

SOLDIERS OF THE PLOUGH
POPULAR PROTEST AND INSURGENCY
IN ALBERTA AND SASKATCHEWAN, 1918-1948

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August, 1983

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

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1983

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study in popular culture and mass protest in Saskatchewan and Alberta from the Great War to 1948. It is an investigation of the impact of industrialization upon the economic and cultural traditions of the agrarian frontier. The modernization of agriculture, like the capitalization of industry, created dislocations and conflicts on an unprecedented scale. It stimulated tensions between regions, exacerbated the rivalries between town and country and divided the farmers against themselves. It is this latter conflict which forms the basis of the present study, for it was largely in the inner-class dissensions spawned by the industrialization process that agrarian dissent found its form and character. Progressive farmers, who sought to rationalize their businesses and employ modern production techniques, were starkly divided from their generally poorer, non-competitive brethren. These differences were mirrored in the types of interests which the various segments of the population advanced and in the divergent ambitions which they embraced. Their rivalries were more than simply the struggles between different interest groups, they symbolized a vital contest between cultures.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce mémoire se veut une étude de la culture populaire et des protestations collectives en le Saskatchewan et en l'Alberta depuis la première guerre mondiale jusqu'à l'année mil neuf cent quarante-huit. Il constitue une recherche de l'impact de l'industrialisation sur les traditions économiques et culturelles du territoire de colonisation. La modernisation de l'agriculture, tout comme la capitalisation de l'industrie, a donné naissance à des bouleversements et des conflits d'une amplitude sans précédent. Celle-ci a provoqué des tensions entre les régions, avivé des rivalités entre ville et campagne et divisé les agriculteurs. C'est sur ce dernier conflit que se fonde la présente étude, puisque c'est dans les dissensions au sein des classes engendrées en grande partie par l'industrialisation que le désaccord de la classe agricole a trouvé sa forme et son caractère. Les agriculteurs progressistes, qui ont cherché à rationaliser leur entreprise et à utiliser des techniques modernes de production, étaient nettement séparés de leurs confrères, généralement plus pauvres et non-concurrentiels. Ces différences se sont reflété par les types d'intérêts que les différents segments de la population ont mis de l'avant et dans les ambitions divergentes qu'ils ont épousées. Leurs rivalités étaient plus que de simples luttes de différents groupes d'intérêts de la classe agricole, ils ont symbolisé une lutte vitale entre les cultures.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

No student can ever adequately discharge the debts of gratitude and esteem to individuals who have contributed in one way or another to his understanding. In completing this work, however, I have found that my intellectual obligations are even more than usually explicit and ramifying. Primarily, I must record my exceptional debt to Professor John Herd Thompson, to whom I owe my introduction to the study of Canadian agriculture. His patience, friendship and understanding has greatly enriched my intellectual life. I am also deeply grateful to Professor Carman Miller and to my comrades in study at McGill, who followed me patiently along obtuse paths of reasoning and suggested new formulations and unexpected lines of investigation.

Special thanks must be accorded all those who admitted me into their confidences and shared their memories of agrarian protest. For Elsie Hart, Carl Stimpfle, Bob Boutilier, Harold Appleby and the late Joseph Lee Phelps, all of whom spent long hours of wintry nights recalling and reconstructing events more than thirty years past, I can only hope that this account represents some measure of thanks. I further wish to acknowledge the contributions of Mrs. A. Hadland, Mrs. W. Tuomi, Mrs. L. Morris, K. Ernie Dalskog, Ivor Mills, Sam Carr and John Weir, who each offered me

their insights into the strange history of the Farmers' Unity League, and the even more perplexing career of its chief propagandist, J.M. Clarke. I am especially indebted to Walter Wiggins' daughter, Cathy Fischer, for providing me with a copy of her late father's as yet unpublished memoirs. Furthermore, through the generosity of G. Van Houten of the Communist Party of Canada, I was not only granted access to the Party papers recently deposited in the Public Archives of Canada, but was also offered every help and encouragement which this invaluable source could provide. To Captain P.E.J. Banning of the R.C.M.P. who is still attempting to free certain requested documents from the grasping claws of the Ministry of the Solicitor General, I offer my thanks and sympathies.

Appreciation is also due to the skillful and energetic staffs of the various archives visited, and particularly to Willa Webb at the Unifarm Office and Lloyd Rodwell of the Saskatchewan Archives Board, who each made my visits to their respective institutions especially pleasant and rewarding. I am also incumbent upon the Social Science Research Council and the McConnell Foundation for making my research possible.

Final thanks are for my parents, who allowed their home to be transformed into a storage house for rural dissent, and to Jan Kennedy who not only bore the brunt of preparing the typescript, but who also patiently and cheerfully endured a year of obsessive research. Yours shall be the heaviest and happiest of obligations to discharge.

A NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS AND FOOTNOTES

The Communist Party of Canada Papers in the Public Archives of Canada and the J.P. Brady Papers in the Glenbow Institute were studied before the Archival staffs had completed organizing the files. References to documents in these two collections should thus be regarded as temporary. All documents cited as UC, refer to the Uniform Collection in Edmonton. This is an unorganized scrapbook on the AFU strike of 1946 that was prepared by Louise O'Neill, the Publicity Director for the Livestock Co-operative. It has been supplemented by a mass of loose papers and clippings which are in no particular order. Due to the nature of the collection no specific footnote references could be given.

Abbreviations employed throughout the text are as follows:

- AFA - The Alberta Federation of Agriculture
- AFU - The Alberta Farmers' Union
- CCA - The Canadian Council or Chamber of Agriculture
- CFA - The Canadian Federation of Agriculture
- CEC - The Central Executive Committee (of the CPC)
- CPC - The Communist Party of Canada
- FEL (PFEL) - The (Progressive) Farmers' Educational League
- FUC - The Farmers' Union of Canada
- FUL - The Farmers' Unity League
- IFU - The Industrial Farmers' Union
- SFA - The Saskatchewan Federation of Agriculture
- SGGA - The Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association

UFA - The United Farmers of Alberta

UFC (AS) - The United Farmers of Canada (Alberta Section)

UFC (SS) - The United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section)

UFM - The United Farmers of Manitoba

The following abbreviations are employed with reference to archival collections:

GIA - The Glenbow Institute of Alberta

PAA - The Provincial Archives of Alberta

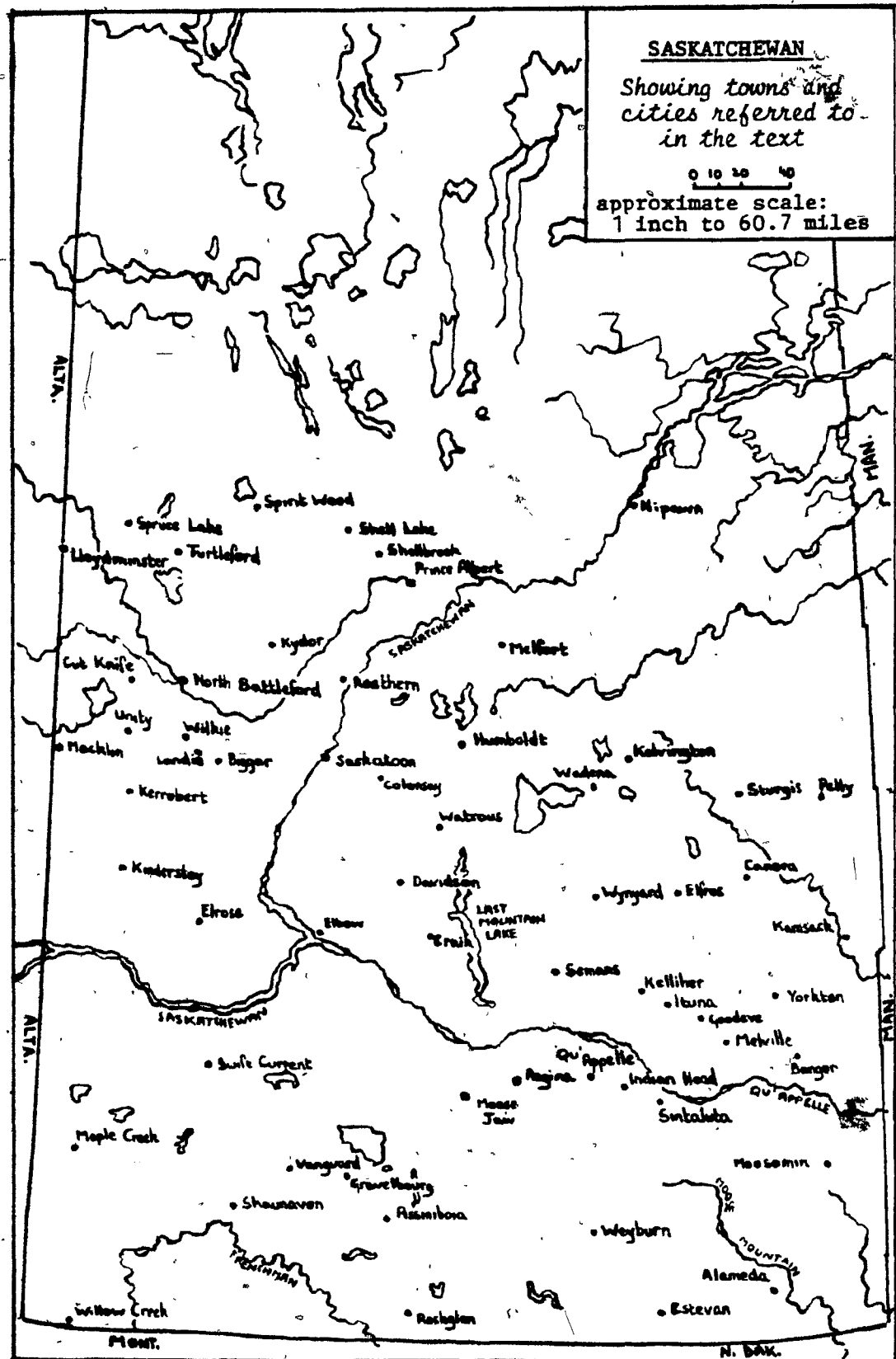
PAC - The Public Archives of Canada

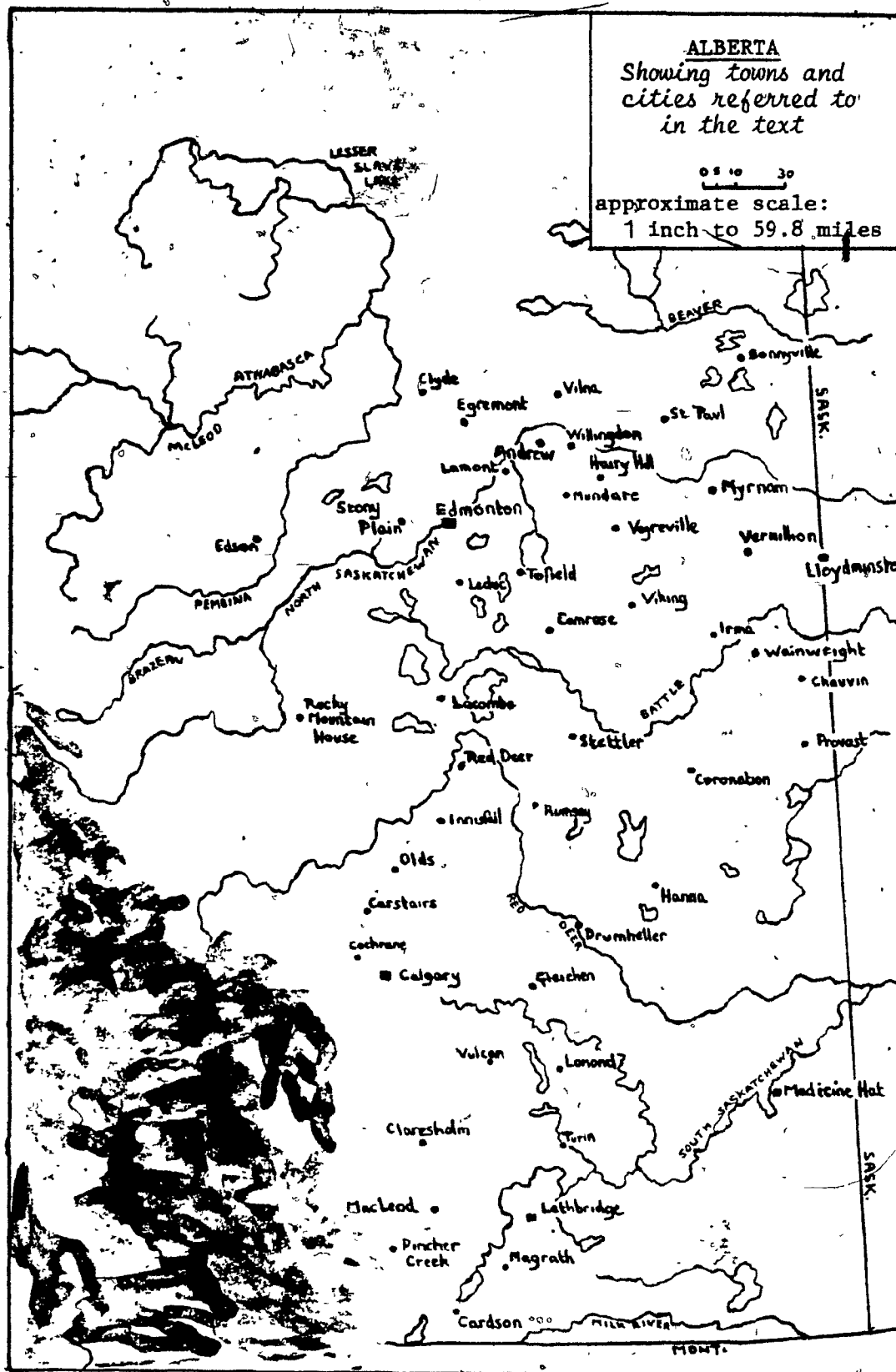
PAO - The Public Archives of Ontario

QUA - The Queens University Archives

SAB - The Saskatchewan Archives Board (Saskatoon)

