions within the industry or the capitalist system. Severe government repression of radical labour organizations such as the IWW which attempted to organize farm workers kept discontent silent. The isolation of farm workers on widely scattered farms fostered the spirit of individualism which drew farm hands to the work in the first place, encouraging them to rely upon their own initiative and resources. During most of this period, farm workers could take advantage of a tactic which gave them independence in their working lives, and a degree of control in their relationship with capital. If they were unhappy, they could vote with their feet. Farm workers chose this route in the early pioneering days, and were still following it fifty years later.

Men undertook agricultural labour for a variety of reasons, but the common thread which ran through their choices was independence. The nexus between base and superstructure is clear. Whatever penchant hired hands may have had for an individualistic outlook was reinforced when they were confronted with the realities of their economic position. Individualism gave them their greatest weapons and provided them the greatest cushions against the conditions of their proletarianization. In turn, they embraced individualism to an even greater extent, incorporating it into their culture of survival and resistance, both in the social setting and in the workplace.

Although farm workers as a group remained outside the mainstream of organized labour, they occupied an important position in the spectrum of the Canadian labour experience. This study of labour-capital relations in prairie agriculture thus has wider applicability, for the experiences of hired hands on isolated prairie farms tell us much about how individual workers have dealt with the realities of their proletarianization.

Their first response was to operate within the relationship as defined by capital. They used the informal apprenticeship system to develop farming expertise, to raise capital, and to make their way into the agricultural community. Yet they also took advantage of the availability of land and the shortage of labour to strike bargains over wages and working conditions. And they developed skills to reap advantages from the close working and living relationship with their employers. Hired hands had necessarily to extend their theory and practice of labour-capital relations well beyond the simple antagonisms of class. Much more than a simple acquiescence, a nuanced understanding of personal class relations enabled farm hands to operate effectively even without recourse to the usual institutions of working class support such as unions or community.

Another response was to subvert underlying features of the relationship. Their own interpretations of cultural constructs such as bachelorhood and masculinity gave farm workers a sense of their own identity. This provided a support against the increasing divergence of interests between labour and capital, and against the more conflictual nature of the relationship. Their role in transformations of the labour process gave them a degree of control over important aspects of their working lives. They embraced those techniques and devices which provided relief from back-breaking labour, yet fought to retain those aspects of the work which they found rewarding. They developed skills and technical expertise to supplement the informal "know-how" of the job in order to maintain the control which figured so largely in reducing much of the alienation inherent to waged labour.

Ultimately, the response of farm workers was to resist the conditions of their proletarianization with the most potent weapon they had -- withholding labour. They used this tactic during periods of labour shortages to drive up wages. The more highly skilled hands used it even during periods of relative labour surplus to regulate the conditions of their work. And all farm workers used it as the ultimate protest against working or living conditions. On an individual level this tactic caused grief for their employers and a measure of control for themselves. In the aggregate it forced capital to seek new ways to deal with the persistent problem of labour.

But job-jumping among hired hands, like other forms of their resistance, was not a consciously collective strategy. As a result, farm workers have been excluded from studies of working class formation and struggle. Yet despite the particularities of early prairie agriculture that shaped labour-capital relations, the actions of farm workers had parallels in other industries. Although they remained outside the mainstream of labour organizing, hired hands exercised tactics that added up to a pragmatic response to their specific conditions, yet were common to workers everywhere.

From the early pioneer period until the onset of the Great Depression, hired hands in the prairie west worked out their relations with capital in the context of choice. Farm workers found their courses of action increasingly restricted as the industry moved toward capitalist agriculture, but they nonetheless continued to operate on their own agenda.

Far from colluding in their own oppression, prairie farm workers displayed agency. In their lives and in their labour, they demonstrated an ingenuity and a resilience that gave them a unique perspective on relations between labour and capital, yet assured them a firm position within the Canadian working class.

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INTRODUCTION

1. Production Statistics

It would seem possible to do something as simple as count grains of wheat with a fair degree of accuracy, especially in the late-19th and early-20th centuries given the penchant of people of that era for the developing science of numbers.

But it is virtually impossible to gather precise statistics about such things as agricultural production in Western Canada until at least 1917. Before that time, provincial governments and the territorial government relied on voluntary reports totalling threshing. While the governments received a very good response to their questionaires, the numbers calculated thereby were by nature inaccurate. The provincial and territorial governments often published the totals as they were recorded; sometimes they made an effort to add an estimated shortfall in questionnaire returns, but they admitted their numbers might be as much as 15 per cent incorrect.[1]

In the early period, the federal government appears to have made an effort to estimate overall numbers using incomplete returns. These appear, by comparison, to have been much more accurate than the provincial or territorial numbers, until 1917 when the reporting appears to have become much more complete and accurate, or at the least agreed upon.

The problem with the statistics was obvious at the time they were collected and was an issue of concern. In 1917, the Alberta Department of Agriculture reported that it was attempting to cooperate with Ottawa in gathering statistics because, " Heretofore, the statistics gathered by the Province have been entirely independent of those gathered by the Dominion Branch. It has been recognized that the system employed by both Governments was open to criticism."[2]

There is no doubt that the gathering of statistics was considered a useful expenditure of the taxpayer's money in the early period of western Canadian development. In 1901, the Department of Argiculture of the North-West Territories pontificated: "The collection, compilation and publication of statistics concerning the various social and economical relations of life are now, by all civilised peoples, considered a legitimate and necessary function of government. In fact, government on rational and scientific principles is impossible without the information which may be derived from this source."[3]

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[1]. North-West Territories Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture 1903 p 24

[2]. Alberta Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture 1917 p 10

However high-blown the aspirations and claims, the fact is that early statistics gathering on the Canadian plains was far from a rigourous scientific procedure. It resulted in widely different numbers being published by different governments. These early statistics must be used carefully, at best as impressionistic evidence. Modern researchers must avoid the temptation to push them all into a chart, alleging that all grains of wheat have been accounted for.

A modern researcher for the Manitoba Department of Agriculture summed up the historian's problem:

> Certain discrepancies may be observed in the statistical figures quoted from the earliest Provincial Crop Bulletins; the Dominion statistical reports; and the summary tabulations in later Provincial publications. These discrepancies emphasize the difficulties experienced and the impossibility of obtaining complete data from crop correspondents under the pioneer conditions which prevailed, and the difficulties subsequently experienced, by different recorders of statistics, in attempting to arrive at reasonable estimates that could be presented as approximations dervived from such data as were available at the time of completion.[4]

In 1908, the federal government, through the fledgling Dominion Bureau of Statistics, began gathering and publishing its own agricultural numbers. The DBS did this, as the provincial governments had been doing with different results, by gathering reports of "crop correspondants", compiling these into averages, compilating the averages on the basis of the past year's acreage, factoring in the estimated yield of the current crop, and coming up with total production. The DBS bragged that

> The system thus established represented at the time, a decided step in advance; its imperfection

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[3]. North-West Territories Department of Agriculture Annual Report 1900 Regina: Queen's Printer [sic], 1901 p 16

[4]. J.H. Ellis The Ministry of Agriculture in Manitoba, 1870-1970 Winnipeg: Manitoba Department of Agriculture 1970 p 96n

> lay chiefly in the fact that errors in the estimated areas sown in any particular year were multiplied by application thereto of the percentage estimates of the following year; and the errors accumulated, therefore, until the enumeration, farm by farm, of the next census brought the data back to a more correct and trustworthy basis.[5]

Even a casual observer of crop statistics from the early period can not help but notice the obvious difference between federal and provincial reports, and sometimes significant differences between early and late reports on the same year by the same authority. Just as assuredly, it is obvious that something happened in 1917 -- the figures from that point agree, or are significantly close to agreement.

In 1917, the federal government reached agreement with four provinces, including Alberta and Saskatchewan, to embark on a common system for collecting crop statistics. The next year, this agreement was extended to the other provinces. The basis of the new system was that cards to be filled out and returned by farmers were distributed through rural schools. The importance was not only that thereby more accurate statistics would be discovered, but that obvious disagreements between provincial and federal governments about such a simple matter as bushels of grain would be avoided. "Identical figures as thus agreed to are then published by both authorities," commented the DBS shortly after the inauguration of the new system.[6]

If the governments had trouble counting bushels of grain, they had greater difficulty with more complex equations touching on basic matters of farm economy. In 1914, a Royal Commission determined that:

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[5] Government of Canada Dominion Bureau of Statistics Census of Industry 1917 Part I Agricultural Statistics 1917 Ottawa: King's Printer 1919 p. v. A summary, complimentary history of the DBS crop statistics efforts is found in Ernest H. Godfrey Progress in the Collection of Annual Agricultural Statistics and of Crop Reports During Growth in the Dominion of Canada Statistics Canada, Agriculture/Natural Resources Division, Crops Section, Methodology Paper No. 9 Ottawa May 1985. This report dwells in part on the unreliability of the pre-1917 statistics.

[6] Government of Canada Dominion Bureau of Statistics Census of Industry 1917 Part I Agricultural Statistics, 1917 Ottawa: King's Printer 1919 p. vi

> There are not available as many dependable data on the cost of producing wheat in Saskatchewan, as would be wished for, nor are there any data worthy of attention on the relative cost of producing wheat on the exclusive grain growing farm and the mixed farm respectively.[7]

Even with more sophisticated reporting techniques and more reliable numbers, the very nature of the western Canadian grain economy mitigates against a very close or clear presentation. A wheat yield in one district can be very much higher than the average in a district only a few kilometres away. Europe might be ready to absorb large amounts of Canadian wheat at high prices one year and not the next. On presenting in 1938 a graph of Canadian wheat exports over the past decades, one expert commented: "Did a jig-saw artist ever cut a more fantastic block? That block, gentlemen, is what we have been trying during all these years to fit into the world's wheat picture."[8]

So the figures in the following tables of this dissertation are, at least until the 1920s, best guesses based on a close examination of all the statistical information extant. Even so, they should not be regarded as the last word on the subject. Federal government statistics have been used here wherever available. As well, there was a tendancey to re-estimate numbers of past years based on new information. Therefore, the most recent available federal numbers are used here, and they differ (sometimes significantly) from those recorded in provincial agriculture department annual reports or from those in the Canada Year Books.

In the tables that follow here, statistics have often been used to make comparisions to actual harvests, not to the governments' fiscal years. That is for instance, that wheat exports for a given year are compared to the actual harvest those exports represent, even though the exports resulting from a wheat harvest of one year would not be posted to the government's books until the next. (See, for instance, Table III-12.) Where this occurs, it has been noted on the individual charts.

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[7]. Royal Commission of Inquiry into Grain Markets Report of the Grain Markets Commission of the Province of Saskatchewan, 1914 Regina: Government Printer 1914 p 20

[8]. Sandford Evans "untitled discussion" in Proceedings of the Conference on Markets for Western Farm Products Government of Manitoba Winnipeg 1938 p 73

2. Wage Calculations

Calculating the money paid farm labourers in the early period contains all the same pitfalls as dealing with production, but compounded.

All reporting bodies used data from individual farmers to try to estimate an average wage for province or area or a range of wages. From 1909, there are two sets of data that appear at least to be internally consistent: the federal government's estimates of average wages and the Saskatchewan government's publication of ranges of wages, and both these are detailed in the following. (See Table II-5.) But while these two sets of wage figures follow much the same trend, direct reconciliation between the two can not be easily achieved.

For the period before 1909, farm workers' wages are extremely difficult to determine. There is no doubt, as mentioned in this dissertation, that wages varied considerably among districts and with respect to the experience of the workers employed. That being the case, it is impossible to compare the scattered impressionistic accounts that list wage figures for those employed annually or for a period of months.[9] For 1901, a table is presented here (Table II-5F), taken from the Labour Gazette, that appears to be an accurate reflection of wages paid, that tends to agree with federal government figures and that illustrates the wide range of wage figures.

Wages for harvesters are much more easily determined. Two sets of figures are presented here (Table II-5E), one compiled from Saskatchewan government reports, the other an estimation of the average harvest wage for the prairie provinces. These appear to agree with reports of correspondants to the Labour Gazette.[10]

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[9]. See for example the impressionistic figures in M.C. Urquhart & K.A.H. Buckley Historical Statistics of Canada Toronto: Macmillan, 1965 D196-207, pp 94-5 (taken from immigration agents' reports) or those in James Mavor Report to the Board of Trade on the Northwest of Canada, with special reference to Wheat Production for Export presented to both Houses of Parliament, London 1904, p 57, cited in Robert E. Ankli & Robert M. Litt "The Growth of Prairie Agriculture: Economic Considerations" in Donald H. Akenson, ed., Canadian Papers in Rural History Vol I Gananoque, Ontario: Langdale Press 1978 pp 46, 59n

[10]. See for example Labour Gazette IV (1903) p 125; Labour Gazette VI (1905) p 362; Labour Gazette IX (1908) pp 105, 377; Labour Gazette XII (1911, p 300; Labour Gazette XIII (1912) p 298

3. Abbreviations

In the tables accompanying this dissertation, sources are often cited using abbreviations for fuller descriptions of works appearing in the general bibliography. These include:

Census - *Census of Canada*, various years, listed in the bibliography under various Canadian government departments.
CYB - Canada. Department of Agriculture. *Canada Year Book*.
DBS - Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics.
Sask. Agric., and similar short-forms, refer to government departments listed with their full titles (which sometimes changed) in the bibliography.
Stats. Can. - Statistics Canada
SYB - Canada. Department of Agriculture. *Statistical Year Book of Canada*.