UTL - The University of Toronto Library Archives





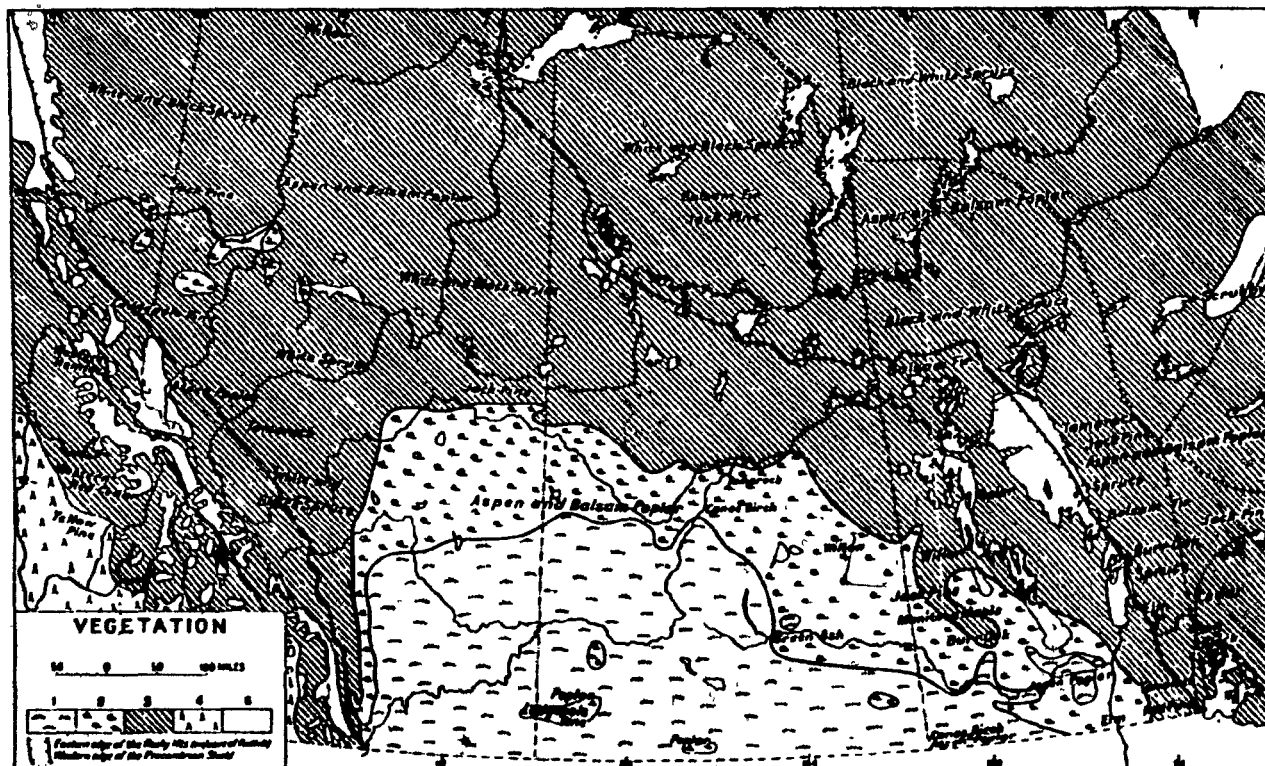
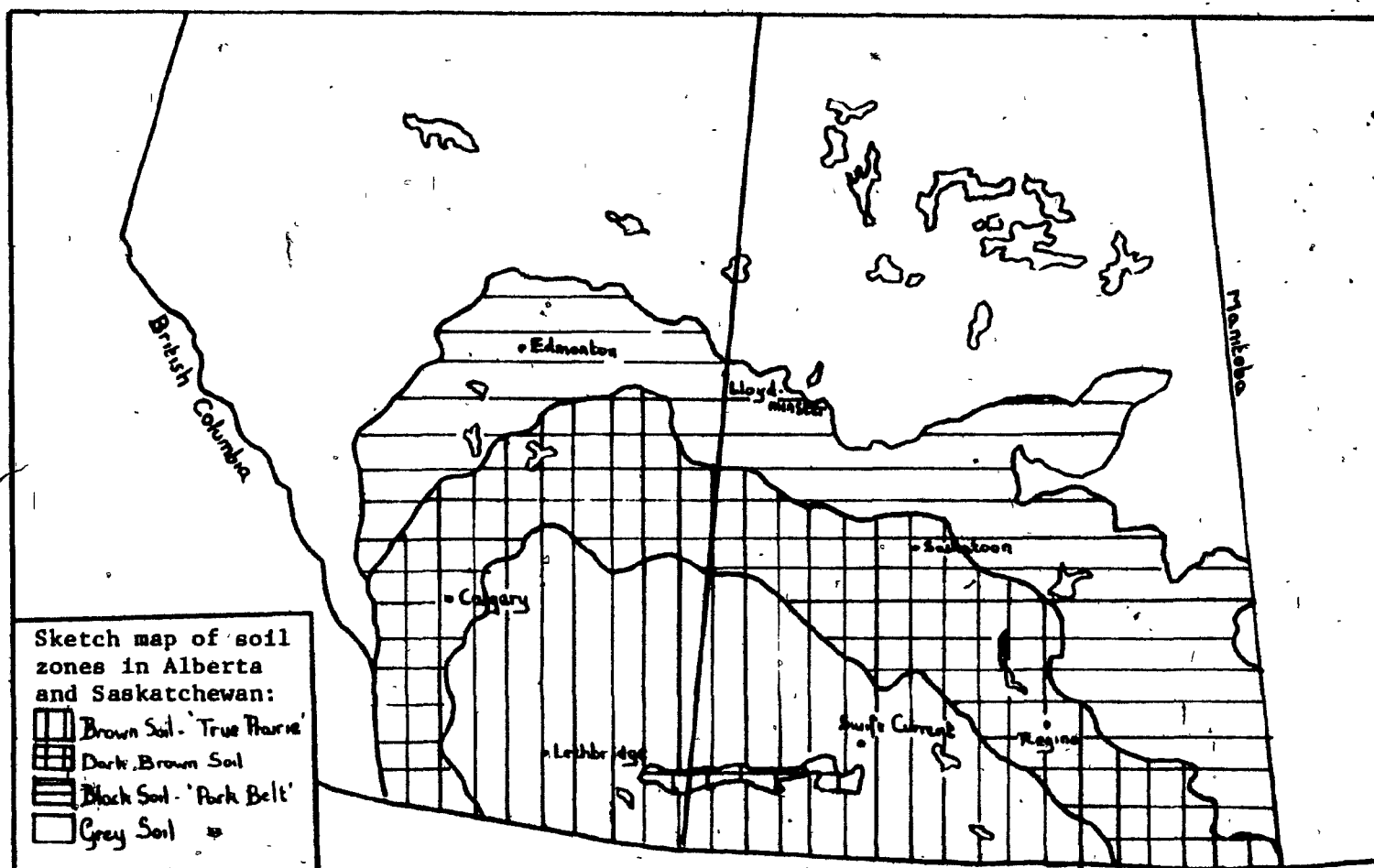


FIG. 23—Natural vegetation (based on published map by National Development Bureau, Department of the Interior, Ottawa). Key to numerals: 1, prairie vegetation (grassland), distinguished by short grass and almost devoid of trees, except (rings along some of the rivers and lakes); 2, park or grove belt; 3, northwestern coniferous forest, merged with sub-Arctic forest (northeast of the dotted line) and western coniferous forest; 4, semi-open coniferous forest; 5, treeless.

Source: W.A. Macintosh, Prairie Settlement: The Geographical Setting (Toronto, 1934), p. 22.



Source: D.G. Kerr, Historical Atlas of Canada (Don Mills, 1975), p. 61.

INDEX

ABSTRACT	i
RESUME	ii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iii
NOTE ON ABBREVIATIONS AND FOOTNOTES	v
CHAPTER ONE: CONTESTED TERRAIN	1
CHAPTER TWO: PROCRUSTEAN BEDFELLOWS	31
CHAPTER THREE: BUSINESS BUGS AND DEBTS	66
CHAPTER FOUR: 'WE ARE BECLOUDED WITH HUMBUG'	120
CHAPTER FIVE: CLASS WAR AND CHAOS	175
CHAPTER SIX: BLOOD FROM STONES	234
CHAPTER SEVEN: THE LAST DAYS	306
APPENDIX: MEMBERSHIP IN FARM ORGANIZATIONS	327
BIBLIOGRAPHY	329

MAPS

SASKATCHEWAN	vii
ALBERTA	viii
VEGETATION ON THE PRAIRIES	ix
SOIL ZONES ON THE PRAIRIES	x

CHAPTER ONE
CONTESTED TERRAIN
THE CANADIAN HISTORIAN AND THE WESTERN FARMER

On the whole, Clio's stepchildren have not been kind to the farmers of Western Canada. Predominantly urban and cosmopolitan in their predispositions, historians in this country have generally spurned the mundane parochialisms of research in agrarian history and have viewed the past from an élitist and metropolitan perspective. Traditionally, even the development of the agrarian frontier has been defined in urban terms, and the dynamic of settlement has been centered not in the nether regions of the West, but in the panelled boardrooms of Montréal and Toronto. When they are discussed, the farmers tend to be impersonalized, dehumanized, and transformed; abstractly reconstructed into helpless automatons who blandly react to fluctuations in an economic system they cannot influence. This 'urban' bias has infected even the revisionists who, for all their iconoclastic energies, have adopted the traditionalist's disdain for matters agricultural. The simple proposition that all farmers are victims of forces extrinsic to themselves has seldom been challenged, and as a result, the complexities of rural life have rarely been considered worth penetrating. Paradoxically, historians have often compensated for their

-disinterest in agriculture by relying upon tired catch-phrases and generalities whose simple inclusion is considered to be an ample form of explanation. Unfortunately, the task of recultivating this wilderness of oversimplifications is a complex one, and far exceeds the limitations of a single study. The place to start is, however, clear enough, for any investigation must begin with the farmers themselves.¹

In the third volume of Capital, Marx wrote that the capture of agriculture by the capitalist mode of production... is in fact the last conquest of that mode of production." The prophesy, though dated, remains nonetheless relevant, for it draws attention to the vital correlation between agricultural and industrial development. Indeed, capitalism in agriculture is characterized, in Marxian terms, by the functioning of the same process of capitalization and concentration which appears to operate so inexorably in industry. In Western Canada, this dynamic has manifested itself in a real and relative decline in the size of the farm population, coupled with a radical increase in the dimensions and outputs of the remaining production units. Clearly, just as industrialization in an urban setting created deep social tensions and conflicts within classes and between classes, so too did it transform perceptions and relationships in the agrarian context. In fact, owing to the accelerated rate of the capitalization process in agriculture, and particularly on the frontier, these disruptions were certainly as intense, if

perhaps less conspicuous, than those occurring in industry. To assert that the process of capitalization was similar is not to obscure the distinctive features of economic change in the rural environment. Agricultural and urban capitalism were differentiated by the fact that unlike the worker, the farmer was both owner and labourer, capitalist and proletarian. To this extent, the capitalization of agriculture occurred voluntarily; the farmer chose to industrialize, and did not have modernity imposed upon him from above. At least, such was the case with the most prominent group of farmers. However not all agriculturalists in Western Canada enjoyed the same opportunities. For most producers, mechanization was an impossibility, either because their land was unsuited to it, or because they could not afford it, or else because they simply did not recognize the importance of changing their economic lifestyles. In time, those who failed to adapt to the industrial mode of production were driven into poverty and dispossession. Confronted by rising production costs, only those farmers who had reduced their overheads through mechanization and expansion were able to survive. Between 1940 and 1960, over half of the farmers on the Prairies were forced to leave the land. Those who remained became the commercial farmers, the precursors of the modern agro-businessmen. Those who failed to adapt generally moved into the cities, joined the proletariat, the unemployed, or the pensioners, and melted into historical anonymity. To ignore these changes is to overlook perhaps the most vital facet of Western agricultural history.

Paradoxically, Canadian historians have not generally concerned themselves with the rural economy or its influence upon farm protest. Though there have been many studies of agrarian politics and dissent, there have been few sophisticated linkings of the agriculturalists world-view with the specifics of their changing socio-economic position. The traditional pattern of historical scholarship was set by the first major student of agrarian protest, Louis Aubrey Wood, whose pioneer study, A History of the Farmers' Movement in Canada, was first published in 1924. Wood was a talented, if uncritical, historian of the Toronto school, who believed, in the best Whig tradition, that the chronicle of popular protest was the unfolding story of the common man's struggle against the concentration of national wealth and political power. "The farmers", he asserted, were the "spirit" of the Dominion, and he characterized them as "unswerving in their loyalty" and "self-effacement", and unflinching in their search "for justice for their industry". Capable of impressive unity and overwhelming tenacity, the farmers were constrained only by their elected leaders, who invariably sacrificed their followers for self-gain. There is little subtlety in Wood's analysis; his farmers struggle only for the good and the right, his plutocrats move always and deceitfully to oppress them. Continually they are abused and abandoned by their spokesmen, who ruthlessly betray their interests at the critical moment. Caleb Mallory set the tempo in 1896 when he abandoned the Patrons of Industry, and he was soon followed by the Premier of

Ontario, E.C. Drury, and T.A. Crerar, the Leader of the Progressive Party, both of whom sacrificed the farmers' interests to low-tariff Liberalism in the 1920s. In this, as in all of Wood's presentations, there is no sense of movement; the farmers' leaders are all of a type, just as their enemies and their problems remain unchanged throughout the course of over half a century. All that alters for Wood is the intensity of the movement, and one senses a definite progression from the local educational organizations to the cooperatives to the political parties; a steady invincible march that can seemingly end only in triumph.²

Subsequent studies of rural protest have followed closely in the Wood's tradition. Authors such as Evelyn Eager, S.D. Clark, and Grant Embree have used a frontier-type analysis with but slight variation. Perhaps the most important of these studies is Paul Sharp's valuable continentalist interpretation, The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada. In Sharp's view, Western protest was a product of the conflict of the traditional "economic justice and democracy of the frontier" with the political and economic inequalities inherent in metropolitan domination. The farmers were engaged in a "crusade for greater democracy", a protest against the "concentration of wealth and political power in the hands of a capitalist plutocracy". In this fight "to preserve agrarian democracy against the onslaughts of...money power", the "individualistic prairie farmers" welded themselves together

into an "effective unit which thought and acted with uniformity". Their unity proved the "envy" of all those involved in the "crusade against monopoly which swept North America."

Independent politics was, for Sharp, the ultimate expression of the agrarian revolt, and like Wood, he depicts the Granges and the cooperatives as the educational preparatives for the Progressive Party. Defeat was a consequence of betrayal and inexperience, and in the author's view, the farmers' leaders were simply unprepared to maintain the struggle against the institutionalized power of the plutocracy. But the 'Progressive heritage' did not fade with the passing of the Party, for Sharp suggests that both the CCF and the Social Credit League were the successors to its frontier tradition.

Indeed, both "Prairie Socialism" and "Social Credit" were "logical outgrowths of three decades of agrarian agitation". The democratic revolt could not be suppressed, for "the past had made it inevitable".³

In a vital sense, the revisionist historians, though different in both their language and intent, have grounded their analysis in the solid bedrock of the frontier model. C.B. Macpherson's Democracy in Alberta, which inaugurated the revisionist reappraisal of agrarian protest, builds upon the basic principles of the Turnerian approach, though now they are garbed in Marxian dialectics. According to the Marxists, traditional historians have failed to recognize that social dissent was not "simply disembowled rhetoric", but was a reflection of the economic realities of the farmers' class-angled position.⁴ Rather than emphasize the innate

democracy of the frontier, the revisionists point to two structural characteristics: the homogeneous petit bourgeois class structure and the colonial character of the economy. For Macpherson, these two realities motivated the alienation of the West from the Eastern party-system, and created the need for a strong 'folk-movement' with the political authority to oppose the plutocracy. Because the farmers formed an independent, commodity producing, petit bourgeois class, their rebellion was bound to take the form of a "revolt against outside domination but not against the property system."⁵ In short, the West's colonial status impelled the farmers to protest, while their property-owning economic status confined their objectives to merely the revision, and not the overthrow, of the capitalist system.

Despite the fact that Macpherson's study was written over thirty years ago, the Marxian interpretation of rural unrest has remained largely unaltered. Reginald Whitaker, whose introduction to William Irvine's The Farmers in Politics is perhaps the best summation of the revisionist approach, offers only minor qualifications to Macpherson's work. In essence, Whitaker suggests that greater emphasis be placed upon the contribution of working-class intellectuals to the farm movement, and he makes special mention not only of Irvine, but also of M.J. Coldwell and J.S. Woodsworth.⁶

Similarly, Tom Naylor's oversimplified, four-page investigation of rural dissent, "The Ideological Foundations of Social Democracy and Social Credit", makes no significant contribution

to revisionist historiography. Naylor's main criticism of Macpherson is to suggest that since the farmers' petit bourgeois class position was in fact a consequence of the West's colonial status, the two structural characteristics should be reduced to one. Next he attempts to explain why one class of commodity producers should have founded two ostensibly different political movements- the CCF and the Social Credit Parties- and he resolves the riddle by dismissing the question. "Underneath the rhetoric and public posturing", Naylor argues, there was no difference between the two movements, and consequently, there is no contradiction. "Since they sprang from the same constituencies" and "exhibited the same objective class attributes", Social Credit and Social Democracy "were the same".⁷ Somehow, the cart had made its precarious way before the horse.

One of the most notable features of the revisionist analysis is how little it differs from the traditional frontier approach. In both, the farmers constitute a homogeneous class, in both they are protesting against external domination, and in both their independent political involvement is regarded as something of an end in itself. By transposing the term 'frontier democrat' in place of 'independent commodity producer', and by replacing the phrase 'corporate capitalism' with the expression 'Eastern plutocracy', the differences are all but eliminated. In effect, there is a fundamental harmony uniting both the revisionists and the traditionalists, and on the major thematic points all that

appears to separate them is only so much window dressing. Unfortunately, there are certain intractable problems confounding all of those who subscribe to the view that the farmers were a unified class harmoniously protesting against the domination of the metropolitan heartland. Firstly, there is the as yet unresolved problem of explaining the fact that farmers in different Provinces employed dissimilar modes of self-expression and dissent. The question transcends the nagging limitations of the CCF-Social Credit debate, and embraces a much larger issue. Why, for example, were the Wheat Pools and the Cooperatives not equally supported in all of the Prairie Provinces; why were the policies of the three farm educational organizations- the UFA, the UFC(SS), and the UFM- so different; and why did farmers in different Provinces consistently refuse to vote for the same Party? By imposing a fabricated unity on all producers, and by asserting that their interests were harmonized by their class position, these questions become far more disturbing than would otherwise be the case. Indeed, by labelling the farmers leatherstocking democrats or petit bourgeois commodity producers, historians have suggested that what should be a jargonized appellation is in fact a definitive characterization. Lamentably, in so doing, they have manoeuvred themselves into the position of having to invent excuses to account for behaviour which transcends the limitations of their neatly-sculpted constructs.

The problems do not, however, stop at the provincial boundaries. A second, and perhaps more damning, issue arises

C concerning the lack of farm unity within a single province, or even locality. Clearly, if all farmers were unified by their economic status, then they should all have embraced similar orientations and dispositions. But this was not the case. Be they traditionalists or revisionists in their persuasions, historians of Canadian agriculture have been beguiled by a common misperception. In part because of the excessive protestations of class harmony coming from the farm movements themselves, in part because of their own reluctance to explore beyond the generalities, historians have exaggerated the homogeneity of the agrarian community. Blind to the differences which stratified the farm population, analysts have been unable to adequately account for the striking variety of rural protest movements within even limited geographical areas. Why, one wonders, did one farmer eschew political dissent while his neighbour endorsed it; why did one want socialism and another laissez faire capitalism; why did some support producer cooperatives while others attacked them? Perhaps it is the differences, rather than the similarities, which modern historians should devote themselves to exploring.

To their credit, some historians and sociologists have attempted to address themselves to the divisions which fragmented rural society in Western Canada. W.L. Morton's The Progressive Party in Canada, published in 1950 as part of the Rockefeller Foundation's 'Social Credit Series', is one of the few sophisticated portraits of rural unrest which attempts to explain why an apparently homogeneous class should have

produced a heterogeneity of protest movements. Morton recognizes the deep ideological differences which divided the Progressive Party, and attributes those disparities to largely regional determinants. Manitobans, he asserts, were generally crypto-liberals, laissez faire capitalists who sought simply to reform the worst excesses of the economic system: the tariff, the tax, and the railway policy. Alberta Progressives, in contrast, were quasi-socialists: they rejected party politics, demanded an expansion of state intervention in the economy, and favoured the introduction of a governmental system based upon group representation. Unfortunately, Morton cannot explain why a Manitoban would be a better capitalist than an Albertan, and he remarks apologetically that many Progressives with socialist tendencies lived in Manitoba, and many crypto-liberals farmed in Alberta. In effect, what is problematical about this interpretation are the terms of reference, for as Morton himself realizes, political geography is useful merely as a functional categorization and not as a comprehensive explanation.⁸

In recent years, many historians have employed ethnicity as a means of re-interpreting agrarian protest. Students such as Leo David Courville, M.F. Smeltzer and William Calderwood have suggested that the sources of divergence in the rural community should be traced to the ethnic backgrounds of the farmers. Courville, in his study of Saskatchewan insurgency in the 1920s, discovered that, with few exceptions, the Progressives were protestant Anglo-Saxons from Britain,

Eastern Canada or the United States. For Courville, what unified the Progressives was their emphasis upon upholding 'Anglo-Saxon values', their antipathy for Catholicism, and their opposition to separate schools and machine politics. The non-Progressives are thus taken to be the Continental immigrants, the Eastern Europeans, Germans and French-speaking peoples; settlers whose cultural isolation and inexperience with democratic government made them less vulnerable to the call to reform.⁹ Though this 'ethnic' approach appears to be both systematic and manageable, it has not received universal approbation even from cultural historians. Indeed, Howard Palmer's study of ethnicity and nativism in Alberta reaches radically different conclusions from those presented by Courville and Calderwood. According to Palmer, the 1920s were a period of waning nativism, when the rural community was largely devoid of ethnic cleavages. It was only after 1925, when the Government and railways introduced a new immigration plan, that nativism began its development on the Prairies. In this sense, Progressivism is presented as having drawn its strength from an ability to transcend ethnic lines, and Palmer suggests that its demise can be definitely related to the ascent of nativism.¹⁰ Clearly, the ethnic argument, though useful and important, cannot be seen as comprehensive, for the interaction of dissent and race is as yet too obscure to be accurately defined.

Assuming a different tack, many scholars have sought to

deny the linkage between protest and the community structure, and have attempted to confine dissent to a far more comprehensible intellectual élite. L.J. Wilson's analysis of the educational activities of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association and the United Farmers' of Alberta, suggests that the spirit of reform originated with a relatively small leadership group. In this work, different ideological tendencies came from the dispositions of the decision-makers, and it was their interactions which created the divergences in the farm movements. At the 'grass roots', Wilson suggests, there was no difference between the two organizations he studies, and any dissimilarity is attributed to their leaders, and in particular to the divergent intellectual legacies of W.R. Motherwell and Henry Wise Wood.¹¹ This approach, when carried to its logical conclusion, has inspired the divorce of the farmers themselves from agrarian protest. In works such as Walter Young's Anatomy of a Party, and Leo Zakuta's A Protest Movement Becalmed, the farmers interests are taken so much for granted that they seem hardly present at all. Inspired by the theorizations of Schumpeter and Mosca, these scholars reduce popular protest to an institutionalized arrangement, and thereby isolate the movement from the society which had produced it.¹² Though of different intent, Kenneth McNaught's biography of Woodsworth, A Prophet in Politics, similarly underestimates the contribution of the farmers to the Western radical tradition. In studying the CCF, McNaught contends that the Party's "ideological background...sprang

from the urban labour, from the social gospel of the Churches ...from the radical intellectuals", and only in passing from "the soil of the wheat belt".¹³ In short, there is a distinct tendency in modern historical writing to reduce the agriculturalists to inconsequential adjuncts of a predominantly élitist and urban reform impulse. Having already been denied control over their economic futures, the farmers are now being isolated from the one thing which at least for the traditional historians had seemed inviolable: their right to protest.

Canadian historians have overlooked some obvious avenues of enquiry when examining agrarian dissent and the rural community. Unquestionably, the chronicle of protest would certainly have been greatly enriched by an earlier utilization of the methods and approaches of the related social sciences. By compiling census information regarding changes in farm size and demographic variations, and by assimilating the findings of contemporary economists, a radically different image of rural protest emerges. As early as the mid-thirties, economists such as George Britnell and R.W. Murchie had illuminated the trail with their studies of the rural economy and society. Murchie's deceptively titled Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier, published in 1936, was a simple compilation of a series of case studies that had been undertaken by the University of Saskatchewan in the first half-decade of the Depression. Flawed by a photographic method which provides only snap-shots of economic conditions in different years at widely disparate locales, the study does

everything but furnish us with a sense of progress or change over time. Nonetheless, despite this structural weakness, it is a seminal study, for it is the only widely accessible secondary source describing the sharp variations which existed in levels of mortgage indebtedness, farm size and conditions of ownership across the Prairie. Britnell's The Wheat Economy does for Western economic-geography what Murchie did for the economy. For Britnell, differences within the farm community were not produced primarily by variations in financial conditions, but rather by changes in climate and soil type. Here there is revealed a subtle correlation between economic realities and geography which Murchie's discontinuous study cannot manage to convey. Farms in the Park Belt, for example, were generally smaller than they were on the true Prairie, because of the higher yields which could be obtained from the deeper, darker soil, and the more humid climate. Like Murchie, Britnell clearly intended his investigations to dispel the myth that agricultural conditions were equivalent across the West, and he sought to open the way for a more detailed analysis of the impact of variations in farm size, mortgage indebtedness, soil type and climate, upon the nature of the rural community.¹⁴

The economists were to wait almost thirty years for scholars to begin to apply their findings to the history of agrarian unrest. Apart from Seymour Lipset's occasional references to divergent interests determined by farm size, analysts ignored the issue until the mid-sixties. In 1966, James Napier McCrorie, a disciple of Lipset's, published a

mediocre critique of an article on the structure of the rural society by the Manitoba psychologist, Earl J. Tyler. Blandly, McCrorie charged, without defence or explanation, that the rural community had been polarized into three 'classes' at least since 1920, and that these groups, with their different interests, had caused the divisions in the farmers' movement. Unfortunately, neither McCrorie, nor anyone else, pursued the matter, and mysteriously, the heterogeneous model of agrarian class disappeared as swiftly as it had arisen.¹⁵ Six years' later, a political science professor at the University of Calgary, Thomas Flanagan, rediscovered Britnell, and in a series of quantitative studies, analysed the extent to which the political success of the United Farmers' of Alberta had been grounded in a geographical and ethnic cleavage in the Foothills' Province. With commendable precision, Flanagan discovered that the UFA had drawn its greatest support in the predominantly Anglo-Saxon wheat growing area of the Southern Prairie, but he did not exploit his findings. Rather than press forward the analysis and discuss the reasons for the Party's greater appeal in this area, Flanagan fell back upon a quasi-Marxian catechism and concluded that this had been the only region in which the farm population was truly 'homogeneous'. In short, he proposed that since the Farmers' Party had been continually successful only in the South, then this had been the only region in which the Marxian stereotype of independent commodity production had been met. Ignoring the implications of his own analysis, Flanagan abandoned the concept that there

could be more than one variety of agrarian interest, and suggests that somehow an Eastern European on the Park Belt was less of a farmer than an American on the true Prairie.¹⁶

Unquestionably, Seymour Lipset's sociological explanation of the rise of the CCF in Saskatchewan, Agrarian Socialism, provides a more refined analysis of the nature of the rural community. However, Lipset seems strangely at odds with his own research, and a confusing dichotomy emerges between what he is trying to prove and what he in fact achieves. An eager young Marxist from New York, he had chosen to study the CCF because of his desire to demonstrate the potentiality for socialism in a North American context. In order to accomplish this, Lipset sought to prove that the farmers of the West were not only a unified class, but were also fundamentally anti-capitalist. Lamentably, his own research failed to support his predetermined conclusions, for he discovered that the farmers were not only more concerned with immediate economic action and political power than with socialism, but also that the success of the CCF was based in the support of a distinct segment of the agrarian population. Unwilling, however, to allow the evidence to distort his theoretical framework, he attempted to side-step the implications of his own research. Despite the fact that the CCF failed to appeal to the poorest stratum of producers, and that it continually garnered its major support from prosperous Anglo-Saxons, Lipset argues that the farmers of Saskatchewan were a unified class for the simple reason that they had "more in common with each other

economically and socially than with any other group."¹⁷ Similarly, he circumvents the fact that the politically Socialist farmers continued to venerate the profit motive by developing an intricate notion of economic 'immediate goals', and more revolutionary 'fundamental objectives'. Conservatism, pragmatism, and capitalism, were all representations of the farmers' "immediate discontents", whereas socialist political action was a consequence of "class-conscious deep-rooted" impulses. Conservative tendencies, he proposes, arose generally in times of crisis, such as depressions or wars, while socialist or cooperative ambitions were stirred by normalcy.¹⁸ Thus, with remarkable sophistic finesse, Lipset demonstrates that though an economic disturbance might force the farmers, almost unwittingly, to appear politically moderate, the trained eye of the social scientist can nonetheless penetrate beneath the deceptive surface and perceive them in their true socialist colours.

By presenting the rural community as homogeneous, scholars have left themselves open to charges that they have not completely understood the causes and courses of farm protest. If all farmers shared common interests and objectives, then why have different groups responded with such wide variation to the same conditions? The most common explanation is to present the emergence of dissent as a simple consequence of hard times; transient and superficial in its origins and therefore flexible and pragmatic in its dogma. As Russel Nye expressed it in his study of American insurgency: "wheat fell to 67 cents in 1868,

when the Grange first organized. Climbing back up to a dollar, wheat dropped to 87 cents in the year of the independent parties. Up to \$1.05 by 1877 as these parties disappeared, it fell to 80 cents in the early years of the Alliance".¹⁹ Since the causes of dissent are not deep-rooted, the farmers frequently discard one solution in favour of another, and as a result, they wander promiscuously over the ideological continuum. Ivan Avakumovic's ambiguous investigations of the Communist Party's associations with the Prairie farmers reflect this position. Unable to admit that a 'propertied class' could be drawn to endorse communism, he underestimates the extent of Party support, and dryly dismisses the Farmers' Unity League as a minor sectarian organization whose popularity was a simple consequence of depressed conditions.²⁰ In lessening the importance of rural communism, however, Avakumovic fails to recognize the degree to which the Party was the successor to a distinct protest tradition in Western Canada, and he undervalues the contribution of those radical leaders who, for a time, represented the ambitions of a distinct group of farmers. In much the same vein, John Irving's magnificent study of Social Credit in Alberta, exaggerates the extent to which an organization's success can be based on economic hardships alone. Irving evidently recognizes this problem, however, and so he introduces the charismatic personality of William Aberhart as a magnifier of the diffuse anomie and psychological insecurity created by the Depression.²¹ Unfortunately, in placing too much emphasis upon the immediate origins of Social Credit,

Irving does not accurately depict the extensive root-network of monetary reform ideas in Alberta, and he fails to consider the paradoxical appeal of Social Credit to the very groups which had previously endorsed the UFA.