Section I
Table 1

Prairie Population

A. Total Population

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1881	65,954	31,527	(NWT)	97,481	4,324,810
1891	152,506	66,799	(NWT)	219,305	4,833,239
1901	255,211	91,279	73.022	414,151	5,371,315
1906	365,688	257,763	185 12	808,863	----
1911	455,614	492,432	374,255	1,322,709	7,206,643
1916	553,860	647,835	496,525	1,698,220	----
1921	610,118	757,510	588,454	1,956,082	8,788,483
1926	639,056	820,738	607,599	2,067,393	----
1931	700,139	921,785	731,605	2,353,529	10,376,786

B. Urban Population (see Graph I-1)

1881	10,245	0	0	10,245	----
1891	41,008	0	0	41,008	1,537,098
1901	70,436	14,266	18,533	103,235	2,014,222
1906	138,090	48,462	58,033	244,585	----
1911	200,365	131,395	137,622	469,422	3,272,947
1916	241,014	176,297	188,749	606,060	----
1921	261,616	218,958	222,904	703,478	4,352,122
1926	278,858	242,532	233,848	755,238	----
1931	315,969	290,905	278,508	885,382	5,573,798

C. Rural Population (see Graph I-1)

1881	52,015	31,527	(NWT)	83,542	----
1891	111,498	66,799	(NWT)	178,297	3,296,141
1901	184,775	77,013	54,489	316,277	3,357,093
1906	227,598	209,301	127,379	564,278	----
1911	261,029	361,037	236,633	858,699	3,933,696
1916	312,846	471,538	307,776	1,092,160	----
1921	348,502	538,552	365,550	1,252,604	4,436,361
1926	360,198	578,206	373,751	1,312,155	----
1931	384,170	630,880	453,097	1,468,147	4,802,988

D. Adult Male Population

1881	24,531	---	(NWT)	---	1,348,387
1891	54,982	28,116	(NWT)	83,098	1,577,082
1901	88,895	56,536	(NWT)	145,431	1,820,604
1911	172,989	206,889	162,346	542,234	2,623,820
1921	206,823	260,584	215,304	682,711	2,994,875
1931	257,048	334,371	279,299	870,718	3,713,221

Section I
Table 1 - cont.

E. Adult Female Population

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1881	16,887	---	(NWT)	---	1,324,428
1891	40,112	20,105	(NWT)	60,217	1,517,386
1901	68,542	41,307	(NWT)	109,849	1,711,488
1911	130,239	118,647	91,720	340,606	2,211,776
1921	178,671	195,359	158,926	532,956	2,752,771
1931	224,130	260,754	213,228	698,112	3,378,579

F. Total Rural Male Population

1881	29,226	15,961	(NWT)	45,187	1,651,511
1891	62,769	37,626	(NWT)	100,395	1,709,611
1901	102,153	41,778	30,585	174,516	1,764,999
1911	144,810	212,504	143,394	500,708	2,143,893
1921	189,038	300,385	209,334	698,757	2,382,326
1931	209,099	350,365	256,687	816,151	2,602,912

G. Total Urban Male Population

1881	5,897	0	(NWT)	5,897	537,343
1891	21,573	0	(NWT)	21,573	750,860
1901	36,351	7,653	10,434	54,438	986,709
1911	108,144	79,226	80,398	267,768	1,678,102
1921	131,529	113,315	114,874	359,718	2,147,317
1931	158,966	149,570	143,512	452,048	2,771,629

H. Total Female Rural Population

1881	22,789	15,566	(NWT)	38,355	1,563,792
1891	48,729	29,173	(NWT)	77,902	1,586,530
1901	82,622	35,235	23,904	141,761	1,592,094
1911	116,219	148,533	93,239	357,991	1,789,803
1921	159,464	238,167	156,216	553,847	2,053,501
1931	175,071	280,515	196,410	651,996	2,201,816

I. Total Female Urban Population

1881	4,348	0	(NWT)	4,348	572,164
1891	19,435	0	(NWT)	19,435	786,238
1901	34,085	6,613	8,099	48,797	1,027,513
1911	92,221	52,169	57,264	201,654	1,594,845
1921	130,087	105,643	108,030	343,760	2,204,805
1931	157,003	141,335	134,996	433,334	2,800,429

Section I
Table 1 - cont.

J. Adult Rural Male Population

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1921	117,834	186,558	138,977	443,369	1,539,481
1931	135,925	229,879	175,721	541,525	1,746,435

K. Adult Urban Male Population

1921	88,989	74,026	76,327	239,342	1,455,394
1931	117,123	104,492	103,578	325,193	1,966,786

L. Adult Rural Female Population

1921	91,121	129,163	88,857	309,141	1,240,686
1931	107,917	164,137	117,916	389,970	1,373,702

M. Adult Urban Female Population

1921	87,550	66,196	70,069	223,815	1,512,085
1931	116,213	96,617	95,312	308,142	2,004,877

N. Male-to-Female Ratio

Number of Adult Males to Adult Females

1881	1.45	---		---	1.02
1891	1.37	1.40 (NWT)		1.38	1.04
1901	1.30	1.37		1.32	1.06
1911	1.33	1.74	1.77	1.59	1.19
1921	1.16	1.33	1.35	1.28	1.09
1931	1.15	1.28	1.31	1.25	1.10

Notes:

"Adult" is defined as 15 years of age or older. NWT refers to that area that became part of the prairie provinces. Ages were not properly collected in the North-West Territories for 1881 and the resulting data is not included here. Where an age was 'not given', these people are presumed to be adults; this results in a slightly too-large adult category for the North-West Territories in 1891 and 1901.

Sources:

A, B, C: 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931, Census 1921, Vol. I, Table 8, p. 345, and Census 1931, Vol. I, Table 7a, p. 384; 1906, 1916, 1926, DBS The Prairie Provinces in their Relation to the National Economy of Canada, pp. 30-1.

D, E: 1881, 1891, 1901, CYB 1905, Table III, pp. 13-15, 18-19; 1911, Census 1921, Vol. II, Table 24, pp. 118-9; 1921, Census 1921, Vol. II, Table 28, pp. 128-9, 134-7; 1931, Census 1931, Vol. III, Table 13, pp. 100, 112, 114, 116.

F, G, H, I: all dates, Census 1931, Vol. I, Table 7a, p. 384.

J, K, L, M: 1921, Census 1921, Vol. II, Table 28, pp. 128-9, 134-7; 1931, Census 1931, Vol. III, Table 13, pp. 100, 112, 114, 116.

N: calculated from Tables I-1D and I-1E.

Section I
Table 2

Marital Status

A. Married Men

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1881	10,948	5,790	(NWT)	16,738	690,544
1891	24,821	10,165	(NWT)	34,986	796,153
1901	42,881	28,141	(NWT)	71,022	928,952
1911	85,009	90,765	70,633	246,407	1,331,853
1921	117,448	142,369	117,047	376,864	1,697,241
1931	137,546	173,572	147,531	458,649	2,032,691
B. Married Women					
1881	10,543	6,458	(NWT)	17,001	689,540
1891	24,065	10,031	(NWT)	34,096	791,902
1901	41,679	27,152	(NWT)	68,831	904,091
1911	79,770	82,189	62,637	224,596	1,251,468
1921	113,752	136,228	110,155	360,135	1,630,732
1931	131,043	164,747	137,788	433,578	1,937,458
C. Adult Single Males					
1911	81,881	107,511	86,028	275,420	----
1921	82,596	110,384	91,117	284,097	1,173,777
1931	110,209	149,702	121,677	381,588	1,519,844
D. Adult Single Females					
1911	41,957	30,335	24,161	96,453	----
1921	52,301	48,333	38,873	139,507	881,791
1931	76,508	80,985	61,807	219,300	1,148,977
E. Rural Married Men					
1921	63,514	97,202	69,385	230,101	824,722
1931	71,404	112,948	87,041	271,393	896,686
F. Urban Married Men					
1921	53,934	45,167	47,662	146,763	872,519
1931	66,142	60,624	60,490	187,256	1,136,005

Section I
Table 2 - cont.

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
G. Rural Married Women					
1921	61,541	93,518	64,880	219,939	788,700
1931	67,795	107,664	80,715	256,174	852,458
H. Urban Married Women					
1921	52,211	42,710	45,275	140,196	842,032
1931	63,248	57,083	57,073	177,404	1,085,000
I. Rural Single Adult Males					
1921	50,502	83,785	64,765	199,052	649,085
1931	63,593	109,711	82,610	255,914	773,686
J. Urban Single Adult Males					
1921	32,094	26,599	26,352	85,045	524,692
1931	46,616	39,991	39,067	125,674	746,158
K. Rural Single Adult Females					
1921	24,143	29,126	19,207	72,476	357,659
1931	33,197	48,073	30,878	112,148	417,427
L. Urban Single Adult Females					
1921	28,158	19,207	19,666	67,031	524,132
1931	43,311	32,912	30,929	107,152	731,550
M. Married Men as a Percentage of Total Adult Males (see Graph I-2)					
1881	44.63	---		---	51.21
1891	45.14	36.15 (NWT)		42.10	50.48
1901	48.24	49.78 (NWT)		48.84	51.02
1911	49.14	43.87	43.51	45.44	50.76
1921	56.79	54.63	54.36	55.20	56.67
1931	53.51	51.91	52.82	52.67	54.74

Section I
Table 2

N. Married Women as a Percentage of Total Adult Females (see Graph I-2)

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1881	62.43	---		---	52.06
1891	59.99	49.89 (NWT)		56.62	52.19
1901	60.81	65.73 (NWT)		62.66	52.82
1911	61.25	69.27	68.29	65.94	56.58
1921	63.67	69.73	69.31	67.57	59.24
1931	58.47	63.18	64.62	62.11	57.35

Sources:

1881: _Census_ 1881, Vol. I, Table I, pp. 94-7.

1891: _Census_ 1901, Vol. I, Table III, pp. 118-21.

1901: _Census_ 1901, Vol. I, Table VII, pp. 26, 130.

1911: _Census_ 1921, Vol. II, Table 23, p. 117.

1921: _Census_ 1921, Vol. II, Table 28, pp. 128-9, 134-7.

1931: _Census_ 1931, Vol. III, Table 13, pp. 100, 112, 114, 116.

Except:

C, D, 1911: _Census_ 1921, Table 24, p. 119.

M, N: calculated from Tables I-1D, 1E, 2A, 2B.

Section I
Table 3

Agricultural Workforce

(Males, aged 15 years and over)

Column 1 - Waged agricultural labourers
Column 2 - Farmers' sons
Column 3 - Farmers
Column 4 - Total agricultural workforce

	1	2	3	4
A. Manitoba				
1881	---	2,608	10,818	13,565
1891	4,981	5,353	20,322	30,988
1901	---	---	---	---
1911	16,815	6,394	44,139	68,654
1921	16,593	14,875	50,845	83,229
1931	19,624	22,750	47,371	90,761
B. Saskatchewan (includes NWT before 1905)				
1881	---	180	822	1,051
1891	1,337	1,870	7,691	11,861
1901	---	---	---	---
1911	20,097	10,090	99,510	130,983
1921	30,314	22,662	113,424	167,294
1931	37,221	47,488	119,799	200,236
C. Alberta (included in Saskatchewan before 1905)				
1911	7,990	5,582	61,599	79,067
1921	16,351	13,619	79,004	110,911
1931	25,616	26,194	89,686	142,328
D. Prairies				
1881	---	2,788	11,640	14,616
1891	6,318	7,223	28,013	42,849
1901	---	---	---	---
1911	44,902	22,066	205,248	278,704
1921	63,258	51,156	243,273	361,434
1931	82,461	96,432	256,856	433,325

Section I
Table 3 - cont.

Notes:

In 1921, the age group is 16 years and over. The census of 1901 did not include statistics on the agricultural workforce.

Sources:

1881: Census, 1881, Vol. II, Table XIV, pp. 319-20, 327.

1891: Census, 1891, Vol. II, Table XII, pp. 145-6, 181.

1911: Census, 1911, Vol. V, Table V, pp. 52-3, 96-7, 228-9.

1921: Census, 1921, Vol. IV, Table 4, pp. 242-5, 270-1, 292-3.

1931: Census, 1931, Vol. VII, Table 40, pp. 134-5, 146-7, 167-7.

Section I
Table 4

Homesteads

A. Entries

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies
1872	---	---	---	283
1873	---	---	---	878
1874	---	---	---	1,376
1875	---	---	---	499
1876	---	---	---	347
1877	---	---	---	845
1878	---	---	---	1,788
1879	---	---	---	4,068
1880	---	---	---	2,074
1881	---	23	---	2,753
1882	---	1,121	---	7,383
1883	---	---	---	6,063
1884	---	---	---	3,753
1885	---	---	---	1,858
1886	---	---	---	2,657
1887	1,053	356	271	1,680
1888	1,665	425	230	2,320
1889	2,225	1,242	504	3,971
1890	1,401	758	524	2,683
1891	1,651	930	784	3,365
1892	1,687	1,797	1,257	4,741
1893	1,276	1,159	1,513	3,948
1894	---	---	---	3,209
1895	866	461	1,000	2,327
1896	993	362	411	1,766
1897	609	301	230	1,140
1898	1,426	960	1,049	3,435
1899	2,124	2,159	1,745	6,028
1900	2,154	2,703	2,470	7,327
1901	1,933	2,332	3,806	8,071
1902	2,263	6,612	5,681	14,556
1903	3,253	19,941	8,069	31,263
1904	2,005	15,659	8,201	25,865
1905	1,707	19,787	9,138	30,632
1906	1,806	27,692	12,263	41,761
1907	1,231	13,501	6,843	21,575
1908	1,748	18,825	9,614	30,187
1909	3,761	21,120	13,771	38,652
1910	2,529	21,575	17,187	41,291
1911	3,082	25,227	15,964	44,273

Section I
Table 4 - cont.

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies
1912	3,158	20,484	15,184	38,826
1913	2,826	17,556	12,942	33,324
1914	3,186	14,504	12,208	29,898
1915	4,420	8,790	10,076	23,286
1916	3,960	6,247	6,410	16,617
1917	2,276	4,105	4,550	10,931
1918	1,593	2,741	3,808	8,142
1919	813	1,191	2,169	4,173
1920	1,232	1,918	3,448	6,595
1921	725	1,670	2,874	5,269
1922	1,488	2,733	2,928	7,149
1923	879	2,104	2,207	5,190
1924	632	1,699	1,326	3,657
1925	464	1,804	1,192	3,460
1926	616	2,363	1,556	4,535
1927	797	2,702	2,145	5,644
1928	688	2,961	3,411	7,060
1929	643	5,808	8,933	15,384
1930	727	6,089	9,795	16,611
1931	454	2,834	7,122	10,410

B. Cancellations

1884	---	---	---	1,334
1885	---	---	---	---
1886	---	---	---	1,033
1887	---	---	---	633
1888	---	---	---	935
1889	---	---	---	1,337
. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
1894	---	---	---	1,558
1895	---	---	---	1,222
1896	---	---	---	1,165
1897	---	---	---	1,090
1898	---	---	---	1,546
1899	---	---	---	1,746
1900	---	---	---	1,096
1901	---	---	---	1,682
1902	---	---	---	3,296
1903	---	---	---	5,208
1904	---	---	---	8,702
1905	---	---	---	11,296
1906	---	---	---	11,637
1907	---	---	---	14,110
1908	---	---	---	15,668

Section I
Table 4 - cont.