The irony of Canadian agricultural history is that few analysts have predicated their understanding of Western protest upon a discussion of the economic character of the rural economy. As E.P. Thompson once noted, the concept of 'class' cannot be viewed as a static thing, but must be seen as a relationship; more as a sequence of interactions which change constantly under the influence of a logic that is not only extrinsic but internal. The farmers should not be defined solely in terms of the urban classes, for their concept of self was shaped also by their understanding of each other. History necessitates the investigation of change over time, and it is vital for researchers to address themselves to the problems of development in the rural context. There is little difficulty involved in this, for the force of change can be easily determined. The generation of new methods of production, and the dissemination of new agricultural ideas, was unquestionably the prime mover behind the farmers' developing world-view. Western agriculture moved from the world of the pioneer homestead to the age of the industrial farm in the space of less than half a century, and that thrust of change destroyed the basis of the original agrarian community. Dissent was a product of this disruption, and its diffuse character was sparked not only by the National disequilibriums, but also by

-the uneven nature of the internal industrialization process.

To truly understand agricultural protest, it is therefore vital for the farmers themselves to be consulted.

Between 1921 and 1961, agriculture on the Prairies underwent a massive transformation. In the space of only forty years, the number of farms in the West was reduced by almost sixty percent, and the average size increased from 344 to 617 acres. The 'quarter section' homestead, which had once been the staple of Prairie settlement, by 1961 comprised four percent of the total acreage, while a small number of farms over twelve hundred acres contained thirty percent of the cultivated land.²² This gradual capitalization and concentration of the wheat economy can be seen to have taken place in two distinct, though overlapping, phases of development. In the first period, during the years between the wars, the number of small farms of one hundred and sixty acres remained constant, with immigration and impoverishment maintaining 1918 levels despite a constant exodus of homesteaders. There was, however, a sharp decline in the number of mid-sized farms under three quarter sections in size. Unfortunately, this trend was not a purely lineal one, for medium-sized farms were not simply growing larger. In fact, what appears to have been taking place was a dual ladder of success and debasement, with some mid-sized farms growing larger while others appear to have been shrinking in size as farmers sold off acreage to cover expenses. This trend is most evident during the decade of the Depression, when the number of mid-sized farms declined sharply, but there

was no appreciable change in the number of large production units. Furthermore, since statistics on mortgage foreclosures and abandonments demonstrate that the vast majority of vacated farms were around a quarter-section in size, there is distinct evidence suggesting that it was possible to descend as well as ascend the agricultural ladder. By the outbreak of the Second World War, the rural community had been effectively polarized, with the interests of the middle-sized producers divided between those of the large and the small farmers. The War provided everyone with a temporary reprieve; the smaller and more marginal producers attempted to diversify their operations so as to improve their economic positions, and the larger unit farmers began to invest again in machinery and land after the temporary quietus of the Depression. After 1946 this relatively static pattern was modified with extreme suddenness. In the first half-decade of peace, the position of the small farmers deteriorated rapidly, while the number of large and mid-sized farmers began slowly to expand. Clearly, some of the lowest stratum of producers were able to ascend the ladder in the post-War period, though large numbers left agriculture entirely, and even those who did not enjoyed their prosperity but briefly. In the early 1950s there was a further shift away from medium-sized production units, and farms of under six hundred and forty acres began to disappear. By the close of the decade, the pattern of rural impoverishment, depopulation and concentration had again asserted itself, and the capitalization of agriculture had largely been affected.

Clearly, any historical discussion of rural dissent must attempt to weigh the influence of economic and social change upon the agrarian community structure. By doing so, the plethora of organizations which appeared in the middle-west during the inter-war years assumes a character that is at once sharper and more profound. Some movements might be classified as being representative of the 'large' farms, while others might be termed 'small' farm organizations. Both would share certain features, and there might be considerable overlaps of membership, but each would hold interests and objectives that were distinctly reflective of the mass of its supporters. The energetic, even volatile, atmosphere of a community in the flux of industrialization created the stimulus for the shifting nature of agrarian dissent. Farmers were never able to unify behind a single banner because they were not of one mind; they held different objectives, and the methods which they selected to advance their aims reflected the relative desperation of their situations. By approaching agrarian protest from the perspective of attempting to understand the inner conflicts and divisions which stratified the rural society, a clearer perspective might be gained of the character of the Western dissident tradition.

Certain qualifications and explanations should be introduced before undertaking such a study. Of vital importance is the realization that the various groups of agricultualists formed strata within the larger community. Whether the farmers were, in fact, one class or several has been the subject of sundry

debate among sociologists, but for the purposes of this study it is of secondary importance. The prevailing assumption will be that because of great social mobility and a pervasive sense of homogeneity, the farmers continued to perceive themselves as a unified class despite the wide differences in economic interest which were evident amongst them. In the following discussion, these interests are classified subjectively in terms of farm size, and a correlation is drawn between unit acreage and relative prosperity. Admittedly, this is a generalized criteria, for a small farmer whose land was fortuitously located on the best soil, or who happened to hold significant reserves of capital, might be as successful a businessman as an individual with much more extensive holdings. Indeed, a farmer's economic and social status was dependent upon much more than simply the size of his farm, but was also a product of his background, his methods of cultivation, his yield, the contour of his land, the selling price of his product, and his debt situation.²³

Nonetheless, despite these qualifications, the general categories delineated are functionally correct, for in the final analysis, farm size was a crucial determinant of an individual's long-term prosperity. With the development of mechanized agriculture, even the most comfortable small farmer would have to expand his holdings or else countenance a severe decline in his income. Furthermore, a small farmer might be considered a poor farmer to the extent that, at least since 1918, most were. Generally, the quarter-section farmer was

of non-English ancestry, was heavily in debt, and did not possess an acreage large enough to capitalize upon economies of scale. Consequently, most producers operating under one hundred and sixty acres were on the lowest extremity of the economic scale, while those owning over a section of land were generally perceived as constituting the 'upper class' of the farm community. Perhaps the strongest justification for defining success in terms of acreage is the fact that during the historical period in question, the farmers themselves used this criterion. A 'successful' or 'prosperous' or 'business-like' farmer was always a man with extensive holdings, and it is characteristic that when the farm journal, The Nor'West Farmer, granted awards to the 'Master Farmers' of the West, no winner between 1929 and 1933 operated under three quarter-sections, and most owned over one thousand acres.²⁴ Similarly, the homesteaders were continually regarded as the 'peasants' of Prairie agriculture; at one point, the editor of The UFA even referred to them as "poor whites".²⁵

Conflicts between classes and within classes do not follow fixed or predetermined patterns. Sometimes they are heated, sometimes obscured, and sometimes absent, and for the farmers, their differences were particularly muted by the rhetoric of cohesion. Small farmers did not define themselves solely in terms of large farmers, but rather the positions of both were influenced by their relationship with the Canadian bourgeoisie. The poor man did not assert that his penury was the fault of the large farmer, who used mechanization to produce more and

thereby lower the price of the goods; on the contrary, he blamed his impoverishment on the bankers and the financiers who set the terms of credit and controlled the medium of exchange. By regarding the enemy beyond as more destructive than the one within, the farmers avoided inner-class struggle. Those conflicts which did emerge were based in divergent interests and originated in different groups' feelings that they needed different levels of security. To this extent, the history of Canadian agriculture is largely the chronicle of inner-class rivalry without a corresponding degree of internicine strife, and of divergent interest without direct conflict.

Michel Vovelle once urged historians of social protest to focus greater attention upon the study of popular ideologies, and to concentrate more upon the mentalités or outlooks of a dissident peoples. These relatively unstructured attitudes, as distinct from more formal ideologies, form the inherent, diffuse and unsystematic perceptions of an unstructured social group. They are the basic orientations, the "plebeian cultures", as Thompson has called them, the "self-activating" understandings of a people which are derived from their own "experiences and resources". For George Rudé, perhaps the foremost student of popular ideologies, these mentalités take the form "of a mixture of often disparate beliefs", most of them "inherent- a sort of 'mothers' milk ideology based on direct experience, oral tradition or folk-memory", but some of them "derived" from outside. Whether termed a Freudian 'drive', a Marxian 'rationalization' or a Paretian 'residue', the sensibilité collective of the

common people is the fundamental manifestation of human expression, and as such, it is the surest indicator of a group's state of social awareness.²⁶ Unfortunately, radicalism's Canadian chroniclers have tended to downplay the relevance of ideas and to ignore the extent to which men with different backgrounds and in different economic predicaments, base their activities upon fundamental differences of perception. By focusing upon the attitudinal and cultural responses of individuals and groups to changing economic circumstances, a reconstructed picture of the dynamics of agrarian dissent gradually emerges. By understanding the process by which the structure of Canadian agriculture evolved during the inter-war years, and by correlating those changes to the intellectual orientations of the various farm movements, a new insight into the mechanisms by which objective conditions and ideas interact to determine human action may be gained. Such a restructuring inevitably leads to a reappraisal of the way we view not only rural protest in Canada, but also our history and ourselves.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. An excellent discussion of the urban bias of the Canadian historian, which remains as valuable today as when it was first written, may be found in W.L. Morton's "Clio in Canada: The Interpretation of Canadian History", in University of Toronto Quarterly, Vol. XV (April, 1946), pp. 227-43.
2. Louis Aubrey Wood, A History of the Farmers' Movements in Canada, 1872-1924 (Toronto, 1975).
3. See, for example, S.D. Clarke's Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1690-1840 (Toronto, 1959), Introduction; Grant Embree, "The Rise of the United Farmers' of Alberta" (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Alberta, 1956), pp. 79-99; Paul F. Sharp, The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada (New York, 1971), esp. Chapters III, IV and X.
4. Reginald Whitaker, "Introduction to the Carleton Library Edition" of William Irvine's The Farmers in Politics (Toronto, 1977), p. xi; see also, Peter R. Sinclair, "Class Structure and Populist Protest", in Carlo Caldarola, ed., Society and Politics in Alberta (Toronto, 1979), pp. 73-85.
5. C.B. Macpherson, Democracy in Alberta; Social Credit and the Party System (Toronto, 1977), esp. Chapter Eight.
6. Whitaker, "Introduction...", pp. v-xxxv.
7. R.T. Naylor, "The Ideological Foundations of Social Democracy and Social Credit", in Gary Teeple, ed., Capitalism and the National Question in Canada (Toronto, 1972), pp. 252-56.
8. W.L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto, 1978).
9. M.F. Smeltzer, "Saskatchewan Opinion on Immigration from 1920-1939" (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1950), pp. 30-43; William Calderwood, "The Decline of the Progressive Party in Saskatchewan", in Saskatchewan History, Vol. XXI (Autumn, 1968), pp. 81-99; Leo David Courville, "The Saskatchewan Progressives" (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1971), pp. 30-70.
10. Howard Palmer, "Nativism and Ethnic Tolerance in Alberta" (unpublished PhD Thesis, York University, 1973), pp. 16-95.
11. Leroy John Wilson, "The Education of the Farmer; The Educational Activities of the United Farmers' of Alberta and the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, 1920-1930" (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Calgary, 1975), pp. 29-54.

12. Leo Zakuta, A Protest Movement Becalmed (Toronto, 1964); and for a statement of principles, see Walter D. Young, Anatomy of a Party; the National CCF, 1932-61 (Toronto, 1976), pp. 139-41.
13. Kenneth McNaught, A Prophet in Politics (Toronto, 1975), p. 225.
14. R.W. Murchie, Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier (Toronto, 1936); G.E. Britnell, The Wheat Economy (Toronto, 1939).
15. James Napier McCrorie, "Discussion", in M.-A. Tremblay and W.J. Anderson, eds., Rural Canada in Transition (Ottawa, 1968), pp. 322-37; see also Earl Tyler's "The Farmer as a Social Class", in the same volume.
16. Thomas Flanagan, "Political Geography and the United Farmers' of Alberta", in Susan Trofimenkoff, ed., The Twenties in Western Canada (Ottawa, 1972), pp. 138-69; also "Ethnic Voting in Alberta Provincial Elections, 1921-1975", in Caldarola, ed., Society and Politics..., pp. 304-21.
17. Seymour Martin Lipset, Agrarian Socialism; The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan (Berkeley, 1971); also "The Rural Community and Political Leadership in Saskatchewan" in Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Vol. 13 (1947), pp. 410-28.
18. S.M. Lipset, Agrarian Socialism..., pp. 82-3.
19. Russel Nye, Midwestern Progressive Politics (New York, 1959), p. 59.
20. Ivan Avakumovic, "The Communist Party of Canada and the Prairie Farmer; The Inter-War Years", in David Bercuson, ed., Western Perspectives 1 (Toronto, 1974), pp. 78-87; also, the slightly less trite discussion in his The Communist Party in Canada (Toronto, 1975), pp. 81-5.
21. John Irving, The Social Credit Movement in Alberta (Toronto, 1959).
22. Throughout this study, the British Imperial System of Measurement has been used, as all historical documents consulted employed it.
The Metric equivalents are as follows:

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

23. For an excellent discussion of the different criteria for farm classification, see J.M. Clarke's "Memo on the Agrarian Question for Comrade Morris" (March, 1930), UTL, Robert J. Kenney Collection, Box 9, file: Agrarian Reform.
24. Nor'West Farmer, "Master Farmers of Canada" (Winnipeg, 1930-34).
25. GIA, Walter Norman Smith Papers, Box 1, file 7, W.N. Smith to Mrs. Spencer, June 6, 1931.
26. M. Vovelle, "Le tournant des mentalités en France, 1750-1789; la sensibilité pré révolutionnaire", in Social History, Vol. X (1977), pp. 605-29; R. Mandrou, De la culture populaire aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles (Paris, 1964); E.P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century", in Past and Present, No. 50 (May, 1971), pp. 76-136; George Rudé, The Crowd in History: A Study of Popular Disturbances in France and England, 1730-1848 (New York, 1964); also by Rudé, Ideology and Popular Protest (New York, 1980).