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies
1909	---	---	---	14,677
1910	---	---	---	16,832
1911	---	---	---	22,122
1912	---	---	---	18,608
1913	2,006	8,288	6,694	16,988
1914	1,370	7,662	6,615	15,647
1915	1,694	4,953	5,432	12,079
1916	1,593	5,722	5,149	12,464
1917	1,578	3,558	4,101	9,237
1918	1,128	2,193	2,813	6,134
1919	929	1,100	1,946	3,975
1920	1,663	2,389	3,673	7,725
1921	1,403	2,360	3,365	7,128
1922	1,846	2,370	3,383	7,599
1923	1,895	2,278	2,652	6,825
1924	759	1,499	1,722	3,980
1925	1,025	1,475	1,552	4,052
1926	746	1,312	1,211	3,269
1927	547	1,330	1,489	3,366
1928	1,034	1,522	2,203	4,759
1929	654	1,717	2,741	5,112
1930	552	2,261	3,823	6,636
1931	381	1,219	2,428	4,028

Source:

M.C. Urquhart and K.A.H. Buckley, eds. Historical Statistics of Canada. Toronto: Macmillan, 1965, K34-41, p. 320; from Annual Report of the Department of the Interior, 1875 to 1931. Author's calculations. (The Manitoba entry figures for 1881 and 1882 appear unlikely and are not included here.)

Section I
Table 5

Harvest Excursionists

	Sask.	Prairies
1890	---	292
1891	---	3,000
1892	---	2,000
1893	---	1,489
1894	---	1,555
1895	---	5,000
1896	---	2,350
1897	---	6,000
1898	---	4,520
1899	---	11,004
1900	---	2,175
1901	---	18,375
1902	1,930	13,000
1903	4,663	18,000
1904	4,435	14,000
1905	3,742	16,858
1906	8,066	23,657
1907	6,434	21,000
1908	14,034	27,500
1909	12,500	23,000
1910	10,647	14,387
1911	22,502	33,115
1912	15,065	26,500
1913	12,772	18,120
1914	11,687	11,501
1915	27,099	29,253
1916	33,310	35,334
1917	32,864	42,690
1918	13,756	9,384
1919	---	6,452
1920	---	28,228
1921	35,764	32,426
1922	34,974	39,740
1923	47,337	50,451
1924	20,183	26,483
1925	43,072	54,850
1926	26,132	34,202
1927	25,029	32,250
1928	33,282	52,225
1929	3,672	3,592
1930	000	---
1931	000	---

Section I
Table 5 - cont.

Notes:

The figures for 1917 are misleading. In that year, women and children were granted excursion rates in an attempt to cope with the wartime labour shortage. The attempt was unsuccessful as a much smaller number than the total indicated actually worked as harvesters. There are some obvious discrepancies between the two sets of figures used. For example, the totals above show more harvesters in Saskatchewan in 1921 than in the prairie provinces combined. John H. Thompson calculated the prairie totals using provincial departments of agriculture estimates for 1891, 1892, 1895, 1897, 1902 and 1909 and for the other years. The Saskatchewan figures are from the provincial departments of agriculture and labour, which claimed to have counted the number of harvesters ticketed "in and for" Saskatchewan.

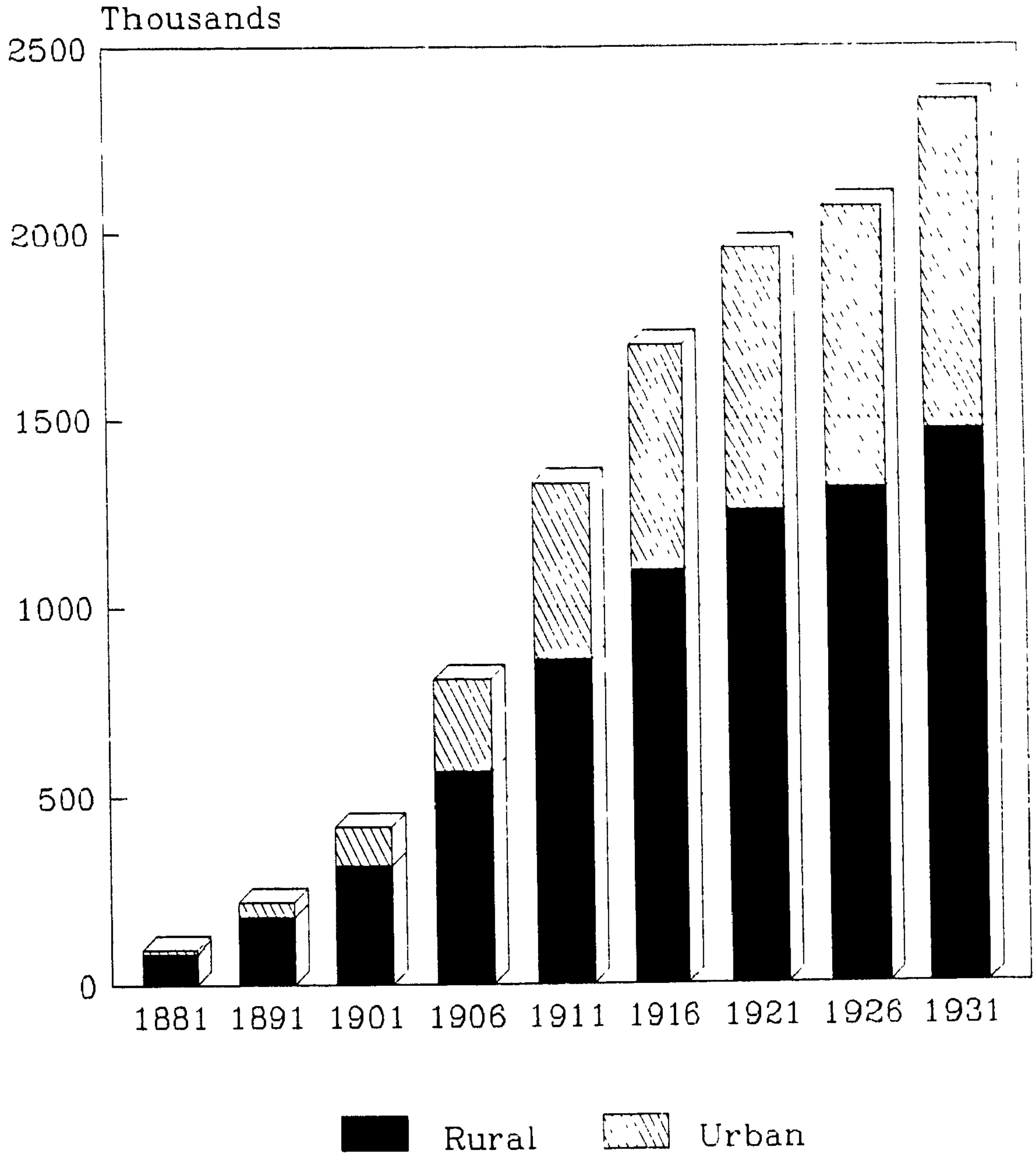
Sources:

Saskatchewan: 1902-05, Sask. Agric. *Annual Report* 1907, p. 110; 1906-08, Sask. Agric. *Annual Report* 1908, p. 92; 1909-12, Sask. Agric. *Annual Report* 1913, p. 196; 1913, Sask. Agric. *Annual Report* 1913, pp. 195-6; 1914-17, Sask. Agric. *Annual Report* 1918, p. 153; 1918, Sask. Agric. *Annual Report* 1919, p. 30; 1921, Sask. Labour *Annual Report* 1922, p. 54; 1922, Sask. Labour *Annual Report* 1923, p. 37; 1923, Sask. Labour *Annual Report* 1924, p. 56; 1924, Sask. Agric. *Annual Report* 1925, p. 30; 1925, Sask. Labour *Annual Report* 1931, p. 54; 1926-31, Sask. Labour *Annual Report* 1932, p. 32.

Prairies: John Herd Thompson "Bringing in the Sheaves: The Harvest Excursionists, 1890-1929," *Canadian Historical Review*, LIX:4, December 1978, 469

Graph I-1

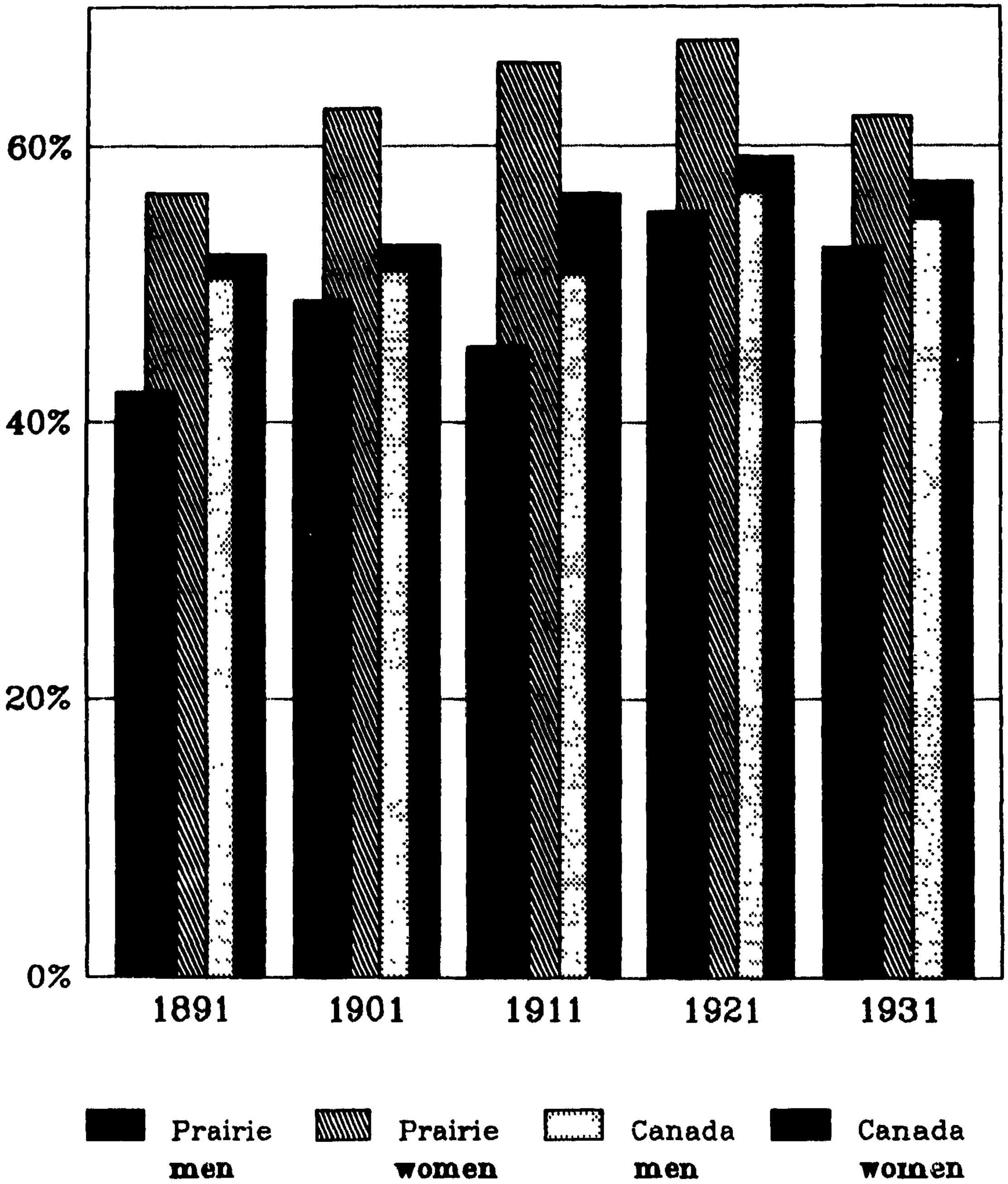
Prairie Population, Urban and Rural



From Tables I-1B, 1C

Graph I-2

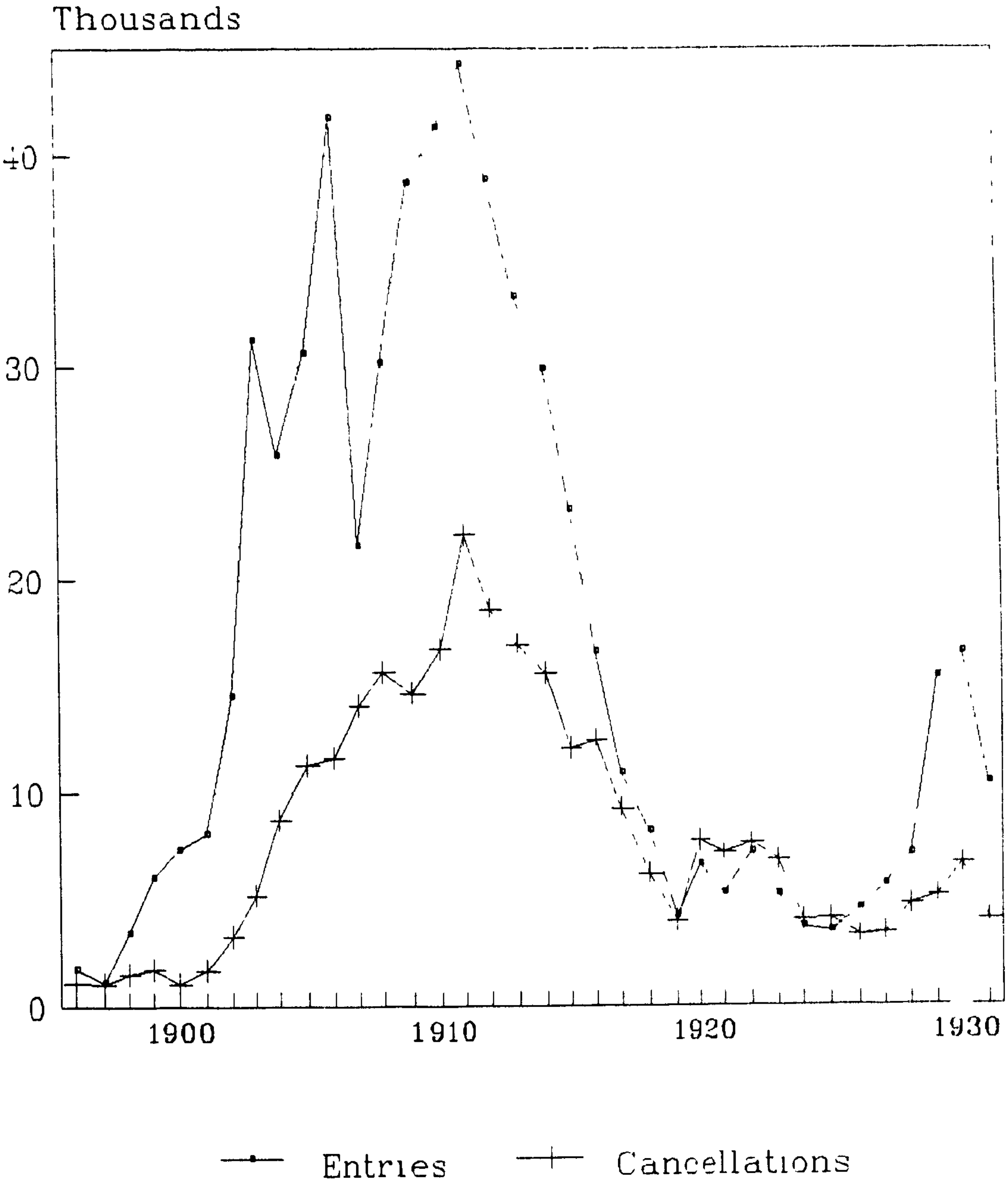
Marriage Rates,
Prairies and Canada



From: Tables I-2M, 2N

Graph I-4

Prairie Homesteads, Entries and Cancellations



From Table I-4C

Section II
Table 1

Prairie Farms

Column 1 - Number of farms.
Column 2 - Total acres occupied, in thousands of acres.
Column 3 - Total improved acres, in thousands of acres.
Column 4 - Area under field crops, in thousands of acres.

A. Manitoba

	1	2	3	4
1881	9,077	2,384	250	230
1891	22,571	5,228	1,232	1,229
1901	32,252	8,843	3,995	2,756
1906	36,141	---	4,228	4,220
1911	43,631	12,184	6,746	5,162
1916	46,580	13,437	7,188	5,117
1921	53,252	14,616	8,057	5,858
1926	53,251	14,412	8,346	6,261
1931	54,199	15,132	8,522	5,842

B. Saskatchewan (including Alberta before 1901)

1881	1,014	314	29	21
1891	9,244	2,910	197	190
1901	13,445	3,833	1,123	656
1906	55,971	---	---	3,271
1908	65,945	17,066	8,005	6,921
1911	95,013	28,099	11,872	9,137
1916	104,006	36,801	19,632	13,973
1921	119,451	44,023	25,037	17,822
1926	117,781	45,945	27,714	19,559
1931	136,472	55,673	33,549	22,126

C. Alberta (incl. in Saskatchewan before 1901)

1901	9,479	2,736	475	188
1906	30,286	---	---	916
1911	60,559	17,359	4,352	3,378
1916	67,977	23,063	7,510	5,506
1921	82,954	29,293	11,768	8,523
1926	77,130	28,573	13,204	9,167
1931	97,408	38,977	17,749	12,037

Section II
Table 1 - cont.

	1	2	3	4
Prairies				
1881	10,091	2,698	279	251
1891	31,815	8,138	1,429	1,419
1901	55,176	15,412	5,593	3,600
1906	122,398	---	---	8,408
1911	199,203	57,643	22,970	17,677
1916	218,563	73,300	34,330	24,596
1921	255,657	87,932	44,863	32,203
1926	248,162	88,930	49,265	34,987
1931	288,079	119,783	59,819	40,066

Sources:

1881, 1891, 1901, 1911, 1921, 1931: Census, 1931, Vol. VIII, Table 1, p. xxviii.

1906, 1916, 1926: DBS The Prairie Provinces in their Relation to the National Economy of Canada, pp. 30-1.

1908, Saskatchewan: Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1909, p. 76.

Prairies: calculated from the relevant figures.

Section II
Table 2

Farm Operating Expenses

In thousands of dollars.

A. 1901

	Rent	Labour
Man.	516	2,615
NWT	157	1,576
Can.	7,355	24,229

B. Manitoba

	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Taxes	4,365	4,223	4,347	4,824	4,545
Rent	7,211	5,450	7,427	5,351	3,708
Labour	11,840	11,378	11,343	11,155	9,564
Interest	5,513	5,547	5,767	5,846	5,829
Machinery	8,859	9,032	9,330	9,597	9,223
Crop & Livestock	5,740	4,627	5,538	4,411	4,737
Other	3,177	3,091	3,310	3,242	2,883
Total	46,705	43,358	47,062	44,426	40,489

C. Saskatchewan

Taxes	12,941	12,833	13,388	13,995	13,940
Rent	24,921	27,386	28,622	19,738	11,764
Labour	31,903	30,245	29,471	28,066	23,408
Interest	18,513	18,724	19,563	19,945	19,725
Machinery	23,595	25,784	27,602	29,286	28,968
Crop & Livestock	8,556	9,158	9,358	6,192	6,931
Other	8,343	9,059	9,518	9,027	7,997
Total	128,772	133,189	137,522	126,249	112,733

Section II
Table 2 - cont.

D. Alberta

	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Taxes	6,911	6,992	7,157	7,378	7,703
Rent	12,153	16,437	13,724	10,232	7,465
Labour	17,035	17,966	18,939	18,381	16,606
Interest	12,251	12,312	12,793	12,965	12,922
Machinery	10,971	12,127	14,897	16,330	17,431
Crop & Livestock	7,629	8,974	8,486	6,632	6,986
Other	4,499	5,305	5,494	5,554	5,109
Total	71,449	80,113	81,490	77,472	74,222

E. Prairies

	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Taxes	24,217	24,058	24,892	26,157	26,188
Rent	44,285	49,273	49,773	35,321	22,937
Labour	60,778	59,589	59,753	57,602	49,578
Interest	36,277	36,583	38,123	38,756	38,476
Machinery	43,425	46,943	51,829	55,213	55,622
Crop & Livestock	21,925	22,759	23,382	17,235	18,654
Other	16,019	17,455	18,322	17,823	15,989
Total	246,926	256,660	266,074	248,147	227,444

F. Canada

	1926	1927	1928	1929	1930
Taxes	49,536	49,491	51,285	53,462	54,347
Rent	53,855	59,389	59,708	45,488	31,522
Labour	111,748	112,434	113,277	112,755	100,426
Interest	61,332	61,898	64,553	66,020	65,910
Machinery	70,464	76,141	84,143	90,293	90,294
Crop & Livestock	92,384	94,460	100,439	90,619	87,949
Other	40,113	43,408	44,614	44,707	40,349
Total	479,432	497,221	518,019	503,344	470,797

Sources:

1901, CYB 1905, p. 97; all others, DBS *Farm Income* (1959), pp. 75-7.

Section II
Table 3

Cost of Living Index

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Can.
1913				100
1914				
1915				
1916	113.0	117.1	111.5	105.4
1917	133.2	136.3	132.8	129.4
1918	151.0	157.8	149.0	147.2
1919	163.3	178.9	162.1	158.1
1920	197.4	202.1	188.6	184.7
1921	176.8	177.2	158.7	161.9
1922	160.1	162.8	144.5	148.9
1923	160.7	163.9	144.1	150.2
1924	158.6	162.1	140.6	147.6
1925	162.2	165.3	146.0	150.2
1926	161.9	164.8	145.8	153.1
1927	161.7	166.2	145.9	151.2
1928	163.8	167.2	145.3	151.7
1929	167.4	170.0	150.4	154.1
1930	163.9	164.7	147.4	151.8
1931	141.4	139.5	126.1	133.1

Note:

The index refers to a family budget staple foods, fuel and lighting, and rent, based on the Canadian average of 1913.

Source:

DBS The Prairie Provinces in their Relation to the National Economy of Canada, p. 118.

Section II
Table 4

Alberta Farm Index

Column 1 - Composite index, including living costs.
Column 2 - Composite index, excluding living costs.
Column 3 - Equipment and materials.
Column 4 - Taxes and Interest.
Column 5 - Wages.
Column 6 - Farm family living costs.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1913	---	---	79.7	---	---	82.6
1914	83.6	83.3	82.7	83.3	89.5	84.0
1915	88.0	88.2	87.7	85.6	98.3	87.5
1916	96.9	98.8	92.2	108.1	116.7	94.0
1917	125.3	135.4	122.4	128.4	207.1	110.8
1918	146.7	158.6	149.2	138.4	237.4	129.7
1919	157.7	168.1	156.8	142.7	263.8	143.0
1920	179.5	183.1	172.0	151.5	288.8	174.4
1921	151.9	158.6	146.1	158.5	218.9	142.2
1922	134.0	136.6	121.2	152.5	181.3	130.3
1923	130.9	131.3	113.7	150.1	161.9	130.2
1924	130.8	133.3	119.3	145.1	178.2	127.1
1925	130.0	133.2	119.5	142.2	181.7	125.1
1926	127.8	131.8	117.1	141.6	183.5	121.9
1927	126.9	130.7	116.3	135.9	188.9	121.1
1928	126.1	130.4	113.9	141.2	189.0	119.7
1929	123.7	128.1	113.9	137.5	178.3	117.2
1930	116.7	118.5	104.7	133.4	158.1	114.0
1931	103.4	102.7	93.9	121.8	112.8	104.4

Note:

Averages for each category for the years 1935-39 are 100.

Source:

Alta. Agric. A Historical Series of Agricultural Statistics, p. 126.

Section II
Table 5

Farm Workers' Wages

A. Annual Farm Workers' Wages (not including board)

	Can.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Ont.
1901	207.55	---	---	---	---
. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .
1909	216.29	233.55	197.90	241.62	211.56
1910	197.82	223.60	234.50	215.60	191.84
1911	---	---	---	---	---
1912	---	---	---	---	---
1913	---	---	---	---	---
1914	152.06	178.53	167.90	168.48	140.21
1915	166.16	207.95	184.70	200.72	144.40
1916	194.08	236.61	215.30	267.03	163.27
1917	383	437	458	508	345
1918	429	515	549	551	367
1919	476	577	576	640	427
1920	543	650	667	697	474
1921	421	503	498	463	382
1922	359	---	---	393	---
1923	372	---	---	465	---
1924	380	---	---	409	---
1925	383	---	---	443	---
1926	384	---	---	446	---
1927	396	---	---	474	---
1928	382	---	---	493	---
1929	373	---	---	---	---
1930	326	---	---	---	---
1931	240	---	---	---	---

Sources:

Canada: 1901, CYB 1906, p. 159; 1909-10, CYB 1914, p. 2032; 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 237; 1922-31, DBS Agricultural Branch Bulletin, Feb. 21, 1941.

Manitoba: 1909-10, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB, 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 238.

Saskatchewan: 1909-10, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB, 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 238.

Section II
Table 5 - cont.

Alberta: 1909-10, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB, 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 238; 1922-28, Alta. Agric. Statistics of Progress, p. 58.

Ontario: 1909-10, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB, 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 237.

B. Summer Farm Workers' Wages
(monthly, not including board)

	Can.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Ont.
1909	23.69	24.95	22.30	25.08	21.52
1910	22.66	25.30	26.00	23.30	19.40
. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .
1914	21.28	23.64	24.01	23.90	19.00
1915	22.53	29.97	25.44	27.08	17.79
1916	26.33	30.23	30.36	32.76	22.98
1917	45	47	50	53	41
1918	49	55	61	60	42
1919	54	63	66	67	48
1920	60	70	72	76	52
1921	45	53	54	52	40
1922	--	--	--	41	--
1923	--	--	--	46	--
1924	--	--	--	42	--
1925	--	--	--	44	--
1926	--	--	--	45	--
1927	--	--	--	45	--
1928	--	--	--	46	--

Sources:

Canada: 1909-10, 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 237.

Manitoba: 1909-10, 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 238.

Saskatchewan: 1909-10, 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 238.

Alberta: 1909-10, 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 238; 1922-28, Alta. Agric. Statistics of Progress, p. 58.

Ontario: 1909-10, 1914-15, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 237.

Section II
Table 5 - cont.

C. Annual Value of Farm Workers' Board

	Can.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Ont.
1909	120.00	132.00	192.00	180.00	120.00
1910	149.88	176.40	168.00	200.40	144.00
. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .	. . .
1914	171.24	185.88	198.00	196.32	157.08
1915	174.84	182.52	201.36	203.28	159.60
1916	202.80	217.68	218.28	234.24	197.16
1917	228	252	276	276	216
1918	252	276	300	312	240
1919	288	312	336	336	264
1920	278	325	336	341	262
1921	248	295	297	283	227
1922	235	---	---	---	---
1923	239	---	---	---	---
1924	256	---	---	---	---
1925	258	---	---	---	---
1926	255	---	---	---	---
1927	262	---	---	---	---
1928	252	---	---	---	---
1929	254	---	---	---	---
1930	233	---	---	---	---
1931	199	---	---	---	---

Sources:

Canada: 1909-10, 1914, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1915, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-19, calculated from CYB 1921, p. 237; 1920-21, CYB 1921, p. 238; 1922-31, DBS Agricultural Branch Bulletin, Feb. 21, 1941.