CHAPTER TWO
PROCRUSTEAN BEDFELLOWS
THE PROGRESSIVE INSURGENCY

For the farmers of Western Canada, 1921 had been a year for grandiose dreams. It had begun with a symphonic blast, with the Canadian Council of Agriculture's (CCA) formal declaration that it intended to lend its support to the newly formed National Progressive Party. The decision took no-one by surprise, for the CCA, in its capacity as a farm lobby group, had long had its fingers twisted about the pulse of the agrarian population. Since the armistice, the Provincial Grain Growers' Associations had been moving steadily in the direction of independent political action, and in 1919, the Ontarians had taken the first step with the election of E.C. Drury and his farmers' government. On the national level, the signs of insurgency were even clearer, for the Council's announcement had been presaged by the formation of an eleven member agrarian bloc in Parliament. The new Party, together with its Provincial affiliates, scored immediate successes. In July, 1921, the United Farmers' of Alberta (UFA) entered politics for the first time, and toppled the reigning Liberals, capturing two-thirds of the Legislature. Simultaneously, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA) moved towards political action, humbled the established Parties, and eventually forced the resignation of the Premier. Culminating this year of insurgency

came the December General Election, which saw the emergence of a farm party of sixty-five members in a House which lacked a clear majority.¹

On the Prairies, the demand for political action arose from a disillusionment born of prosperity. During the war years, many farmers had received just enough affluence to deepen their natural concerns over economic adversity into a desire for revenge. Advertising, commercialization, and the creeping network of transportation and communication facilities had exploded the farmers' sense of isolation. The war-stimulated global demand for wheat had seemed limitless, and the farmers had responded willingly to the Government's appeals to patriotism and to profit's appeals to self-interest. Between 1913 and 1919, the wheat acreage in Western Canada increased nearly eighty percent, and wheat exports leapt from 194.9 million bushels to almost 600 million. Stimulated by the unprecedented demand, the Prairie economy revelled in a phantasmagoric intoxication. Land prices almost doubled during the war years, and the amount of improved acreage increased an alarming ninety-five percent. An artificially inflated wheat price lifted the farmers' income, and stirred a thirst for luxuries undreamed of a decade before. A new barn, a piano, a magazine subscription, an automobile; little seemed out of reach, and the countryside echoed with the rattle of new ploughs, reapers, mowers and tractors. "War", sneered an indignant Stephen Leacock, "teaches ... the farmer that his own fat, easy industry is war itself, and that he may count his fatted cattle in the light of his stable lantern and go to bed a patriot".²

For the farmers, the structure of prosperity was of faulty construction. Overextended and overspecialized, the Prairie economy lacked the stable foundations necessary for universal prosperity. Even during the halcyon days of war, the signs of instability were not difficult to detect. Though the value of farm commodities rose steadily, the farmers were plagued by the high costs of production, and the serious shortage of labour. Monthly wages for farm workers almost doubled during the War, and the price of agricultural implements soared. Lacking in sufficient manpower, the farmers needed more machinery to facilitate their expansion, and this meant borrowing at a time when the cost of credit was increasing, and the price of equipment was far more inflated than the price of grain.³

For the more prosperous farmers who had extensive holdings and some working capital, there was little cause for alarm. Having a lower ratio of debt to capital, and a larger credit reserve on which to draw, the agrarian élite was more secure in its ability to repay its debts. The medium-sized farmers, however, were in a much less attractive position, for many of them found themselves face-to-face with a mountainous burden of debt which they could not hope to reduce without a continuation of inflated grain prices. High prices during the War had made grain production in Western Canada a capital intensive industry, and technological developments were beginning to indicate that it was possible for fewer men to produce a tremendously increased quantity of food. Mechanization, however, was a costly endeavour, and the low quality of early agricultural

machines, such as the Fordson tractor or the International Titan 10-20, made it particularly unattractive.⁴ Nonetheless, the high cost for farm labour between 1914 and 1920, induced thousands of farmers to mechanize, though it proved an uneconomical investment on all but the largest farms.⁵ For the middle-sized producers who had chosen to be among the first to industrialize, the decision brought only misfortune. The anticipated reduction in production costs failed to materialize, and most found themselves driven towards bankruptcy by the debts incurred to purchase the machinery.⁶ Faced with the possibility of a severe grain price decline once the wartime demand had ended, many farm leaders recognized that a stabilization of the agriculture economy was imperative. Larger farmers needed a continuation of stable prices so as to ensure that mechanization would remain profitable, and medium-sized producers required wheat price inflation in order to simply remain in business. Ironically, it was the boom conditions of the war years which sowed the seeds of the economic polarization that was to permanently debilitate the cause of agrarian unity on the Prairies.

II

Farm insurgency in the immediate post-war years was to originate not with the dispossessed, but with the most prosperous group of farmers. Indeed, agrarian progressivism was a consequence of a fusion of the interests of the agrarian élite with those of the farmers' cooperative organizations, and the

structural representation of this union was the Canadian Council of Agriculture. The immediate cause of the Progressive revolt was the Federal Government's wheat marketing policy, which exacerbated long-standing grievances over the tariff, the railway, and military conscription. In 1917, the Federal Government had appointed a Board of Grain Supervisors to provide for the orderly marketing of Canada's wheat crop, and it had established the liberal fixed price of \$2.21 for a bushel of No. 1 Northern wheat in storage at Fort William.⁷ Following the November armistice, however, the Government began to take faltering steps towards a resumption of the open marketing system, and on July 21, 1919, futures' trading recommenced on the floor of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. An upward trend promptly revealed itself, and a flurry of speculation drove the value of wheat futures upward, from an opening price of \$2.20 a bushel on Monday, July 21, to a close of \$2.45½ a week later. Horrified by the speculative surge, the Borden Government hastily closed the Exchange, and re-established the Wheat Board to dispense with the 1919-20 crop. Anxious to restore stability to an erratic market, the Government reversed its previous generosity, and reduced the initial wheat payment to \$1.75 a bushel, later revising that figure upward to \$2.15.⁸

Not surprisingly, the Council of Agriculture was extremely agitated by the Government's wheat policy, and in a lengthy statement, it attacked the Cabinet for being "too solicitous to supply the British Government with cheap wheat at the expense of the Canadian producer."⁹ The CCA had initially

opposed the reopening of the Grain Exchange, owing to the unstable condition of the global economy, but it found the Government's inconsistency even more disturbing than its policy. For the Council, the solution to the problem of wheat marketing lay neither in unrestricted trading nor in a wheat board, but rather in the creation of a centralized 'grain corporation' which could control transport and marketing facilities, while simultaneously "permitting greater business freedom", by "preserving and offering ... fair remuneration to the existing organizations and machinery of the grain trade."¹⁰ Complete government control, Council members argued, served only to keep prices down, by preventing the farmer from "securing a full world value for his commodity."¹¹ Indeed, though the Wheat Board had been "satisfactory as a war measure", it was criticized for "functioning in exactly the opposite way from which it was expected ... In other words, it kept down the price of wheat to the farmer and did not either increase or stabilize the price."¹² Henry Wise Wood, the millenarian president of the United Farmers' of Alberta, frequently emphasized his "suspicion" of any scheme which "centered all power ... in the government", and he later revealed that he thought "a reversion to any kind of direct governmental control is unthinkable in a free country."¹³ T.A. Crerar, one-time Unionist Cabinet Minister, Leader of the Progressive Party and President of the largest farm cooperative, the United Grain Growers' Limited, was even more succinct in his criticisms. "I am opposed entirely to any permanent policy that means the

control of the marketing of grain", he said in Ottawa, "if adopted ... it will be a long step forward in the socialization of industry in this country."¹⁴

The original reluctance of many Progressive leaders to accept a Federal wheat board stemmed from their twin interests as large farmers and as representatives of the grain trade. Men like Crerar, J.B. Musselman, J.A. Maharg, Rice Sheppard and H.W. Wood, were not only prosperous farmers, they were also actively involved in the business of wheat marketing. Maharg, who was President of the CCA during the War, was also President of the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, and a Director of the United Grain Growers' Limited. Wood, who led the UFA for almost twenty years, was also President of the Alberta Cooperative Elevator Company, the Council of Agriculture, and a Director of the North-West Grain Dealers' Association. Sheppard, the UFA's first Vice-President, was simultaneously a Director of the Cooperative Elevator Company, the UGG, and the Alberta Pacific Grain Company. Finally, Musselman was a member of the Boards of the Saskatchewan Elevator Company, the United Grain Growers', the SGGA, and the CCA. In short, the Progressive leaders were not merely politicians, they were the social and corporate elite of Western agriculture.¹⁵

For these men, as for all of the more prosperous farmers, open marketing was attractive because the larger volume which they had to sell gave them an opportunity to capitalize upon price fluctuations. More wheat allowed the individual farmer

to ship on consignment, in carload lots, thereby escaping price spreads, and retaining control over his product until induced to sell by favourable market conditions.¹⁶ Similarly, for the farmers' cooperatives, the open market held the singular advantage that it allowed free reign to their speculative impulses. In the pre-war period, these companies had operated in the same fashion as the private line elevator interests, and as they expanded, they had begun to develop their own domestic and export selling agencies. During the period in which the Board of Grain Supervisors had been in operation, the ability of these companies to 'play the market', by hedging and trading in futures, had been curtailed, and as a result, profits had been affected. Though the War witnessed a significant expansion in both the number of elevators owned, and the amount of wheat handled, profits for the farmers' cooperatives actually declined. The UGG, for example, saw its net profits fall from \$607,899 to \$148,549 in the period from 1917 to 1919, a decline of seventy-five percent. Profits for the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company shrank by forty-four percent over the same period, from \$305,752 per annum to \$193,599.¹⁷ Clearly, the detrimental effects of government control was a powerful inducement not only for protest, but also for insurgency. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that the idea soon developed "in the minds of thousands of farmers in Western Canada, that the commercial companies, including the United Grain Growers' ... were opposed to the Wheat Board scheme because it would interfere with our

profits."¹⁸ If the traditional parties were unwilling to develop policies which could ensure both a fair return for the producers, and a fair profit to their companies, then the injured parties must seize control of the instruments of political control for themselves. As one contemporary remarked of T.A. Crerar, his progressivism was "plain big business"; a product of the "ledger of exports and imports", his "Church was the elevator, his economic Bible the Grain Growers' Guide".¹⁹

III

Originally, progressivism was not simply a Party, or an organizational apparatus; it was an outlook, a movement, and a new intellectual formulation. The progressive idea was a product of the mechanization and institutionalization of economic relationships, and a consequence of the triumph of rationalism over North American intellectual thought. "Science and technology", recalled Ray Stannard Baker, had brought on "a Great American Renaissance [sic]"; an era of phonographs, automobiles, incandescent lights and moving pictures, airplanes and wireless telegraphs.²⁰ Scientific industrial management was perceived as being the mechanism whereby man could master himself and the world in which he lived. Codified by the writings of John Dewey and William James, progressivism offered a pragmatic alternative to the determinism of Newtonian physics, Calvinism and Nineteenth Century materialism. Instead of constructing an a priori universe, the

progressive idea ventilated the world with a blast of creative and moral inspiration. Logic and science had allowed man to control his destiny, and to affect the forces which positivistic interpretation had bound about him. "Rightly understood", mused Walter Lippman in 1914, "Science is the culture under which people can live forward in the midst of complexity and treat life not as something given but as something to be shaped."²¹

Canadian progressivism was not a continuation, under different leadership, of the Western populist tradition. Indeed, political insurgency on the Prairies was born not of debt, foreclosure and rural depopulation, but of success and ambition. If names mean anything, the average Progressive was of old American or British stock, and the movement was shaped in the twin forges of their respective liberal reformist cultures. The heart of organized progressivism, the low tariff demand, was drawn from the British tradition, while the subsidiary platforms dealing with taxation, currency reform, railroad regulation and antimonopoly legislation, all bore the stamp of the American radical ethos.²² Despite the doctrinal similarities, however, the overwhelming majority of Western progressives were unified not by their nationality, but by their affluence. Most were financially secure, and a good number were extremely wealthy men, with a few having college educations and moneyed backgrounds. As one journalist reflected, "it is a notable feature of the Grain Growers' Movement, that its leaders in every instance have been first-

class farmers."²³ Being economically established, these reformers were concerned more with financing expansion than with paying off debts, and it is a remarkable feature of the movement that none of the three Progressive manifestos carried a debt or credit resolution.²⁴ Their aim, according to Crerar, was "some orderly reform and progress" which could be achieved only through "lower production costs, wider markets, cheaper transportation, and cheaper distribution."²⁵ In effect, the insurgent farmer was not a desperate man, and his objective was not so much to survive as to become simply more prosperous.

The 'agrarian myth' or the 'agrarian bias', as it has been variously called, has been seen as "one of the more important elements that went into the making of the progressive mind."²⁶ In America, this 'myth' assumed the shape of the 'cult of the pioneer'; the idea, as Bryan put it, that the 'country was the world as God planned it, the city as man had made it.'²⁷ To an extent, Canadian insurgents shared this vision; but radicalism on the Prairies, though shrouded in Jeffersonian idealism, was not a product of the homesteaders mentalité. Indeed, Western agrarian progressivism was concerned with bringing agriculture into line with urban and industrial developments, and not with escaping into an arcadian past. George Edwards, the last President of the SGGA, emphasized this when he remarked that "the idea behind the whole farm movement is that agriculture is essentially a

dignified and honourable profession ... and that there is no reason why the returns of the Agriculturalist should not be sufficient to provide ... all the necessities of life and those comforts and conveniences which make the lot of the city dweller so envied."²⁸ The objective of progressivism was to synchronize the farmers' social status with his economic affluence and technological mastery. Rather than glorify the values of the 'sheepskin coated peasantry', the insurgents sought to set themselves apart from the myth of the struggling yeoman, and to cast themselves in the mold of the twentieth century industrialist. The majority of progressives felt they had proved their economic perspicacity, and they were tired of being treated by the rest of society as improvident hayseeds. Science and technology had been the mechanism by which they had escaped rural pauperism, and so too would it prove the medium of political and social ascendancy. "I believe that the spirit of business is the ruling spirit of life," thundered Henry Wise Wood, "the urge to Progressive action is to create better social conditions ... in accordance with the natural social laws ... of the intelligent serving of self-interest."²⁹ For the progressive, the time had passed when the farmer might feel himself indebted to society. As a successful capitalist, the agriculturalist wanted to "get into this world", and he modelled his organizations not upon the Granges and Alliances, but upon the Canadian Manufacturers' Association.³⁰ In the words of one

critic, "the Progressives are whole heartedly agreeable to play the game according to the rules of capitalism, only they want a chance to deal the cards so that they give themselves four aces."³¹ The progressive farmer was fighting to enter the modern world on an equal footing with industrial capitalism. C.W. Peterson, Editor of the Farm and Ranch Review, wrote: "the progress of mechanization has almost completely revolutionized agricultural practices ... Industry and agriculture are gradually converging. After all, a farm is only an industrial plant in which chemistry and the handling of materials are the predominant factors."³²

IV

Unfortunately, the spirit of progressivism did not long remain untainted. Originally a large farm-business movement, insurgency soon touched the ambitions and imaginations of a far more disparate segment of the rural population. Drawn largely by the free trade covenant, whose benefits had been magnified to the extent that they now constituted a panacea for agrarian hardships, Progressivism attracted a large number of supporters from the less advantaged farm masses. Lured by the promise of a reformed capitalism, many mid-sized producers turned to insurgency as a means of removing the obstacles to their entry into large-scale production. Unlike the wealthy farmers, these were men with serious

liabilities; men who were constrained and harassed by "mortgage interest and payments, implement payments, store bills, taxes", and all the other expenses incurred through over-investment during the boom years of the Great War.³³ These men sensed that they could overcome their liabilities only by altering "the manner in which the financial business of the country is conducted", and they turned to Progressivism "not out of the inherent virtues of the platform as outlined by the Council of Agriculture", but rather because they saw in independent politics "a means of getting rid of financial domination."³⁴ Unlike the large-farm Progressives, the middle-stratum producers did not feel that a continuation of laissez faire capitalism, coupled with a simple redistribution of the share of political benefits, was sufficient. They wanted guarantees of stability and reform, and their demand for a radically expanded government with extended economic powers was the mechanism by which they hoped to overcome debt and harness the power of industry.