Manitoba: 1909-10, 1914, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1915, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-19, calculated from CYB 1921, p. 238; 1920-21, CYB 1921, p. 238.

Saskatchewan: 1909-10, 1914, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1915, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-19, calculated from CYB 1921, p. 238; 1920-21, CYB 1921, p. 238.

Alberta: 1909-10, 1914, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1915, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-19, calculated from CYB 1921, p. 238; 1920-21, CYB 1921, p. 238.

Ontario: 1909-10, 1914, CYB 1914, p. 203; 1915, CYB 1915, p. 176; 1916, CYB 1916-17, p. 202; 1917-19, calculated from CYB 1921, p. 237; 1920-21, CYB 1921, p. 238.

Section II
Table 5 - cont.

D. Saskatchewan Farm Workers' Wages
(monthly, not including board)

	Summer	Yearly
1907	--	23.00
1908	29.00	22.00

. . . .

	Summer	Yearly
1912	31.00-40.00	23.00-29.00
1913	32.00-41.00	22.50-28.50
1914	25.00-35.00	20.00.25.50
1915	40.00-45.00	25.00-30.00
1916	50.00-55.00	37.50-40.00
1917	55.00-65.00	40.00-46.00
1918	55.00-65.00	50.00-54.00
1919		

	Winter	Spring	Season
1920		60.00	
1921			
1922			
1923		50.00-60.00	35.00-45.00
1924	10.00-25.00	35.00-55.00	
1925	10.00-25.00	35.00-55.00	

	Winter	Spring	Fall
1926	10.00-25.00	35.00-60.00	40.00-50.00
1927	10.00-25.00	35.00-50.00	50.00
1928	10.00-25.00	35.00-50.00	50.00
1929	10.00-25.00	35.00-50.00	40.00
1930	10.00-15.00	25.00-40.00	15.00-20.00
1931	board-10.00	5.00-25.00	board-10.00

Sources:

1907, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1907, p. 108; 1908, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1909, p. 83; 1912-1918, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1919, p. 30; 1920, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1920-21, p. 35; 1923, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1924, p. 56; 1924, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1925, p. 36; 1925, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1926, p. 30; 1926, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1927, p. 37; 1927, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1928, p. 34; 1928, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1929, p. 74; 1929, Sask. Labour Annual Report, p. 42; 1930, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1931, p. 59; 1931, Sask. Labour Annual Report 1932, p. 36.

Section II
Table 5 - cont.

E. Harvest wages

In dollars per day

	Sask. figures	Prairie estimates
1901		1.88
1902		2.75
1903		2.00
1904		2.00
1905		2.25
1906		2.57
1907	1.50-2.50	2.00
1908	1.75-3.25	2.05
1909	2.50	2.00
1910		3.13
1911	2.50	2.88
1912	2.75-4.00	3.13
1913	2.75-3.75	3.13
1914	2.50	2.55
1915		2.60
1916	3.00	2.75
1917	3.50-4.50	4.00
1918	4.50	4.55
1919		4.69
1920		5.73
1921		3.88
1922		3.55
1923	3.50-6.00	3.75
1924	3.00-6.00	3.38
1925	3.50-5.00	4.10
1926	4.00-6.00	3.40
1927	4.00-6.00	4.50
1928	4.00-6.00	3.90
1929	2.50-4.00	3.58
1930	1.50-2.50	
1931	1.00-2.50	

Sources:

Sask. figures: 1908, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1908, p. 93; 1909, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1909, p. 82; 1911, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1910, p. 77; 1912, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1912, p. 137; 1913, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1913, p. 196; 1914, 1916-17, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1918, p. 153; 1918, Sask. Agric. Annual Report Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1919, p. 30.

Prairie estimates: These are John H. Thompson's averages for all the prairie provinces contained in his "Bringing in the Sheaves: The Harvest Excursionists, 1890-1929", CHR LIX, 4, Dec. 1978.

F. Farm Workers' Wages, 1901
(not including board)

Column 1 - Annual engagement, dollars per year
Column 2 - Season engagement (7 or 8 months), dollars per month
Column 3 - Engagement for 1 to 3 months, dollars per month
Column 4 - Short-term engagement, dollars per day

	1	2	3	4
Manitoba				
South-eastern	---	22	26	1.50
Eastern	150-240	20-25	25-30	1.00-1.75
South Central	120-240	18-30	20-35	1.00-1.50
North Central	180-200	20-25	20-25	1.00-2.00
South-western	180-240	20-30	22-50	1.00-2.00
North-western	144-240	14-32	16-35	1.00-2.00
Assiniboia	120-240	15-25	20-35	1.00-2.00
Saskatchewan	150-240	15-25	20-25	1.00-1.50
Alberta	180-312	20-30	20-40	1.00-2.50

Source:

Labour Gazette, Vol. 1, Sept. 1900-June 1901, pp. 564-5.

G. Misc. Farm Workers' Wages

From: Robert Miller Christie. Manitoba Described:

1885 - harvest - $1.50 per day but had been $2.50 in late boom.

From: M.C. Urquhart & K.A.H. Buckley Historical Statistics of Canada. Toronto: Macmillan, 1965, D196-207, pp. 94-5, from immigration agents' Annual Reports.:

1882 - Winnipeg - Farm labourers per month with board - $30.00 to 40.00

Section II
Table 5 - cont.

1883 - Winnipeg - Farm labourers per day without board - $1.50

1885 - Qu'Appelle - ditto per month without board - $40 to 50

- Brandon - per week without board - 6 to 12.00

- Winnipeg - per day without board - 1.25

1887 - Medicine Hat - per month with board - $25 to 35.00

1888 - Medicine Hat - per day without board - $ 1 - 1.25
- Qu'Appelle - per month with board - 20-35.00
- Winnipeg - per month without board - 5-30.00

1889 - Calgary - per day without board - 1.50
- Moose Jaw - ditto - 1.50-1.75
- Regina - ditto - 2.00
- Brandon - ditto - 1.25-1.50
- Winnipeg - ditto - 1.00

1890 - Brandon - per month with [sic] board - $15-30.00
- Calgary - per day without board - 1.75
- Regina - ditto - 1.75-2.00
- Winnipeg - ditto - 1.25

From: James Mavor. Annual Annual Report to the Board of Trade on the Northwest of Canada, with special reference to Wheat Production for Export, presented to both Houses of Parliament, London 1904, p. 57, cited in Robert E. Ankli and Robert M. Litt "The Growth of Prairie Agriculture: Economic Considerations:"

1904 - Indian Head, Assiniboia: "First-class experienced farm labourers" $30.00/mo. for eight months; "ordinarily [sic] good men" $25-$26 per month; "inferior hands" $15 to $20 per month (board included); harvesting & threshing $35-$45 per month with board & lodging.

1904 - Brandon, Manitoba: experienced men $20-$35/mo. with board & lodging; "newly arrived immigrants" (inexperienced) $10-$15/mo. with board & lodging.

As reported by correspondants to the Labour Gazette:

Aug. 1903, Calgary, $35 for haying. [Labour Gazette IV, p. 125]
Oct. 1905, general farm work, $2-2.50/day, $40-45.00 per week. [Labour Gazette VI, p. 362]
Aug. 1908, general, $2/day "and upward" [Labour Gazette IX, p. 105]

Oct 1908, 2.25-2.50/day [Labour Gazette IX, p. 349]
1910, $2/$3 for "exceptionally good men" [Labour Gazette XI, p. 377]
Oct. 1911, 1.75-2.00 [Labour Gazette XII, p. 300]
Oct. 1912, $3-3.50 for experienced men [Labour Gazette XIII, p. 298]

Section II
Table 6

Mechanization

A. Number of Tractors

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1921	10,027	19,243	9,215	38,485	47,455
1926	12,151	26,674	11,311	50,136	---
1931	14,366	43,308	23,985	81,659	105,360

B. Number of Combines

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1931	355	6,019	2,523	8,897	8,917

C. Number of Automobiles (including trucks in 1921)

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1921	16,645	36,098	20,616	73,359	157,022
1926	20,208	52,177	29,144	101,529	---
1931	25,588	65,094	42,817	133,499	321,284

D. Number of Trucks

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Canada
1926	952	3,267	1,421	5,640	---
1931	3,260	10,938	7,319	21,517	48,401

E. Combine Sales

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies
1926	2	148	26	176
1927	21	382	195	598
1928	206	2,356	1,095	3,657
1929	158	2,484	858	3,500
1930	134	939	541	1,614
1931	35	92	54	179

F. Tractor Sales

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies
1919	3,627	3,514	1,703	8,844
1920	3,671	4,229	2,379	12,279
1921	1,057	1,655	716	3,428
1922	1,361	2,475	386	4,222
1923	911	2,524	731	4,166
1924	465	1,213	434	2,112
1925	1,008	2,176	869	4,053
1926	1,498	3,704	1,311	6,513
1927	1,414	5,727	2,885	10,026
1928	2,209	8,703	6,231	17,143
1929	2,423	6,906	5,228	14,557
1930	1,541	4,350	3,100	8,991
1931	186	267	334	787

Section II
Table 6 - cont.

G. Numbers of Horses, Alberta

In thousands

1906	226.5	1919	763.5
1907	255.0	1920	770.6
1908	280.9	1921	806.2
1909	314.5	1922	785.4
1910	365.1	1923	772.7
1911	407.2	1924	787.5
1912	429.5	1925	783.9
1913	483.2	1926	784.3
1914	539.0	1927	773.0
1915	585.6	1928	761.0
1916	629.5	1929	764.8
1917	660.2	1930	740.0
1918	720.5	1931	731.7

Sources:

A, B, C, D: DBS The Prairie Provinces in their Relation to the National Economy of Canada, p. 52.

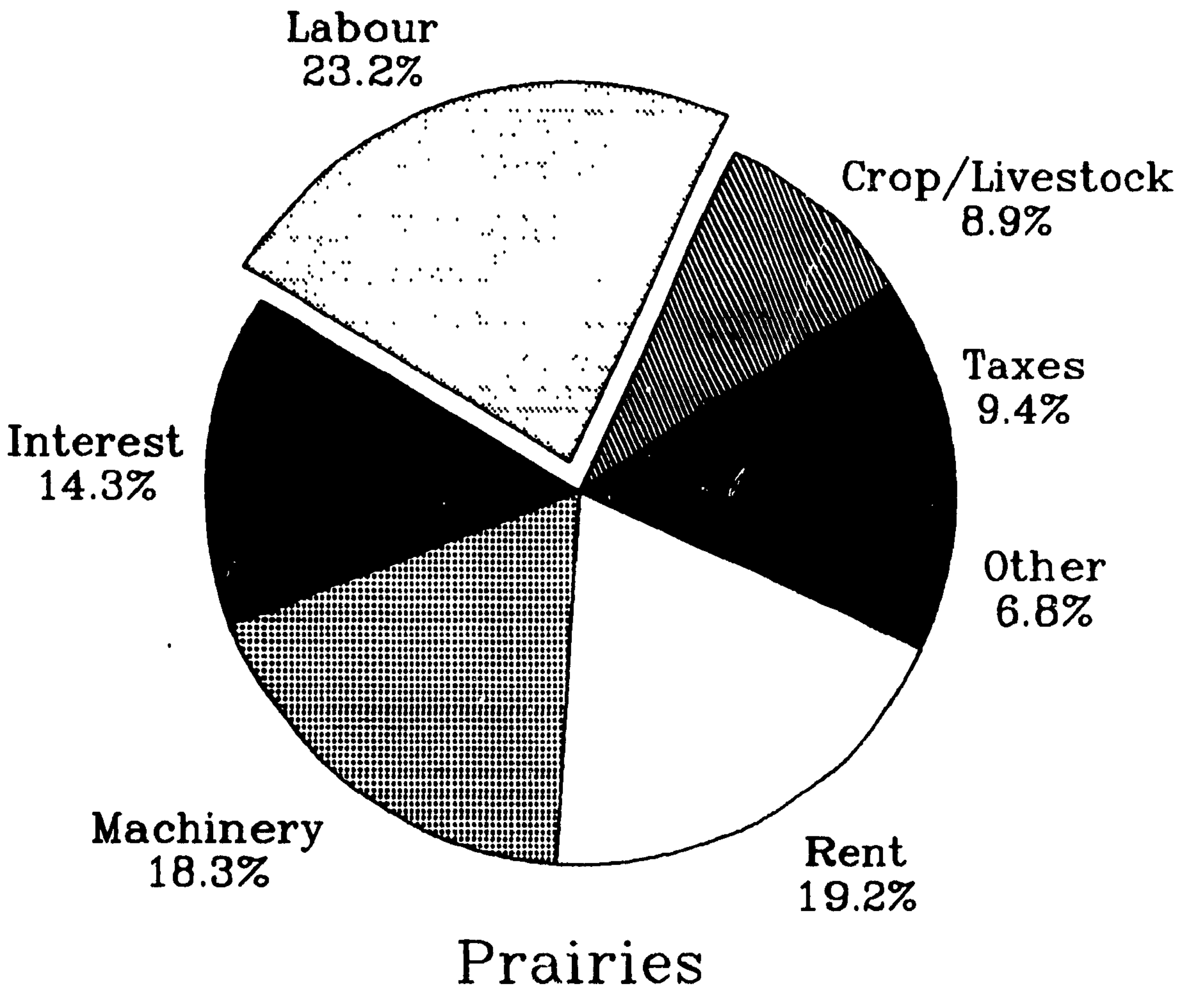
E, F: Canadian Farm Implements, December, 1931, cited in Andrew Stewart "Trends in Farm Power ...," Appendix A, in R.W. Murchie Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier, pp. 296, 298.

G: Alta. Agric. A Historical Series of Agricultural Statistics, p. 58.

Graph II-1

Farm Operating Expenses,

Prairies 1927



From: Table II-2E

Section III
Table 1

Value of Agricultural Production

Gross value, in thousands of dollars.