There was, however, much common ground uniting both strands of progressive thought. Standing, as most of them did, at the upper end of the rural economic spectrum, all progressive farmers could be united by a common perception of the dangers inherent in overpopulation. They wanted to make agriculture not more accessible, but to transform it into a 'closed shop'. This attitude underlay the progressive's contempt for 'non-competitive producers' who found themselves on the edge of financial ruin and dispossession. "The concentration of

capital is the outstanding characteristic of modern business", the progressives assured themselves, and as such the disappearance of the insolvent farmers was a normal development. "The smaller the proportion of the population engaged in agriculture," mused C.W. Peterson, "the more economically will farm commodities be produced ... and the greater will be the prosperity of the individual farmer."³⁵ Some progressives were extremely outspoken in their disparagement of poor farmers who were unable to pay off their debts. "My idea is that the sooner we get rid of this kind of rubbish the better", wrote one organizer for the SGCA, "the more we help such people the longer they will be a curse to the community and the more unpaid debts they will leave behind when they do go down."³⁶ The crux of the progressive attitude to the rural poor was that they recognized the dangers of overproduction. Too many farmers meant too much wheat, and the results of this were not simply a falling wheat price, but also a reduced per capita share of the total profits. Furthermore, the more farmers tilled the land, the less each would own, and since acreage was necessary for effective mechanization, the progressives were anxious to ensure low population density. Both large and medium sized farmers, who were each in their own way moving along the path to industrialization, could be united in this fear of overpopulation. It was this unity of vision which provided the initial cement for the Progressive alliance.

From the outset, however, the nexus of insurgency was too brittle to long survive, and it began to weaken soon after the reestablishment of the Wheat Board in the summer of 1919. Ironically, the rift developed over the issue of grain marketing, which threatened to replace free trade as the cow bird of Prairie insurgency.³⁷ The problem lay in the fact that while large farmers enjoyed the benefits of open marketing, the medium-sized unit farmers were not so certain of its merits. During the Wheat Board years, the advantages of growing a larger crop had been obscured, and the benefits derived from selling on consignment had been limited by the fixed price. Consequently, the mid-sized farmer was able to enjoy the same price per bushel as the larger farmer, reducing the differential which many farmers believed was creating a rural polarization.³⁸ Furthermore, a guaranteed wheat price assured the medium-sized producer of a stability of income, and it prevented his ruination by an erratic market. Unlike the larger farmers, many of the smaller producers had significant burdens of debt, and lacking in a stable repayment capacity; they needed higher prices over an extended period of time to guarantee their continued prosperity. Without a secure source of income, a significant number of these farmers would be forced to sell some of their machinery or part of their holdings, and they would thereby slip back into the class of marginal commodity producers.³⁹ As the Progressive movement expanded, a ground swell pressure began to develop within the Grain Grower Associations for the Party to commit itself to an indefinite continuation of the Wheat Board. Iron-

ically, a movement that had originally been devoted to containing government involvement in the economy through free trade and open marketing, was being moved from below towards an endorsement of an extension of Federal economic control.

V

From his handsome wood-panelled office in the Grain Exchange Building in Winnipeg, Tom Crerar watched the box cars of insurgency rumble off across the Prairie. Now they were returning, but the wheat they bore was not to his liking. Personally, he loathed the idea of nationalized grain trading, and he made his opinions well known to all who cared to listen. A committed free trader and nineteenth century liberal, Crerar attacked the Wheat Board for restricting the freedom of competition which, in his view, could alone create balanced economic growth. "I cannot help but feel", he once wrote, that the Wheat Board was leading the farmers "chasing after strange gods, and in this way the [sic] " run a real danger of losing the opportunity to secure those changes which, in my opinion, are very necessary for our continued prosperity."⁴⁰ It was, he asserted, simply an attempt by the government and the farmers to monopolize grain trading, and to impose parochial interests on a naturally-ordained system of exchange and distribution. "I detest class legislation", he once stated, and "I detest class movements."⁴¹ Doggedly, conscien-

tiously, Crerar criticized the very objectives of the people whose votes he was seeking. "I stand for the abolition of special privilege in all its forms, if ... I stand against special privilege to manufacturers, ... how can I consistently support the idea of a bounty to wheat growers?"⁴² Independent, wealthy, determined, and all too consistent, T.A. Crerar was never a man to allow himself to follow the crowd. In an age of motion, his very resolution was to prove a terrible handicap.

In August, 1920, the Canadian Wheat Board was to be suspended and trading in wheat futures resumed at Winnipeg. For Crerar, Maharg, and the other executives of the cooperatives, this was not an unwelcome event, but for the mass of farmers, it signified an agrarian quietus. The general belief among the less advantaged producers was that a restoration of open marketing would lead to an immediate collapse of grain prices. "We shall witness", lamented one Saskatchewan farmer, "the sorry spectacle of a horde of grain dealers and exporters competing with each other ... the only way they can win is to under-sell each other ... [it] bids fair for the depression of prices."⁴³ Gradually, the force of this type of mass paranoia began to seem irresistible, and it even penetrated the sacrosanct chambers of the Council of Agriculture. In early 1920, the CCA issued a carefully-worded statement cautiously endorsing the idea of a temporary extension of the Wheat Board, without declaring itself "upon the principle of governmental control as a permanent policy."⁴⁴

Some members of the Council were less guarded in their opinions, and particularly among the leaders of the Grain Growers' Associations, 1920 was a year for ideological reorientation. Worried of losing the support of the middle-stratum farmers, leaders who had hitherto rejected the idea of governmental control suddenly became outspoken partisans in the struggle for a Federal Wheat Board. Henry Wise Wood, in particular, displayed an amazing capacity for intellectual gymnastics when he reversed his previous opinions, and announced uncatagorically that "we must have a Wheat Board ... There is no question about the Board being the best way to market our crop."⁴⁵

Henry Wise Wood's response to the Wheat Board agitation was part genius, part madness, and part inexplicable. Predictably, it was also eminently effective. Cloaking his inconsistencies in a messianic fervour, he soft-peddled the marketing debate, and concocted a complicated scheme of political authority and democratic responsibility. The farmers' revolt, he argued, must not fall victim to internal dissension, for all farmers must unify behind a general agrarian will. "We have never had a class opinion", he lamented, "and the consequence has been that so far as politics was concerned, half of you always went to the polls and killed the votes of the other half. Could anything be more foolish?"⁴⁶ To counter the divisive force of divergent interests in the rural community, Wood invented an ill-defined program of 'group political action', which combined traditional patrician progressivism

with his own singular messianic vision. The farmers, he asserted, were but one mass with one objective, and their true interest could be defined only in terms of their relationship as primary producers with the 'consuming' and the 'manufacturing' segments of society. For Wood, a natural harmony of interest could be developed between agricultural producers if they foreswore self-gain, and focused their attention on forces external to themselves. Introspection and self-re-
crimination could only destroy the Progressive movement, for "cooperation is the principle which is to save society."⁴⁷

The son of a wealthy slave owner from Ralls County, Missouri, Wood was, in many ways, the epitome of the college-educated radical patrician. The owner of a vast farm near Carstairs, he was a Democrat and a Free-Mason, and he believed strongly in the power of industry and technology as a social corrective.⁴⁸ According to Wood, what was needed was equality of competition, because unfair advantages created an unbalanced relationship between classes. Since the basis of society was the exchange principle, depression and hardship were consequences of the improper organization of the system of production and distribution. Politics was simply a method by which industrial classes might harmonize their own interests, and ensure that each group within society was offered an equal competitive opportunity. Rather than condemn mechanization and technological change, Wood was attempting to devise a political system which could institutionalize industrial progress.⁴⁹ He condemned the idea of stasis in Canadian

agriculture, and he warned against a continuation of policies designed to create a mass of "poor peasants" on the Prairies.⁵⁰ Dogmatic, remorseless and magnetic, Wood's ideas were broad enough to attract a large following, and obscure enough to alienate those who thought about the things he was saying.⁵¹ Espousing a doctrine which, in fact, venerated ruthless competition, Wood tempered his message with Biblical allusions, and hinted with Spencerian irony that man could only achieve a Cooperative Commonwealth through a primordial struggle for survival. Nobody really understood what Wood was talking about, but the prophet - with his ghoulish face and compelling baritone - was charismatic enough to convince people to follow him. Armed only with a messianic vision and an unsavory cunning, Wood won over enough people to save Alberta Progressivism from being ruined on the rocks of internal division. Lamentably, the unity which he imposed upon farm protest was too personal a creation to long survive its supreme architect.

Gloomily, the rest of the Prairie patricians watched Henry Wise Wood's dive into intellectual promiscuity with the air of affronted spinsters. "He's crazy and impractical," stammered one of his contemporaries, "he is one of these people who "prove" all sorts of things by reference to passages in Isaiah and Ezekial and ... [now] ... one can see him carrying these habits into the field of politics."⁵² T.A. Crerar was no less critical, and he chastized the Alberta farmers for "wandering off into the bogs of Wood's cloudy philosophy and pinning their faith on Wheat Boards and other

fancied short-cuts to relief."⁵³ For his part, the UFA's President turned his contemporaries' criticisms to his own advantage, and fostered the view that men like Crerar were opposing the Wheat Board and Group Government because as members of the Grain Trade they were worried for their profits.⁵⁴ Many farmers, both inside and outside of Alberta, probably saw the situation more clearly than even Wood could imagine. As one dissident Progressive noted, the reluctance of many farm organizations to endorse centralized marketing "was brought about by the influence of a minority of apparently wilthy [sic] farmers ... who were activated by no other motive than their own personal selfishness."⁵⁵

With alarming rapidity, a dangerous split was developing over the marketing question, and dissension was blasting the Progressive movement apart from within. "The difficulty", stormed Crerar, "is that action, consciously or unconsciously, is too frequently based on personal prejudice and suspicion. This is largely demoralizing the work of the Council and it is dropping from the position of moral leadership which it should occupy."⁵⁶ Unfortunately, while recognizing the problem, the patrician leaders were unsure of how to undermine it, and their indecision only worsened their isolation from the main drift of the movement. To outsiders, they seemed "asleep at the switch ... out of touch with the farmers."⁵⁷ Among themselves they evinced only confusion. "Just what could make so tremendous a change in [progressive] sentiment I cannot imagine," sighed a beleaguered J.B. Musselman, "I have

gone on with my work as usual ... I was doing my best."⁵⁸

Excuses, however, were no supplement for action, and in the summer of 1920, the Progressive leaders began to grope about for an alternative to the Wheat Board. The answer finally decided upon was a resurrection of the old CCA idea of semi-controlled marketing by cooperative methods, and in July, the UGG and the Saskatchewan Coop. announced their intention to investigate a 'wheat pooling' scheme.⁵⁹ In general, a wheat pool was a system whereby produce was massed into a common fund and marketed by a central selling agency. Returns would then be allocated on an equal basis among the business units according to a patronage dividend method.⁶⁰ The advantage of pooling to the large farmers and the cooperatives was that while it established a quasi-monopoly on grain handling, it did not terminate the operations of the futures' market. Indeed, the pool was to be a voluntary organization, functioning simply as an oversized grain growers' company; an alternative and not a replacement for open marketing.⁶¹ In a sense, there was nothing spectacular about the notion of a voluntary pool. It was simply a method of combining the centralized selling and patronage dividend facilities of the Wheat Board with the flexibility of open trading in wheat futures. Narrow in its objectives and deceptive in its benefits, the voluntary pool was merely an effort to subvert the growing demand for government marketing with the antiquated plum of cooperative selling. In fact, the idea was innocuous enough to have found an ardent supporter in Arthur Meighen,

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and the Progressive leaders were hard-pressed to explain how their ideas were going to ensure a higher price for wheat.⁶²

Clearly, the patrician Progressives did not display much political acumen when they decided to support a voluntary pool proposal. In principle it was vague, and in comparison to the Wheat Board, not very stimulating - a weakness made particularly apparent after grain prices entered a tail-spin following the resumption of futures trading. Nor did the idea garnish the unqualified support of all the Prairie patri- cians. Many of the executives of the UGG and the Cooperative Elevator Companies, who did not share the politically-minded Progressives interest in preserving the unity of the insurgent revolt, perceived the voluntary pool as a potential competitor, and they massed their opposition to the proposal.⁶³ Others, who had already found a place in their advocacy of the Wheat Board, condemned pooling as completely insufficient. Henry Wise Wood, who feared that the plan might fracture the alliance which he had so carefully wrought in Alberta, attacked the new scheme because "its adoption might lead to the breaking up of the solidarity of the farmers."⁶⁴ Wood's criticisms were especially damaging, and his opponents were swift to seize upon the inconsistency which his position revealed in his social thought. John Howey of the Edmonton Bulletin, was notably sardonic in remarking that while "for years Mr. Wood has been preaching what he calls cooperation ... in relation to the marketing of wheat it appears ... he has no faith in it and is sarcastic about the idea doing any good."⁶⁵

55

Despite the incongruities, however, Wood's attitude probably saved the UFA from the same internal strife which soon paralysed both the United Farmers of Manitoba and the SGGA. For, in the desperate moments of 1921, the mass of Prairie Progressives had decided that only a Wheat Board could save them from economic depression, and alone, Henry Wise Wood had anticipated their inclination.