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Can.
1906	---	---	16,428	---	---
1907	---	---	17,550	---	---
1908	---	---	24,410	---	---
1909	---	---	32,466	---	---
1910	---	---	33,624	---	---
1911	---	---	48,385	---	---
1912	---	---	51,885	---	---
1913	---	---	61,407	---	---
1914	---	---	75,853	---	---
1915	---	---	138,108	---	---
1916	---	---	155,573	---	---
1917	---	---	252,042	---	---
1918	211,805	339,232	198,444	749,481	1,873,037
1919	214,257	382,034	248,188	844,479	2,096,014
1920	164,622	310,341	284,214	759,177	1,961,715
1921	101,274	251,576	124,968	477,818	1,485,110
1922	---	---	148,488	---	---
1923	88,236	290,259	206,852	585,347	1,440,395
1924	---	---	216,424	---	---
1925	146,709	418,482	250,005	815,196	1,792,829
1926	146,393	365,025	263,932	775,350	1,714,477
1927	129,026	413,636	334,978	877,640	1,917,999
1928	155,452	409,661	264,607	829,720	1,806,020
1929	126,062	305,028	228,594	659,684	1,729,821
1930	95,892	194,549	169,512	459,953	1,346,364
1931	55,894	111,014	142,277	309,185	880,054

Sources:

Manitoba: 1918-20, CYB 1921, p. 282; 1921, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1929-31, DBS The Prairie Provinces in their Relation to the National Economy of Canada, p. 23; 1926, 1928, CYB 1931, p. 216.

Saskatchewan: 1918-20, CYB 1921, p. 282; 1921, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1929-31, DBS The Prairie Provinces in their Relation to the National Economy of Canada, p. 23; 1926, 1928, CYB 1931, p. 216.

Alberta: 1906-20, 1922, 1924, 1926, Alta. Agric. Annual Report 1926, p. 114; 1921, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1929-31, DBS The Prairie Provinces in their Relation to the National Economy of Canada, p. 23; 1928, Alta. Agric. Statistics of Progress, p. 41

Section III
Table 1 - cont.

Prairies: totals of the relevant figures.

Canada: 1918-20, CYB 1921, p. 282; 1921, 1923, 1925, 1927, 1929-31, DBS The Prairie Provinces in their Relation to the National Economy of Canada, p. 23; 1926, 1928, CYB 1931, p. 217.

Section III
Table 2

Major Crop Acreage

In thousands of acres.

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Can.
1910	4,422	6,756	1,820	12,998	19,931
1911	4,937	8,552	3,148	16,637	23,784
1912	4,775	10,217	3,387	18,379	25,191
1913	4,759	10,200	3,471	18,430	25,208
1914	4,462	9,123	3,148	16,733	23,510
1915	4,712	12,969	4,335	22,016	29,435
1916	4,905	13,770	5,182	23,857	29,388
1917	4,711	14,312	6,099	25,122	32,090
1918	6,180	15,924	7,183	29,287	37,843
1919	6,007	17,060	7,652	30,719	39,472
1920	5,743	17,018	7,915	30,676	39,524
1921	7,100	21,395	8,861	37,356	46,242
1922	6,450	19,463	8,396	34,309	42,975
1923	6,398	19,395	8,276	34,069	41,981
1924	6,415	20,065	8,671	35,151	42,970
1925	5,554	18,018	7,783	31,355	39,215
1926	5,933	19,197	8,625	33,755	41,733
1927	5,518	19,037	9,082	33,637	41,430
1928	6,267	20,544	9,774	36,585	44,462
1929	6,201	21,893	10,293	38,387	46,054
1930	6,291	22,337	10,369	38,997	46,946
1931	5,427	21,751	11,316	38,494	45,627

Note:

The major crops totalled are wheat, oats, barley, rye, mixed grains and flaxseed.

Sources:

Author's calculations from: DBS _Field Crops_ (1959), p. 1; Alta. Agric. _Alberta Agriculture: A History in Graphs_, p. 4; Man. Agric. _100 Years of Agriculture_, pp. 18, 22, 26, 113; Stats. Can. _Field Crops_ (1975), pp. 20, 28, 36, 40, 48, 58, 61, 69, 76-7, 110, 114; _CYB_ 1914, p. 181; _CYB_ 1915, pp. 146-7, 161-4; _CYB_ 1916-17, pp. 192-3; _CYB_ 1918, pp. 169-70, 175-6; _CYB_ 1921, p. 225; _CYB_ 1922-23, pp. 239, 248-50.

Section III
Table 3

Major Crops Farm Value

In thousands of dollars.

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Can.
1910	41,806	76,512	13,739	132,057	220,732
1911	70,602	110,256	42,429	223,287	332,522
1912	65,473	110,688	38,536	214,697	323,305
1913	59,351	124,317	41,725	225,393	332,792
1914	60,180	107,067	53,743	220,990	351,410
1915	89,367	262,506	89,444	441,317	577,006
1916	72,276	287,415	142,407	502,098	619,465
1917	133,096	335,882	160,893	629,871	830,564
1918	172,705	285,306	100,518	558,529	862,821
1919	168,404	319,274	136,892	624,570	918,774
1920	121,635	254,672	182,048	558,355	820,117
1921	62,551	201,827	61,410	325,788	452,823
1922	90,543	287,529	68,769	446,841	602,052
1923	56,279	251,578	130,050	437,907	576,062
1924	126,032	228,315	106,490	460,837	637,964
1925	82,086	349,410	141,123	572,619	740,943
1926	105,192	303,607	146,562	555,361	719,882
1927	72,863	336,498	222,484	631,845	815,172
1928	102,663	338,494	171,853	613,010	783,224
1929	68,936	225,996	120,675	415,607	589,082
1930	44,410	126,933	81,471	252,814	362,444
1931	20,096	67,533	71,774	159,403	236,858

Note:

The major crops totalled are wheat, oats, barley, rye, mixed grains and flaxseed.

Sources:

Author's calculations from: Alta. Agric. Alberta Agriculture: A History in Graphs, p. 7; DBS Field Crops (1959), pp. 1, 11-12; Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), pp. 28, 36, 40, 48, 52, 58, 61, 69, 76-7, 110, 114; Man. Agric. 100 Years of Agriculture, pp. 22, 26; CYB 1915, pp. 146-7, 161-4; CYB 1918, pp. 169-70, 175-6; CYB 1922-23, pp. 239, 248-50.

Section III
Table 4

Wheat Acreage

In Thousands of Acres

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Can.
1880	51	3	(NWT)	54	2,367
1881	--	-		--	---
1882	--	--		--	---
1883	261	21	(NWT)	282	---
1884	307	28	"	335	---
1885	357	36	"	393	---
1886	384	43	"	427	---
1887	432	53	"	485	---
1888	---	--		---	---
1889	632	90	"	720	---
1890	746	114	"	860	2,701
1891	917	146	"	1,063	---
1892	876	146	"	1,022	---
1893	1,004	174	"	1,178	---
1894	1,010	182	"	1,192	---
1895	1,140	213	"	1,353	---
1896	1,000	194	"	1,194	---
1897	1,291	259	"	1,550	---
1898	1,488	308	"	1,796	---
1899	1,630	328	35	1,993	---
1900	1,457	487	43	1,987	4,225
1901	2,021	470	35	2,517	---
1902	2,040	581	45	2,666	---
1903	2,443	778	63	3,284	---
1904	2,412	910	58	3,380	---
1905	2,644	1,376	148	4,168	---
1906	3,142	2,117	224	5,483	---
1907	2,790	2,048	208	5,046	---
1908	2,957	2,396	271	5,624	6,610
1909	2,808	3,685	385	6,878	7,750
1910	2,759	4,228	880	7,867	8,865
1911	3,095	5,256	1,640	9,991	11,101
1912	2,839	5,582	1,590	10,011	10,997
1913	2,804	5,520	1,512	10,036	11,015
1914	2,616	5,348	1,371	9,335	10,294
1915	2,800	8,929	2,138	13,868	15,109
1916	2,726	9,032	2,605	14,363	15,370
1917	2,449	8,273	2,897	13,619	14,756
1918	2,984	9,249	3,892	16,125	17,354
1919	2,880	10,587	4,283	17,750	19,126

Section 3
Table 4

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Can.
1920	2,706	10,061	4,074	16,841	18,232
1921	3,501	13,557	5,123	22,181	23,261
1922	3,126	12,332	5,766	21,223	22,423
1923	2,916	12,791	5,173	20,880	21,886
1924	2,460	13,033	5,574	21,066	22,056
1925	1,903	12,509	5,348	19,760	20,790
1926	2,086	13,558	6,161	21,805	22,896
1917	2,195	12,979	6,251	21,426	22,460
1928	2,660	13,791	6,708	23,159	24,119
1929	2,301	14,445	7,551	24,297	25,255
1930	2,470	14,326	7,164	24,807	24,898
1931	2,617	15,026	7,942	25,586	26,355

Sources:

Manitoba: 1880, CYB 1914, p. 181; 1883-89, SYB 1898, p. 70; 1890, CYB 1914, p. 181; 1892-98, SYB 1898, p. 70; Man. Agric. Annual Report 1899, p. 324; 1900-07, Man. Agric. 100 Years of Agriculture, p. 18; 1908-09, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 11; 1910, CYB 1914, p. 181; 1911-14, CYB 1915, p. 161; 1915-16, CYB 1916-17, p. 192; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 223; 1922-27, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 19; 1928-30, CYB 1931, 227; 1931, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 19.

Saskatchewan: 1899, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1905; 1900, CYB 1914, p. 181; 1901-04, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1905; 1905-06, CYB 1906, p. 169; 1907, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1925, p. 235; 1908-09, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 12; 1910, CYB 1914, p. 181; 1911-14, CYB 1915, p. 163; 1915-16, CYB 1916-17, p. 192; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 225; 1922-27, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 20; 1928-30, CYB 1931, p. 227; 1931, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 20.

Alberta: 1899, Alta. Agric. Annual Report 1910, p. 71; 1900, CYB 1914, p. 182; 1901-04, Alta. Agric. Annual Report 1910, p. 71; 1905-05, CYB 1906, p. 170; 1907, Alta. Agric. Annual Report 1926, p. 133; 1908-09, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 13; 1910, CYB 1914, p. 182; 1911-14, CYB 1915, p. 165; 1915-16, CYB 1916-17, p. 193; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 227; 1922-27, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 21; 1928-30, CYB 1931, p. 227; 1931, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 21.

North-West Territories: 1880, 1883-97, estimates; 1898, SYB 1899, p. 72.

Prairies: totals of relevant figures.

Section III
Table 4 - cont.

Canada: 1870, 1880, 1890, 1900, CYB 1914, p. 177; 1908-09, Can. Agric. Annual Report 1909-10, p. 50; 1910-14, CYB 1915, p. 146; 1915-16, CYB 1916-17, p. 187; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 214; 1922-30, CYB 1931, p. 218; 1931, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 9.

Section III
Table 5

Wheat Production

In Thousands of Bushels

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Can.
1880	1,034	120 (NWT)		1,154	32,350
1881	---	---		---	38,000
1882	---	---		---	47,752
1883	5,686	---		---	30,841
1884	6,174	---		---	45,363
1885	7,429	---		---	42,736
1886	5,893	---		---	38,225
1887	12,352	---		---	38,954
1888	---	---		---	32,965
1889	7,202	---		---	30,792
1890	14,666	1,792 (NWT)		16,458	42,223
1891	23,192	---		---	60,721
1892	14,454	---		---	48,182
1893	15,616	---		---	41,347
1894	17,173	---		---	43,221
1895	31,775	---		---	55,703
1896	14,372	---		---	39,570
1897	18,262	---		---	54,418
1898	25,314	4,780	792	30,886	66,495
1899	27,922	6,084	833	34,839	59,912
1900	13,025	4,307	797	18,129	55,572
1901	50,502	11,956	858	63,316	60,721
1902	53,007	13,110	850	66,967	97,073
1903	40,117	15,121	1,201	56,439	81,888
1904	39,162	15,945	938	56,045	71,828
1905	55,761	31,799	3,036	90,596	107,033
1906	61,250	50,182	5,932	117,364	135,602
1907	39,688	27,691	4,195	71,574	93,131
1908	50,269	34,742	6,842	91,853	112,434
1909	52,706	85,197	9.579	147,482	166,744
1910	34,127	66,979	9,060	110,167	132,078
1911	62,820	109,323	36,554	208,697	231,237
1912	63,017	106,960	34,303	204,280	224,159
1913	53,331	121,559	34,372	209,262	231,717
1914	38,605	73,494	28,859	140,958	161,280
1915	69,337	224,313	66,538	360,187	393,543
1916	29,667	147,559	65,088	242,314	262,781

Section III
Table 5

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Can.
1917	41,040	117,921	52,992	211,953	233,743
1918	48,191	92,493	23,752	164,436	189,075
1919	40,975	89,994	34,575	165,544	193,260
1920	37,542	113,135	83,461	234,138	226,508
1921	39,054	188,000	53,044	280,098	300,858
1922	60,051	250,167	64,976	373,194	399,786
1923	35,804	271,622	144,834	452,260	474,199
1924	41,464	132,918	61,312	235,694	262,097
1925	33,624	235,472	97,962	367,058	395,475
1926	47,133	219,646	113,986	380,765	407,136
1927	30,773	252,500	171,286	454,559	479,665
1928	52,383	321,215	171,000	544,598	566,726
1929	28,565	160,565	90,206	281,664	304,520
1930	43,600	206,700	147,000	397,300	420,672
1931	28,112	132,466	140,603	301,181	321,325

Sources:

Manitoba: 1880, CYB 1914, p. 181; 1883-89, SYC 1898, p. 70; 1890, Man. Agric. 100 years of Agriculture, p. 18; 1891, SYC 1898, p. 70; 1892-98, SYC 1898, p. 70; 1899, Man. Agric. Annual Report 1899, p. 324; 1900-07, Man. Agric. 100 Years of Agriculture, p. 18; 1908-11, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 11; 1912-14, CYB 1915, p. 161; 1915-16, CYB 1916-17, p. 192; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 223; 1922-27, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 19; 1928-29, CYB 1931, p. 227; 1930-31, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 19.

Saskatchewan: 1898-1904, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1905; 1905-06, CYB 1906, p. 169; 1907, Sask. Agric. Annual Report 1925, p. 235; 1908-11, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 12; 1912-14, CYB 1915, p. 163; 1915-16, CYB 1916-17, p. 192; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 225; 1922-27, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 20; 1928-9, CYB 1931, p. 227; 1930-31, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 20.