To the east, in Saskatchewan, the patrician Progressives were neither so fortunate nor so cunning as they were in Alberta. Here, a deep fissure soon opened between those who wanted to follow the crowd, and support the Wheat Board, and those who clung desperately to the old ideas of open marketing, or the newer doctrines of voluntary pooling. Prominent Progressives such as Musselman, George Langley, Tom Sales and J.A. Maharg came out strongly in favour of pooling. Maharg, the Provincial Minister of Agriculture and eleven-term President of the Cooperative Elevator Company, proclaimed that a Wheat Board would have to be "appointed in direct opposition to the farmers' wishes," and that "pooling in the marketing of wheat" was the "only just policy."⁶⁶ A younger group of Progressives in the SGGA, centering around George Edwards, Alexander McPhail, and Violet McNaughton, assumed a radically different tack. McPhail and McNaughton, while supporting a voluntary wheat pool, agreed that a Wheat Board was an immediate necessity, if only as an interim step.⁶⁷ George Edwards, in contrast, was highly critical of the pool idea in all of its guises. As he told a Last Mountain audience during the

1921 General Election campaign, "the West needs a Wheat Board and no other solution will be acceptable."⁶⁸

For the original patricians of Saskatchewan's Progressive movement, the road to reform was becoming increasingly hazardous. J.B. Musselman, the Secretary of the SGGA and ancient warhorse of progressive radicalism, was characteristic in his confusion. J.B. was known to Saskatchewan as a careful man; a good farmer, he mingled a reverence for God, democracy and Anglo-Saxon traditions with a genial respect for political necessities. He was a practical, business-like progressive, and he wanted not so much to change society as to make it more charitable to himself and his associates. The struggle over a marketing policy caught Musselman at a disadvantage. As Secretary of the SGGA, he was being prodded into endorsing the Wheat Board, but as a prosperous farmer, and a major share-holder in the Cooperative Elevator Company, he disliked any arrangement which "would jeopardize the position of the present farmers' companies."⁶⁹ Ultimately, J.B. vacillated helplessly between the two poles. Speaking before District 6 of the SGGA in November, 1921, he stated that a Wheat Board was "absolutely contrary to all our ideas of British democracy," and that "even if we did get such a system at present, we should not get much for our wheat under present world conditions."⁷⁰ Two months later, in the face of mounting pressure, he reversed his position. "If we cannot get a Wheat Board", he told a Watrous audience, "then God help us."⁷¹ Within a month, he had again changed his

mind, "I shall continue my research into the grain business," he remarked, "with a view to having a feasible pooling plan under the control of the farmers fully worked out."⁷²

Clearly, events had outdistanced J.B. Musselman, and he was becoming lost in the miasma of indecision. In February, J.B.'s old friend, A.G. Hawkes, was defeated in his bid for the Presidency of the SGGA by the 'upstart radical' George Edwards. The defeat shocked Musselman and the old guard, and it drove home to all the degree to which "the whole Character of the Association" had changed "since we first went into politics three years' ago."⁷³ For the young turks, and for middle-stratum farm progressivism in general, the accession of Edwards was a momentous event. "The core of the inner circle is out", roared the Press, and never again would the farmers of Saskatchewan "be railroaded ... from a platform."⁷⁴ Stoically, the patricians tightened their ranks, and accepted a tactical withdrawal, falling back upon the Cooperative's more defensible heights. In September, Musselman himself resigned from his post as Secretary, and retreated with Hawkes and Sales into the barricaded board rooms of the Cooperative Elevator Company.⁷⁵ Within months, the back of patrician Progressivism in Saskatchewan had been broken, and the original insurgent alliance had been shattered. Gradually, the large farmers lost interest in the SGGA, and turned to the Cooperatives as the bulkward of their insurgency. It was to take over a decade for that rift to heal, and when it finally did, not Musselman, nor Maharg, nor even Edwards, were present for the reunion.

VI

Blurred tendencies, perhaps trends, or only temperaments - but in the early 1920s, Prairie progressivism was clearly moving in a different direction. What had begun as an élitist revolt by agrarian businessmen against governmental control, was becoming a movement of the moderately affluent with socialistic overtones. Strange forces were being released at all levels of the rural community, and even H.W. Wood was having trouble constraining the dynamics of reform. From far below, deep within the slough of despond, came a ferocious agitation of tremendous intensity. It rolled first across Saskatchewan, but it spread quickly, and as it travelled, it gathered momentum. In the years following the Wheat Board's disestablishment, while the Progressives grappled against themselves, a change was taking place in the wheat economy. With the collapse of grain prices, a new depression struck the Prairies, and the economic contradictions which had been accumulating since the War, burst the dykes of stability. Farmers who, in 1919-20, had counted themselves relatively successful, suddenly found themselves driven into penury. The debt situation, which the Progressives had found so easy to ignore in the frenzy of insurgency, became a source of widespread concern. New ideas began to circulate, and the fear of debt stimulated an intense hatred of lending institutions, which found expression in mad schemes of currency,

credit and banking reform. Membership in the old Progressive farmers' associations fell off rapidly, and new movements with strange habits and revolutionary ideologies began to appear.

Swiftly, the venerable chieftans of radicalism dropped into obscurity; first Musselman, Maharg, Lambert and Drury, and then Crerar himself. The grand master of grain trading had failed to heed the reactions of the people; he had set himself apart, detached his views from theirs, and castigated their ambitions. Never a tactful man, Crerar on a platform was big business talking Horatio Alger. He told the farmers he wanted laissez faire capitalism, and he chastized them for expecting more than equality from their representatives. His views on grain marketing and his criticisms of the Wheat Board had brought upon himself "a good deal of unpopularity and misrepresentation."⁷⁶ Finally, when it became clear that he was estranged from the mass of Progressives, and that his star was on the descent, the knives had come out. The Hyndman Royal Grain Commission probed into the workings of the UGG, accused the Coop. of stealing from the CPR, and revealed the extent to which the Company had been dealing in futures. Public embarrassment followed his flirtations with the Liberals, and criticisms of his political machinations came even from the CCA. Wood disagreed with him, Morrison damned him, and his Party failed to support him. In November, 1922, Crerar concluded that the "programme of the Council of Agriculture of six years ago ... is to a considerable measure being lost

sight of."⁷⁷ That same month, he yielded to the white heat of opposition and tendered his resignation from the leadership of the Progressive Party.

Somewhere in Western Canada, a shocked insurgent raised his head from the newspaper and remarked sadly that they were now standing at the open grave of progressivism. His forecast was to prove a touch premature.⁷⁸

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

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52. GIA, Smith Papers, Box 1 file 5, E.C. Dawson to W.N. Smith, February 28, 1920.
53. QUA, Crerar Papers, Box 105, Series III, T.A. Crerar to C.A. Dunning, December 28, 1922.
54. QUA, Crerar Papers, Box 105, Series III, T.A. Crerar to Manning Doherty, January 20, 1923.
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60. S.W. Yates, The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (Saskatoon, 1947), pp. 11-12.
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67. SAB, Violet McNaughton Papers, A.J. McPhail to Violet McNaughton, May 3, 1922.
68. Saskatoon Pheonix, November 18, 1921.
69. SAB, Musselman Papers, J.B. Musselman to N. Lambert, December 31, 1920.
70. Saskatoon Pheonix, November 7, 1921.
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72. Saskatoon Pheonix, February 18, 1922.
73. SAB, Musselman Papers, J.B. Musselman to William Rowles, March 7, 1922.
74. Courville, "The Saskatchewan Progressives", pp. 152-60.
75. SAB, McNaughton Papers, A.J. McPhail to Violet McNaughton, July 7, 1923.
76. QUA, Crerar Papers, Box 105, Series III, T.A. Crerar to C.A. Dunning, December 22, 1922.
77. QUA, Crerar Papers, Box 132, Series III, T.A. Crerar to W.E. Edwards, November 29, 1922.
78. QUA, Crerar Papers, Box 132, Series III, T.H. McConica to T.A. Crerar, December 22, 1922.

CHAPTER THREE

BUSINESS BUGS AND DEBTS

THE FARMERS' UNION AND THE WHEAT POOLS

The wagon rocked easily, its frame swaying and creaking in the soft light of the lantern. An empty mantle of darkness had closed over the Prairie, and silence rested like a phosphorescent sheet over the newly fallen snow. The founding conference was over and Norbert Henri Schwarz was edging his way slowly towards home. Behind him, the night wound its black sheaths about the countryside, the stygian texture punctuated only by the dull, uncertain light that streamed from the Ituna Town Hall. It was almost Christmas but there was little celebration. The agricultural depression, whose arrival had been foreshadowed as early as 1913-14, but whose grim spectre had so wantonly been ignored throughout the War years, had finally struck. In the space of months grain prices had fallen by almost fifty percent and the farmers' purchasing power had been drastically reduced. Bitter, depressed and angry the rural West had found itself suddenly driven headlong

into confusion. The stately Grain Growers' Association, shocked by the sudden disaster and bitterly divided by an ideological crisis, were thrown into paralysis. For men witnessing this apocalypse it all seemed vast, horrifying and strangely unreal. Reassuringly, Harry Schwarz moved his hand over the leather case which lay at his side and pressed his fingers against the contours of the book within. This was the first minute book of a new organization and wistfully, he imagined the words written in his own careful, unpracticed hand: "First Meeting of the Farmers' Union of Canada. Ituna, 17 December 1921."

Men like N.H. Schwarz possessed their own special kind of prestige. Though hardly wealthy or accomplished he was nonetheless proud of his comfortable home, his small farm and his young children. At twenty-three he had emigrated to Canada from Switzerland with a young bride and twenty-five hundred dollars, and he had settled on a neat quarter section of land near Ituna, Saskatchewan. That was in 1904 and during the good years that followed his farm prospered and his family grew. By 1920, he was "a free, respectable member of the community", with nine children and a sizeable mortgage. The land had been generous to Harry Schwarz and the banks had been accommodating. He was the archetype of petty bourgeois values and like McCourt's Jim Armstrong, he believed a small farm to be "more than enough for one man to look after properly."¹ Harry kept his holdings compact and manageable but he spent much of what he earned on edu-

cating his children and in improving the quality of his operation. A daring investor, he had impressed his friends with a series of radical purchases: a new gang-plow, an automobile and a tractor. Unfortunately, like so many small farmers struggling to earn a secure living, his prosperity and his good fortune were to prove apocryphal.

In the autumn of 1920, the bubble burst and a darkness descended upon Harry Schwarz and his homestead. It began just like 1919; yelling, scrambling traders clamoring over the floor of the Grain Exchange. With the reopening of the Winnipeg market in the summer of 1920, prices began to climb. A speculative voltage charged the air and the value of wheat futures was sent spiralling upward; \$2.42 a bushel in early August, \$2.45 7/8 by month's end and \$2.82 by mid-September. Restrained for half a decade, the market reeled under the pressure of the trading and then broke. Like a wave of gloom, buying began to slow and wheat prices began to topple downwards. By August 1921, the value of wheat had dropped to \$1.76 7/8 a bushel and a further precipitous decline followed, bringing No. 1 Northern to a low of \$1.11 1/8 a bushel in December.³ Suddenly, gilt-edged mortgage certificates were transformed from harbingers of prosperity into irritating reminders of overconfidence. Grimly, the farmers watched everything they had bought doubling in price because their income was being halved. The shiny new car, the tractor, the new coat of paint in the parlour; all those fixed charges were now only horrible mementos of an age of ruthless

deception. The smiling faces that grinned from Mr. Eaton's catalogue had become sardonic images from the past; cold, perverse and strangely infernal.

For the small farmers of western Canada, the agricultural depression of the early twenties was one of unprecedented magnitude. Farmers who had previously counted themselves among the moderately prosperous now found themselves being driven into penury. Having grown accustomed to relative security during the boom years of the previous decade, they were now entering the ranks of marginal production and in so doing, they were experiencing a severe deterioration in their living standard. The situation was far worse in the Southern Prairie than it was in the North; here the effects of economic depression were aggravated by prolonged drought and blowing winds. Lower yields and drought conditions meant that the only successful farmers were those who could work the land in large sections and thereby grow enough to survive while simultaneously benefitting from economies of scale. Smaller farmers who could not grow a crop large enough to live upon, let alone pay their debts, were faced with the grim alternative of starvation or escape. In the Palliser's Triangle area, south of the Benton-Davidson line, sixty-five hundred farms or thirty-seven percent of the total number, were abandoned in the years from 1920 to 1925. Of these vacated farms well over half were a quarter section in size and only five percent were larger than four hundred and eighty acres.⁴ By 1926, the average-sized farm

in the drought area was twice the western average and even this figure obscured the tremendous extent of some of the larger holdings.⁵ It was in the Southern Prairie that modern production methods first triumphed over the traditions of the wheat economy, but only at the cost of severe suffering and only with the help of nature's savage complicity.

In the deep black soil region of the Western Park Belt the condition of the farmers was slightly better. More fertile than the 'true prairie' of the South, the park lands received sufficient rainfall to ensure a higher yield per acre.⁶ Here, small unit production was a far more successful endeavor, for with higher yields an individual might survive a decreased wheat price for a considerable period of time. However, though a small farm in the Park Belt might have been a satisfactory unit of production, reduced grain prices meant lower profits and if the farm operation happened to be in debt, the farmer's situation might well be desperate.⁷ Furthermore, between 1920 and 1926 an ominous trend was beginning to display itself, which foreshadowed the eventual demise of marginal wheat production. In N.H. Schwarz's own region of Saskatchewan, the area between the Kelvington-Ituna meridian and the Manitoba border, the agrarian community was gradually changing. During the depression of the early twenties the number of farmers was steadily decreasing and the majority of farms abandoned were under one hundred and sixty acres in size. Simultaneously, a polarization was taking place with an increase

in the number of farms over three hundred and twenty acres and a steady erosion in the number of holdings under one-quarter section. More alarmingly, tenancy was expanding rapidly, doubling in five years, while a sharp decline was taking place in the proportion of full owners.⁸ Clearly, marginal producers were either being driven off the land or into tenancy, while the more successful agriculturalists were expanding their operations by renting unoccupied areas of land. For those standing between these two extremes and especially for the less prosperous middle-sized and small farmers, these must have been inauspicious developments. Confused, enraged and apprehensive, the farmers of Western Canada were beginning to see that the ideal of the independent yeoman was as transient as it was ephemeral.

II

Grimly, Norbert Henri Schwarz looked upon his life which had turned suddenly to ruin. Clearly, his woes were a product of terrible circumstance; yesterday he had been prosperous, happy and the envy of his friends; today he was poverty's unwilling bedfellow. The gang-plow was the first to go, and then the tractor, but the debt payments continued.⁹ There had to be something in it, he reasoned, something deeper than the inexorable workings of an inhuman market structure. Slowly, methodically, he struggled with his

alleged greeds and volcanic resentments and found cohesion in the simplest answers. Visions of a universal conspiracy crept stealthily into his worried mind and in his frustration, he began to see the cause of his distress not in markets or mechanisms of trade, but in an evil system which consciously operated to impoverish the mass of producers. Somewhere, the farmers were being prevented from enjoying "the produce of our work, the joys of life which all workers are entitled." Under present conditions, the farmers were being deluded; they were being induced to invest heavily and then they were being snipped off the land with scissors of depression and overproduction. "We are expected," mused Schwarz grimly, "to work for our future destruction." Such was the inevitable consequence of a system of competition and profit; a system created by strangers and preserved by politicians who insiduously corrupted all that they touched. The government, he concluded, had had the power to prevent the collapse of prices, but it had not done so. Clearly, it had ignored the people's needs because it was representative only of the vested interests, which exercised their authority through "a few controlled old men."¹⁰ Since the farmers' organizations had been unwilling to compel the plutocrats to listen to the people, they too must be in league with the forces of oppression. "The Grain Growers were not run by the farmers", they couldn't be; they were tools of the "politicians...who do not seem to realize the needs of the farmers, nor their actual difficult position."¹¹

73

As the agricultural depression ground into its second year, N.H. Schwarz decided that it was time to stop thinking and start acting. Along with his friend, Joe Thompson, he called a meeting of local farmers to discuss the economic problems which confronted them all. Christmas was barely a week away and the absence of festivities only served to worsen the farmers' disquietude into a volatile misery. In the meeting room of Ituna's Town Hall, a small crowd of embarrassed men sat quietly and listened to Schwarz tell them that it was time to "unite to protect themselves." In his slow, meaningful way, he explained that the farmers had become slaves of an unsympathetic plutocracy which wanted only to drive them from their land. The SGGA, to which most of them apathetically belonged, had forgotten about them, and because of its "lethargic, practically dead" behavior, "the government was in no need of worry." In order to regain control over their lives, he charged, the farmers must "obtain a complete control over their produce," and that meant growing and marketing the wheat "for themselves", and not for others. Since they could not depend upon the traditional elite to lead them, the poor farmers must organize a new movement of their own. These were hot words on a cold night, but they stirred angry hearts and by the end of the evening the Farmers' Union of Canada (FUC) had been created.¹²