Alberta: 1898, Alta. Agric. Annual Report 1906, p. 12; 1899, Alta. Agric. Annual Report 1910, p. 71; 1900, CYB 1914, p. 182; 1901-04, Alta. Agric. Annual Report 1910, p. 71; 1905-06, CYB 1906, p. 170; 1907, Alta. Agric. Annual Report 1926, p. 133; 1908-11, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 13; 1912-14, CYB 1915, p. 165; 1915-16, CYB 1916-17, p. 193; 1917-21, CYB 1921, p. 227; 1922-31, Stats. Can. Field Crops (1975), p. 21.

North-West Terrtories: 1880, 1890, CYB 1905, p. 80.

Prairies: totals of the relevant figures.

Section III
Table 5 - cont.

Canada: 1868-1931, Canada. Royal Grain Inquiry Commission. Report of the Royal Grain Inquiry Commission, p. 24.

Section III
Table 6

Wheat Farm Value

In Thousands of Dollars.

	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies	Can.
1908	41,924	25,883	4,617	72,424	91,228
1909	45,854	68,669	7,037	121,560	141,320
1910	28,584	50,213	6,676	85,474	104,817
1911	42,089	63,407	22,516	128,012	148,318
1912	42,221	59,910	18,459	120,590	139,090
1913	37,858	77,805	21,009	136,672	156,462
1914	38,963	70,556	26,403	135,922	158,236
1915	62,663	203,888	58,326	324,876	356,817
1916	36,501	188,918	86,600	312,018	344,096
1917	84,144	229,967	91,941	406,052	453,039
1918	99,274	184,061	45,604	328,939	381,678
1919	98,341	208,787	79,945	387,073	457,722
1920	68,769	175,360	126,861	370,990	427,357
1921	35,539	142,880	40,756	219,175	242,936
1922	49,842	212,642	50,031	312,515	339,419
1923	23,989	176,554	94,143	294,686	316,995
1924	51,415	160,831	73,575	285,821	320,362
1925	40,940	294,281	116,735	451,959	487,736
1926	51,375	237,218	119,686	408,279	442,221
1927	32,619	244,925	168,003	445,547	477,791
1928	48,192	247,336	128,511	424,039	451,235
1929	30,279	165,382	92,010	287,671	317,340
1930	23,980	97,149	66,150	187,279	204,693
1931	11,526	50,337	50,617	112,480	123,550

Sources:

Manitoba: 1908-31, DBS _Field Crops_ (1959), p. 11.

Saskatchewan: 1908-31, DBS _Field Crops_ (1959), p. 12.

Alberta: 1908-31, DBS _Field Crops_ (1959), p. 13.

Prairies: 1908-31, DBS _Field Crops_ (1959), p. 14.

Canada: 1908-31, DBS _Field Crops_ (1959), p. 1.

Section III
Table 7

Wheat yields

In bushels per acre

	Can.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies
1870	10.2				
. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .
1880	13.7	20.3			
. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .	. . . .
1883	----	----	21.8	----	----
1884	----	----	20.1	----	----
1885	----	----	20.8	----	----
1886	----	----	15.4	----	----
1887	----	----	28.6	----	----
1888	----	----	----	----	----
1889	----	----	11.4	----	----
1890	15.6	19.7	----	----	----
1891	----	----	25.3	----	----
1892	----	----	16.5	----	----
1893	----	15.6	----	----	----
1894	----	17.0	----	----	----
1895	----	27.9	----	----	----
1896	----	14.4	----	----	----
1897	----	14.2	----	----	----
1898	----	17.0	6.2	25.6	----
1899	----	17.1	18.6	23.8	----
1900	13.2	8.9	8.8	18.5	----
1901	----	25.0	25.4	24.5	----
1902	----	26.0	22.7	18.9	----
1903	----	16.4	19.4	19.1	----
1904	----	16.2	17.5	16.2	----
1905	----	21.1	23.1	20.5	----
1906	----	19.5	23.7	26.5	20.4
1907	----	14.2	13.5	20.2	14.1
1908	17.0	17.0	14.5	25.2	16.3
1909	21.5	18.8	23.1	24.9	21.4
1910	14.9	12.4	15.8	10.3	14.0
1911	20.8	20.3	20.8	22.3	20.9
1912	20.4	22.2	19.2	21.6	20.4
1913	21.0	19.0	21.3	22.7	20.9
1914	15.7	14.8	13.7	21.0	15.1
1915	26.0	24.8	25.1	31.1	26.0
1916	17.1	10.9	16.3	25.0	16.9
1917	15.8	16.8	14.3	18.[illegible]	15.6

Section III
Table 7

	Can.	Man.	Sask.	Alta.	Prairies
1918	10.9	16.2	10.0	6.1	10.2
1919	10.1	14.2	8.5	8.1	9.3
1920	14.4	13.9	11.2	20.5	13.9
1921	12.9	11.2	13.9	10.4	12.6
1922	17.8	19.2	20.3	11.3	17.7
1923	21.7	12.3	21.3	28.0	21.7
1924	11.9	16.9	10.2	11.0	11.2
1925	19.0	17.7	18.8	18.3	18.6
1926	17.8	22.6	16.2	18.5	17.5
1927	21.4	14.0	19.5	27.4	21.2
1928	23.5	19.7	23.3	25.5	23.5
1929	12.0	12.4	11.1	12.1	11.5
1930	16.9	17.7	14.4	20.5	16.6
1931	12.2	10.7	8.8	17.7	11.8

Sources:

Canada: 1908-31, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 1; all other figures calculated from the relevant tables in this dissertation.

Manitoba: 1908-31, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 11; all other figures calculated from the relevant tables in this dissertation.

Saskatchewan: 1908-31, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 12; all other figures calculated from the relevant tables in this dissertation.

Alberta: 1908-31, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 13; all other figures calculated from the relevant tables in this dissertation.

Prairies: 1906-07, Canada. Royal Grain Inquiry Commission. Report of the Royal Grain Inquiry Commission, p. 20; 1908-31, DBS Field Crops (1959), p. 14; all other figures calculated from relevant tables in this dissertation.

Section III
Table 8

Wheat Prices and Quality

A. Wheat Prices

Column 1 - Average price of No. 1 Northern wheat at the Lakehead.
Column 2 - Average Canadian wheat export price
Column 3 - Yearly average London wheat price
Column 4 - Average New York export wheat price

In Cents per bushel

	1	2	3	4
1871	---	---	173	131
1872	---	---	173	147
1873	---	---	178	131
1874	---	---	170	142
1875	---	---	137	112
1876	---	---	140	124
1877	---	---	173	116
1878	---	---	141	133
1879	---	---	133	106
1880	---	---	135	124
1881	---	---	128	111
1882	---	---	137	118
1883	---	102	126	113
1884	---	109	109	107
1885	---	84	99	86
1886	---	88	94	87
1887	---	84	99	89
1888	---	87	96	85
1889	---	96	90	89
1890	90.4	92	97	83
1891	87.0	75	126	93
1892	74.9	80	92	103
1893	65.6	76	80	80
1894	71.0	66	68.5	67
1895	61.1	61	69.25	67.333
1896	72.6	58	80	--
1897	98.9	71	92	--
1898	72.4	91	103	--
1899	69.8	--	78	--
1900	79.5	--	82	--
1901	72.7	--	81	--

Section III
Table 8 - cont.

	1	2	3	4
1902	74.9	--	85	--
1903	86.2	--	81	--
1904	97.4	--	86	--
1905	77.5	--	90	--
1906	79.5	--	86	--
1907	104.7	--	93	--
1908	116.1	--	97	--
1909	102.4	--	82	--
1910	96.6	--	96	--
1911	100.8	--	96	--
1912	89.4	--	106	--
1913	89.4	--	96	--
1914	132.4	--	106	--
1915	113.3	--	161	--
1916	205.6	--	--	--
1917	221.0	--	--	--
1918	224.1	--	--	--
1919	217.5	--	--	--
1920	199.3	--	--	--
1921	129.7	--	--	--
1922	110.5	--	--	--
1923	107.1	--	--	--
1924	169.0	--	--	--
1925	151.2	--	--	--
1926	146.3	--	--	--
1927	146.3	--	--	--
1928	124.0	--	--	--
1929	124.0	--	--	--
1930	64.2	--	--	--
1931	59.8	--	--	--

Notes:

The Lakehead prices are based on harvest, not crop or fiscal year. For instance, the 1890 figure covers the harvest of the fall of 1890, but was actually calculated on a crop year that ended Aug. 31, 1891. From 1890 to 1923, the calculation is made on the basis of the crop year ending August 31 the following calendar year; from 1924 to 1931, it is on the basis of the crop year ending July 31.

Section III
Table 8 - cont.

Sources:

Lakehead prices: 1890-1931, Canada. Royal Grain Inquiry Commission. Report of the Royal Grain Inquiry Commission, p. 23.

Average Canadian export prices: 1883-95, SYC 1895, p. 559; export, 1896-98, SYC 1898, p. 269.

London prices: 1871-95, SYC 1895, p. 325; 1896-1915, CYB 1915, p. 200.

New York export prices: 1871-95, SYC 1895, p. 325.

B. Wheat Quality

Percentage of wheat graded No. 3 Northern or better.

1900	55	1916	48
1901	93	1917	84
1902	94	1918	74
1903	78	1919	74
1904	66	1920	86
1905	82	1921	75
1906	78	1922	92
1907	51	1923	86
1908	71	1924	56
1909	88	1925	63
1910	78	1926	35
1911	39	1927	31
1912	69	1928	33
1913	90	1929	87
1914	75	1930	67
1915	80	1931	81

Source:

W.A. Mackintosh. Ecomonic Problems of the Prairie Provinces. Canadian Frontiers of Settlement, Vol. IV, W.A. Mackintosh and W.L.G. Joerg, eds. Toronto: Macmillan, 1935, p. 26.

Section III
Table 11

Wheat Exports

Column 1 - Wheat exports, in thousands of bushels
Column 2 - Wheat flour exports, in thousands of barrels
Column 3 - Wheat and wheat flour exports combined, in thousands of bushels, with flour converted at the rate of 4.5 bushels to the barrel of 196 pounds.
Column 4 - Total wheat and wheat flour exports as a percentage of total wheat production.

	1	2	3	4
1868	2,809	375	4,498	20.30
1869	3,557	382	5,277	23.37
1870	1,749	306	3,128	18.70
1871	2,993	453	5,032	21.74
1872	4,380	474	6,514	27.33
1873	6,581	540	9,013	37.27
1874	4,383	303	5,746	24.09
1875	6,070	416	7,940	30.43
1876	2,393	269	3,602	15.94
1877	4,394	476	6,537	25.24
1878	6,611	575	9,198	30.30
1879	5,091	545	7,541	22.00
1880	2,524	440	4,502	13.92
1881	3,845	470	5,959	15.68
1882	5,867	489	8,068	16.90
1883	746	197	1,634	5.30
1884	2,341	123	2,898	6.39
1885	3,419	386	5,157	12.07
1886	5,632	520	7,973	20.86
1887	2,164	350	3,739	9.60
1888	491	131	1,081	3.28
1889	422	115	940	3.05
1890	2,108	297	3,444	8.16
1891	8,714	381	10,429	17.18
1892	9,272	410	11,118	23.08
1893	9,272	429	11,201	27.09
1894	8,826	223	9,829	22.74
1895	9,920	187	10,760	19.32
1896	7,855	422	9,753	24.65
1897	18,963	1,249	24,586	45.18
1898	10,305	793	13,872	20.86
1899	16,845	768	20,301	33.88
1900	9,740	1,119	14,774	26.59
1901	26,118	1,087	31,007	51.06

Section III
Table 11 - cont.

	1	2	3	4
1902	32,986	1,288	38,781	39.95
1903	16,779	1,588	23,923	29.21
1904	14,700	1,321	20,647	28.75
1905	40,399	1,532	47,293	44.19
1906	39,435	1,562	46,466	34.27
1907	40,078	1,668	47,584	51.09
1908	47,696	2,008	56,734	50.46
1909	52,624	3,374	67,808	40.67
1910	48,443	3,101	62,398	47.24
1911	78,787	4,181	97,601	42.21
1912	95,511	4,496	115,744	51.63
1913	114,902	4,597	135,587	58.51
1914	63,902	5,077	86,750	53.79
1915	235,739	7,426	269,158	68.39
1916	140,224	7,631	174,565	66.43
1917	118,580	11,258	169,240	72.40
1918	55,921	9,120	96,960	51.28
1919	63,450	6,455	92,500	47.86
1920	136,969	6,721	167,215	73.82
1921	150,935	7,741	185,770	61.75
1922	229,840	11,003	279,365	69.88
1923	292,425	12,021	346,522	73.08
1924	146,958	10,170	192,722	73.53
1925	275,557	10,897	324,592	82.07
1926	251,266	9,248	292,881	71.94
1927	288,567	9,866	332,963	69.42
1928	354,425	11,809	407,504	71.90
1929	155,766	6,778	186,207	61.15
1930	228,536	6,702	258,694	61.50
1931	182,803	5,384	207,030	64.43

Notes:

These figures are all listed in terms of harvest, not crop or fiscal year. That is, a figure here for any given year will appear in the yearbooks for the fiscal year ending the next calendar year. In compiling the figures in this manner, the commission from whose work the numbers are taken made a direct comparison between each harvest and the amount of that harvest exported. There are some minor discrepancies between the commission's figures and those of the yearbooks.

Canada began to become a net wheat exporting nation in 1879. From 1868 to 1878, wheat and wheat flour imports were consistently between five and ten million bushels, but in 1879 they dropped to less than half a million. Except for 1883, 1888, and 1889, they never again exceeded exports.

Sources:

All figures from: Canada. Royal Grain Inquiry Commission. Report of the Royal Grain Inquiry Commission. The percentages are calculated from figures in Column 3 of this table and figures in Table III-5, Wheat Production.

Section III
Table 10

Canadian Exports

Column 1 - Total Canadian domestic produce exports.
Column 2 - Total Canadian agricultural exports, domestic produce.
Column 3 - Wheat exports, domestic produce.
Column 4 - Wheat flour exports, domestic produce.

In Thousands of dollars.

	1	2	3	4
1867	45,543	12,871	3,648	---
1868	49,323	12,183	3,183	---
1869	56,081	13,677	3,705	---
1870	55,181	9,854	1,982	---
1871	62,944	13,379	3,901	---
1872	73,246	14,995	6,024	---
1873	73,927	19,590	8,886	---
1874	67,491	17,258	4,960	---
1875	69,862	21,140	6,749	---
1876	65,865	14,689	2,742	---
1877	65,740	18,009	5,376	---
1878	60,090	19,628	6,275	---
1879	70,096	22,294	5,942	---
1880	80,921	21,268	2,594	---
1881	90,043	31,036	5,180	---
1882	84,286	22,819	5,881	---
1883	77,132	12,398	813	---
1884	76,184	14,518	1,966	---
1885	74,976	17,653	3,026	---
1886	77,964	18,826	4,745	---
1887	78,278	15,436	1,886	---
1888	77,202	13,414	471	---
1889	82,336	11,908	389	---
1890	85,758	13,667	1,583	---
1891	95,684	22,113	6,948	---
1892	102,006	22,049	7,060	---
1893	100,587	17,678	6,133	---
1894	99,528	15,719	5,359	---
1895	106,379	14,083	5,772	---
1896	119,685	17,983	5,544	---
1897	139,921	33,063	17,314	---
1898	132,801	22,953	---	---
1899	163,511	27,517	---	---
1900	177,431	24,781	6,872	4,015
1901	196,020	37,153	18,688	3,969

Section III
Table 12 - cont.

	1	2	3	4
1902	214,402	44,624	24,567	4,699
1903	198,414	37,139	13,465	6,129
1904	190,855	29,994	12,387	5,878
1905	235,484	54,062	33,658	6,180
1906	180,545	35,857	20,380	4,095
1907	246,961	66,070	40,005	8,455
1908	242,604	71,997	48,148	7,991
1919	279,248	90,434	52,609	14,860
1910	274,317	82,601	45,521	13,855
1911	290,224	107,143	62,591	16,034
1912	355,755	150,146	88,609	19,970
1913	431,588	198,220	117,719	20,581
1914	409,419	134,746	74,294	24,611
1915	741,611	249,661	172,896	35,767
1916	1,151,376	373,414	244,395	47,473
1917	1,540,028	567,714	366,342	95,896
1918	1,216,444	288,893	96,986	99,932
1919	1,239,492	416,123	185,045	94,263
1920	1,189,164	482,925	310,952	66,520
1921	740,241	317,814	179,991	53,478
1922	931,451	407,760	252,146	60,075
1923	1,045,351	391,000	267,759	62,783
1924	1,069,067	398,981	251,666	70,639
1925	1,315,356	539,220	364,364	69,688
1926	1,252,158	505,502	353,095	68,720
1927	1,228,349	555,111	352,117	59,879
1928	1,363,710	646,514	428,524	65,118
1929	1,120,258	384,636	215,753	45,457
1930	799,743	243,509	177,420	32,876
1931	576,344	174,768	115,739	18,898

Notes:

The yearbooks list these figures as representing totals at the end of fiscal years. In this table, all the figures have been moved back one year to facilitate comparisons to actual harvests. That is, for instance, the harvest here represented by the 1868 figure would have taken place in 1868, but it is recorded in the yearbook for 1869. In 1907, the fiscal year end changed from June 30 to March 31, which will artificially lower the figure for 1906.

Section III
Table 10 - cont.

Sources:

Total exports: 1867-1904, *CYB* 1905, p. 155; 1905, *CYB* 1906, p. 181; 1906-09, *CYB* 1911, p. 49; 1910-16, *CYB* 1916-17, p. 301; 1917-21, *CYB* 1921, p. 402; 1922-29, *CYB* 1931, p. 517; 1930-31, *CYB* 1934-35, p. 554.

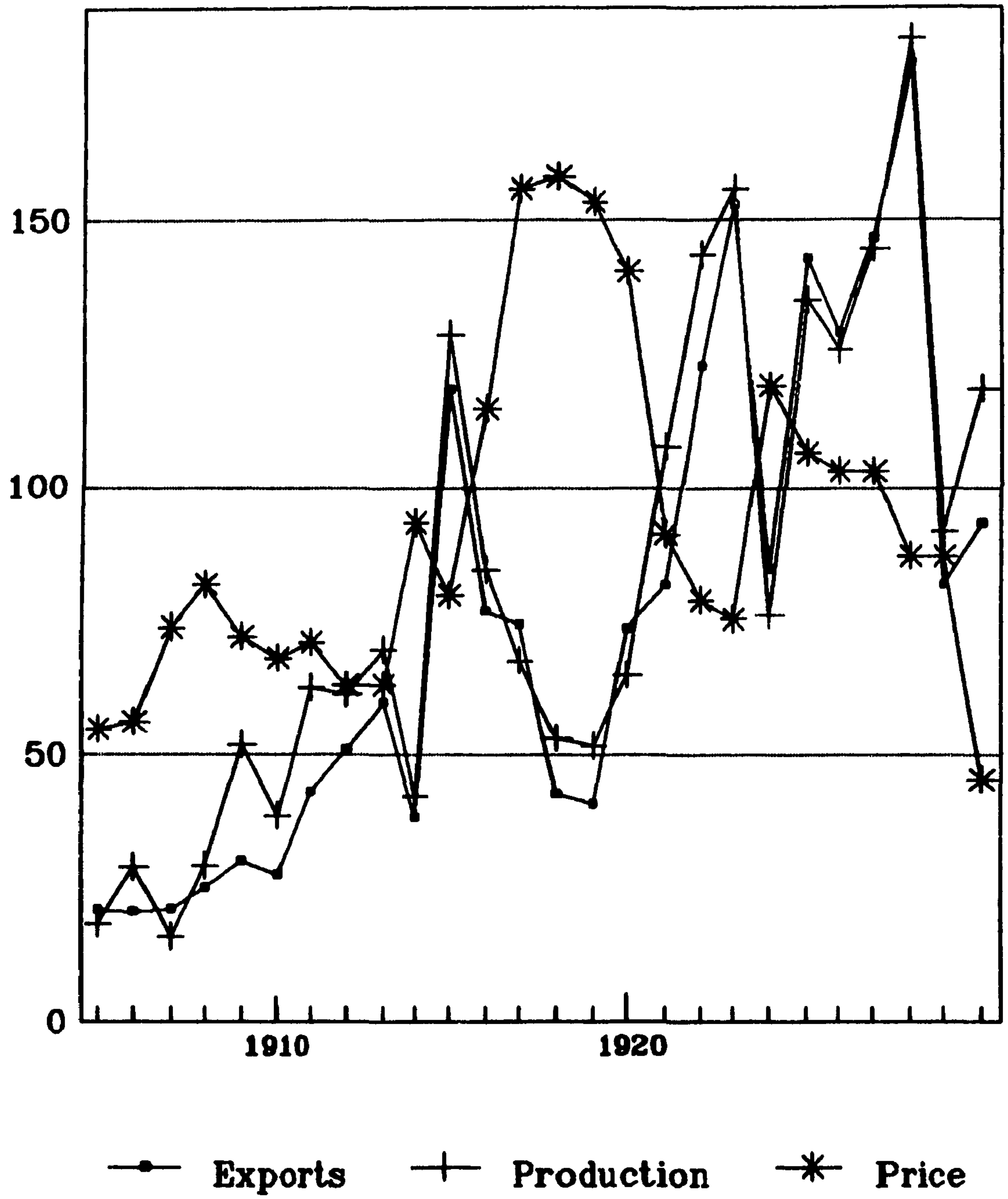
Agricultural exports: 1867-1904, *CYB* 1905, p. 148; 1905, *CYB* 1906, p. 174; 1906-1910, *CYB* 1911, p. 42; 1911-1916, *CYB* 1916-17, p. 303; 1917, *CYB* 1919, p. 303; 1918-21, *CYB* 1921, p. 412-3; 1922, *CYB* 1924, p. 460; 1923-26, *CYB* 1927-28, p. 507; 1927-29, *CYB* 1932, p. 429; 1930-31, *CYB* 1934-35, p. 565.

Wheat exports: 1867-1897, *SYC* 1898, pp. 75, 77; 1900, *CYB* 1905, p. 161; 1901-05, *CYB* 1906, p. 223; 1906-10, *CYB* 1911, p. 101; 1911, *CYB* 1915, p. 301; 1912-15, *CYB* 1916-17, pp. 308-9; 1916-17, *CYB* 1919, p. 303; 1918-21, *CYB* 1921, pp. 410-11; 1922, *CYB* 1924, p. 463; 1923-26, *CYB* 1927-28, p. 505; 1927-29, *CYB* 1932, p. 427; 1930-31, *CYB* 1934-35, p. 565.

Wheat flour exports: 1900, *CYB* 1905, p. 161; 1901-05, *CYB* 1906, p. 235; 1906-10, *CYB* 1911, p. 101; 1911, *CYB* 1915, p. 303; 1912-15, *CYB* 1916-17, pp. 308-9; 1916-17, *CYB* 1919, p. 303; 1918-21, *CYB* 1921, pp. 410-11; 1922, *CYB* 1924, p. 464; 1923-26, *CYB* 1927-28, p. 505; 1927-30, *CYB* 1932, p. 427; 1930-31, *CYB* 1934-35, p. 565.

Graph III-1

Wheat, 1905 to 1930



See following page

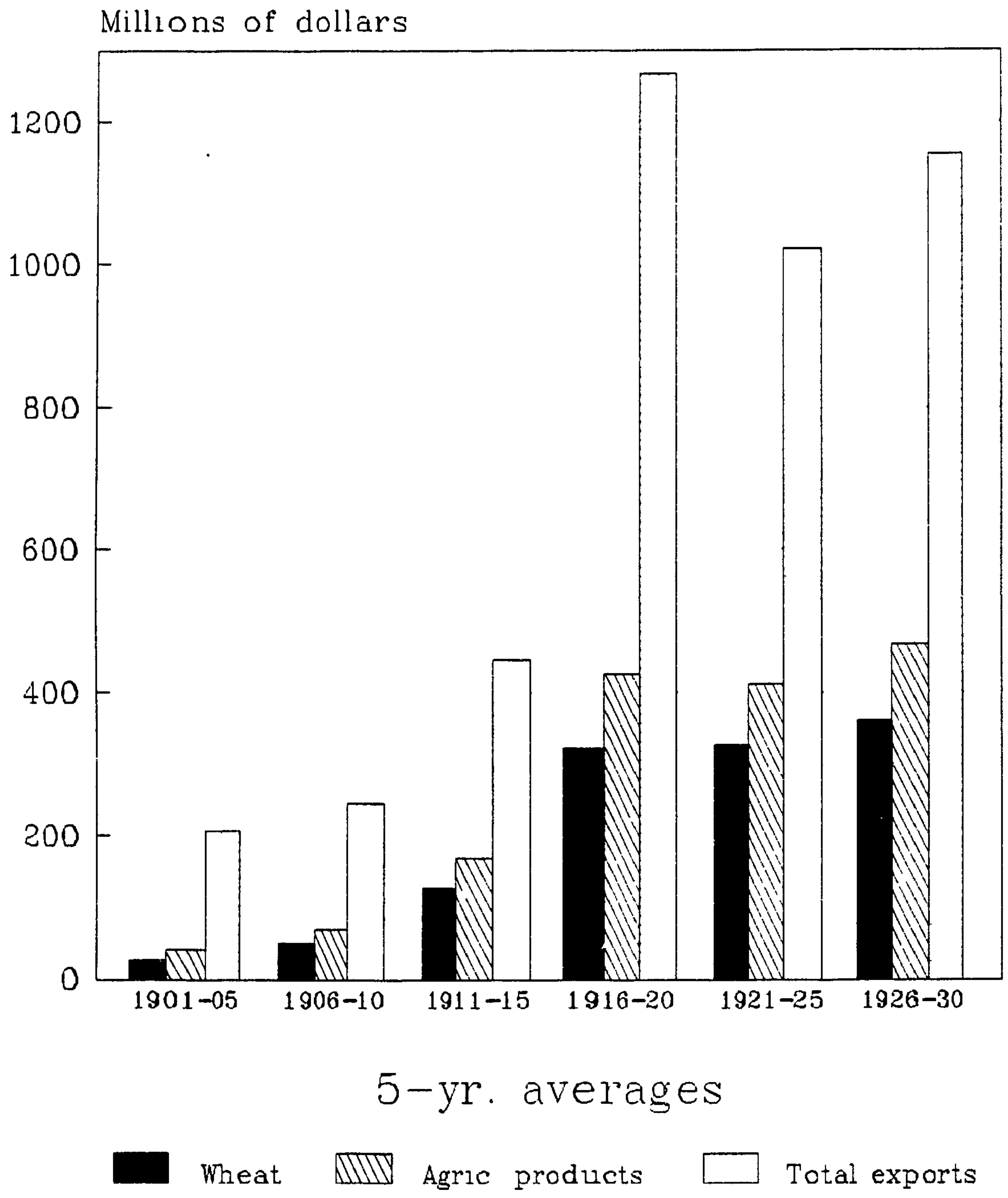
Note to Graph III-1

The graph on the preceeding page is a comparison of wheat production/exports with the wheat price realized at the Lakehead. To facilitate comparison, each variable, wheat production, wheat exports and wheat price, is calculated against the mean values for each variable during the period 1905-1930. That is that, for instance, the mean Lakehead wheat price for the period 1905-1930 has been calculated and each individual price for specific years is rendered here as a percentage of that mean. The figures are taken from Tables III-5, III-10 and III-11 of this dissertation.

What the graph clearly shows is that, compared against their own means, wheat exports and wheat production followed each other closely in their increase/decrease. But the increase/decrease in wheat prices bears a strongly inverse relationship to wheat exports/production. That is, when production and exports tended to increase, prices tended to fall, and vice versa.

Graph III-2

Export Values



From Table III-12

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