The new movement spread rapidly into the countryside around Ituna and by the beginning of February, the Union had six locals evenly dispersed in the area between Goodeve

24

and Kelliher.¹³ Originally, the Farmers' Union was an organization of failures. Its members were poor men; farmers who had lost their freedom and their dignity in the price crash of 1920-21. They might once have been like K.H. Schwarz; independent and comfortably wealthy, but now they were only penurious misfits. For many of their more prosperous neighbours, these men were undeserving. Being small farmers who had not expanded competitively they were popularly considered the "peasantry" of the Canadian countryside. In Western agriculture, "the best class of people" had always been "people with means and ability to carry on farming operations on a considerable scale."¹⁴ The farmers who joined the FUC were by no means "the best class of people"; they were the non-competitive immigrants who had been deluded by the belief that a quarter-section homestead was a possession of substance. Generally, they were not even British or Americans, but Irish, Germans, Frenchmen or Eastern Europeans; groups who, from the beginning, had been settled on "second class land...which the homesteaders from the United States or Eastern Canada passed by."¹⁵ C.A. Dunning, the Premier of Saskatchewan, called them the "dead-beat radicals", or more accurately, "the impecunious" and he believed them to be men "who are so loaded with debt that they do not ever expect to get out of debt."¹⁶

On March 24, 1922 a Constitution was drafted and presented before a small knot of farmers who had assembled in Ituna for the Farmers' Union's first District Meeting.¹⁷

A peculiar document, apparently written by Schwarz himself, the Constitution was a clear reflection of the Union's ideological deficiency. In fact, the FUC's Constitution was a simple case of a tract created by the grafting of derived notions from the outside onto the vague mentalités of an indigenous group.¹⁸ Ostensibly, the preamble to the document was an indistinguishable facsimile of the introduction to the constitution of the One Big Union (OBU), and it was characterized by the same pseudosyndicalist industrial vision.¹⁹ According to the Charters of both the OBU and the FUC, modern society was composed of 'buyers' and 'sellers' and between these "two classes a continuous struggle takes place...a struggle of the buyer to buy as cheaply as possible ... and of the seller to sell for as much as possible." Simple enough, especially when the Unions made the obvious intellectual leap from 'buyers' to 'sellers' to 'master' and 'worker'. "The buyer," runs the preamble, "are always masters - the sellers always workers." At this point, however, the adopted ideology was abandoned, for instead of making the next logical step and arguing, as the OBU did, that the struggle would eventually climax in a revolution, "when production for profit shall be replaced by production for use," the farmers injected into the equation their own ideas of an ideal society. The object of organization, according to the Farmers' Union, was not socialism, but rather the assurance of a 'just price' within a competitive hierarchy. The producers were to be "enabled to fix their own price

above the cost of production, a price reasonable towards producer and consumer."²⁰ Paradoxically, the idiom of revolt which the FUC bequeathed to agrarian dissent was not revolutionary socialism, but rather militant conservatism. The goal was not to advance change but to prevent it; "to prevent the farming population from falling into decadence and slavery...to protect our members... and to return our homes to their rightful owners."²¹

Shortly after presenting the Constitution to the Union, Schwarz received an invitation to discuss a possible amalgamation from a Kelvington group which called itself the "Industrial Farmers' Union".²² The IFU was a 'secret brotherhood' of poor farmers that had been created in September of 1921, as a reaction against the quiescent attitude of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association.²³ Shrouding itself in the rituals of a folkloric past, the IFU appealed to the farmers' sense of alienation and dislocation. A 'closed door' organization, the Industrial Farmers' Union performed 'secret work' amidst a fraternity of 'Brothers' who were each sworn to a vow of silence. Meetings opened with a runic celebration in which the 'Outer' and 'Inner' guards were posted and a password was given, followed by "The Grip, the Test Word and Its Answer. The Working Sign, The President's Answering Sign. Warning Words."²⁴ On July 1, Schwarz went to Kelvington with instructions from President Thompson to negotiate an amalgamation with the new organization. The secret ceremonies immediately appealed to his conspiratorial

77

provincialism and he "was especially impressed by the spirit of Brotherhood shown by the members."²⁵ In late July, 1922 a joint convention was held in Saskatoon and a formal union was effected; Schwarz was elected Secretary of the organization and Louis Phillip McNamee, the leader of the IFU, was chosen President. The name and Constitution of the Farmers' Union of Canada was endorsed, but the delegates voted to adopt the ritual and secrecy of the Kelvington group.²⁶ Gradually, Schwarz came to realize that poor farmers all across the Province were feeling the same sense of frustration and anxiety which had initially spurred him into action and "more than ever before" he came to understand "that the Farmers' Union of Canada had not been started by a single individual but had been started by the irresistible force of existing circumstance."²⁷

Among the amber fields of wheat, a popular culture was thrashing out wildly against the inexorable machinations of progress. Change was driving the poor from their homes and the people were militant in their demand for continued security. "We want absolute protection," roared Louis McNamee, "we want the absolute protection of saving the people from paying on a hopeless burden of debt a bill of interest which you can never pay."²⁸ The movement lurched forward. In February, 1923, the FUC had three hundred and sixty-six members and by the end of the year, that number had doubled.²⁹ Neither the poor farmers nor their Union quite knew what to do to restore agrarian security, but for both the first in-

stinct was the strongest - resistance. We can "defeat the scheme of the creditors," chanted McNamee, "by a unanimous declaration of "Hands Off". On a local level, this meant the organization of penny auctions; the interdiction of the sale of debtors' property by the prevention of bids from going above a fraction of an item's worth. Goods sold under these conditions would then be returned to the debtor by the purchaser, and his further impoverishment would thus be averted.³⁰ As one Union member recalled, "when we came in to the auction we were told we couldn't bid more than a dollar or two dollars on anything and we wore a bow...if you didn't wear a binder twine bow, you didn't get into the sale."³¹

On the Provincial level, the FUC carried out an active campaign for the declaration of a moratorium on debt. For the Union, a moratorium implied a restoration of a just relationship between debtor and creditor. It "means that people cannot be forced to pay their debts but that it is left to themselves to decide how to pay them to the best of their ability."³² Violently, angrily, the poor farmers of Saskatchewan were fumbling about for a weapon to use in their struggle with the forces of rural change, and in their rage they began to search the field for a Messiah to lead them in the Crusade.

In many ways, Aaron Sapiro was an unlikely man to lead the poor farmers' revolt against debt and depression. A tough Jewish lawyer from Chicago with an aquiline face and a polished style, Sapiro had spent most of his adult life on

the Pacific Coast, working as an attorney for the prosperous Fruit Growers' Association in California. Somehow, during the war years, Sapiro had become interested in marketing economics, and he had assumed a significant role in formulating the contracts for the Sun Maid Raisin Cooperative and the California Fruit Growers' Exchange.³³ A high-priced salesman of Cooperative enterprise and the iron-clad contract, 'Sapiro' soon became a synonym in America for producer-controlled marketing associations. In a series of whirlwind tours, he stumped the Midwestern and Coast states, proclaiming his gospel of Cooperation, and for a time, he even became the trump card in the American Farm Bureau Federation's perennial power struggle with the National Farmers' Union.³⁴ In 1923 the B.C. Dairymen's Association invited the pugnacious attorney north to discuss the possibility of organizing a dairy pool, and when the editor of the Calgary Herald heard the news, he asked Sapiro to come to Alberta and reveal the benefits of Cooperative Marketing in Wheat.³⁵ Staunchly opposed to H.W. Wood, the Herald clearly wanted to use the messianic lawyer as a ploy to discredit the UFA in its opposition to a Cooperative Marketing idea. Unquestionably, the scheme was a good one, for it worked perfectly. Wood attacked the Pool, Sapiro attacked Wood, and the farmers believed the aggressive young attorney.³⁶ Membership in the UFA began a precipitous decline, and even the loyal Secretary of the Association reflected gloomily that "the disaffection" was largely a consequence of "the way the Central Office

mishandled Sapiro."³⁷

Apparently, William Thrasher was the first member of the FUC's Executive to propose bringing Sapiro to Saskatchewan.³⁸ For some time, "the air" had been "thick with rumors in regard to Wheat Pools" but no one in the Farmers' Union had until then given it serious consideration.³⁹ The Pool was considered to be the brainchild of Crear and his Progressives and its obscure and ineffectual character held little appeal to poor farmers in need of immediate assistance. If anything, they wanted a reestablishment of the Wheat Board, for at least in government marketing they were guaranteed a stable price which experience had shown them would be above cost of production. However, in the wake of the failure of Western leaders to agree upon the Wheat Board strategy in the summer of 1922, the farmers were prepared to investigate other possibilities. The Sapiro plan, with its five-year contract proviso, compared favourably with the Wheat Board, for if enough farmers signed the Pool contract, the futures' market of the Grain Exchange could be circumvented completely. Furthermore, by inviting the prestigious Sapiro to Saskatchewan, the Farmers' Union assumed an importance and esteem which transcended its seven hundred members. In every sense, it seemed a promising idea, and McNamee and the rest of the Executive grew as excited about it as "ten year old kids with a new toy."⁴⁰ At the 1923 Convention, President McNamee waved the formalities, announced that Sapiro would save them from onerous debt, and passed his hat around the audience to raise

money for a telegram. "We had listened to long-winded talks before without much profit," McNamee explained, and now the farmers "had more important things to do."⁴¹

III

In Saskatchewan, Charles Avery Dunning was a political prodigy. Broad, moralistic, ambitious; he was in every respect a solid, decent fellow. A liberal reformer cut from the appropriate pattern, his background was suitably working-class, his clothes were of the finest broadcloth, his hair was immaculate and even his enemies called him Charlie. He had emigrated to Canada from Leicestershire at the tender age of seventeen and he prided himself on the wealth he had acquired by his own efforts. A true liberal in his outlook, Dunning used his own exceptional career as an explanation of his antipathy for paternalism. "My own pioneer experiences in the North West Territories and in this Province," he recalled, "convinced me that neighbourly cooperation is a greater factor in enabling newcomers to get a start than any Government assistance, financially or otherwise, could be."⁴² Politically energetic and unquestionably talented, he had risen quickly through the ranks of the farm movement. At twenty-six, he was general manager of the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company; at thirty-one he was Provincial Treasurer and at thirty-seven, he was Premier. As grand sa-

chem of one of Canada's most successful political machines, Dunning wanted nothing more than to keep himself and his Party in power, and that implied appeasing agriculture's insurgent temper. The problem was a relatively simple one and the only difficulty lay in determining just what it was that the mass of farmers wanted. To his credit, Dunning tried everything to satisfy the agrarian malaise and it is indicative not only of his own talents, but also of the general confusion of his times, that no one exploited the inconsistencies of his actions.⁴³

Since the accession of George Edwards to the leadership of the SGGA in February, 1922, the Association had been moving steadily towards an unqualified endorsement of compulsory government marketing.⁴⁴ This trend mirrored developments in the other Prairie Provinces, where the call for a renewal of the Wheat Board was gradually overwhelming the patrician Progressive's demand for a voluntary pooling agency. In order to dissipate the growing pressure, the Federal Liberals offered to establish a Wheat Board if legislation was granted concurrently by at least two of the Western Provinces.⁴⁵ Ironically, none of the Prairie Premiers were particularly enthusiastic about the idea. Manitoba's John Bracken favoured a voluntary pooling system and Herbert Greenfield, the leader of the UFA Government, believed that politicians were already too much involved in agriculture, and that as a result, "the old spirit of 'get in there in spite of setbacks' is rapidly disappearing."⁴⁶ Nonetheless,

despite their personal sentiments, none of the Western Premiers could easily resist the popular pressure for the Wheat Board's restoration. Both Bracken and Greenfield were leaders of farmers' governments and both the UFA and the UFM had recently reiterated their demand for governmental control of Wheat marketing.⁴⁷ Though Dunning was a liberal, his position was probably the most difficult, for in early 1922, Musselman and Maharg had led the SGGA into Provincial politics.⁴⁸ Somehow, the Liberals had to prove that they were more representative of the farmers' wishes than were the Progressives, and that implied aligning themselves with the general agrarian will. Since the opposition of Maharg, Musselman and the other leaders of Saskatchewan Progressivism to the Wheat Board was widely known, Dunning probably saw the issue as a mechanism by which he could exploit the cleavages in the farmers' ranks. In the mid-summer of 1922, the Alberta and Saskatchewan Governments pushed through the necessary enabling legislation and promptly set about searching the field for qualified individuals to administer the proposed Wheat Board.

Given the motives underlying the actions of the principal characters in the Wheat Board extravaganza of 1922, it is hardly surprising that the whole affair rapidly assumed an air of theatrical shabbiness. Throughout one torrid August week, Dunning and Greenfield applied themselves to the task of inviting the team of experts to manage the nascent Wheat Board. H.W. Wood was contacted, as were Stewart and

Riddell, the Chairman of the previous Board, J.R. Murray of the UGG, T.A. Crear, J.A. Maharg and C. Rice-Jones.⁴⁹

All of them promptly refused and the Wheat Board proposal was abandoned. Excluding Stewart and Riddell, who argued that the legislation was flawed because Manitoba had not agreed to endorse it, none of the men approached could possibly have been expected to accept the administrative posts. Wood had been, at best, an unwilling convert to controlled marketing and he was comfortable enough in the President's chair of the UFA that he had even chosen it over the Premiership of Alberta. All of the other 'experts' contacted were well-known opponents of socialized marketing and all belonged "to the ordinary grain trade, and there can be little doubt that the great majority of men in the grain trade are opposed to the Wheat Board idea."⁵⁰

Unquestionably, the whole affair smacked unpleasantly of deception, for as John Howey of the Edmonton Bulletin noted, "to suppose the Government did not know" if the individuals approached would assent, "is difficult [to believe]. They certainly could have found out, and it was their business to find out before calling the members together on a fool's errand."⁵¹ Nonetheless, despite the superficiality of their efforts, the participating Premiers acquired reputations for being the true spokesmen of the farmers' interests and they strengthened their control over the agrarian vote. For Dunning, the whole fiasco was a particular triumph, for it illustrated the ease with which the Provincial Pro-

gressive leadership could be isolated from the mass of its supporters. His next action was even more demonstrative of his political brilliance, for with unrelenting swiftness, he closed upon the sacrosanct citadel of patrician insurgency itself. Speaking in Saskatoon in December, 1922 Dunning proposed that an alternative to the Wheat Board might be the creation of a voluntary Wheat Pool, and he pledged Liberal Party support and Government funds to the creation of an interprovincial marketing cooperative.⁵²

The 'Dunning Plan', as it became known, was a simple reiteration of the voluntary pooling strategy which Crear and Maharg had been advocating since 1920. Under this system, the export subsidiaries of the UGG and the Saskatchewan Cooperative Elevator Company would be amalgamated into a single farmer-owned marketing agency. This joint enterprise would make initial payments and issue participation certificates on a pooling basis for all wheat delivered through the elevators of the two parent bodies. After payment of a ten percent dividend on the capital invested by the Co-op and the UGG, and after setting aside a reserve of twenty percent, surplus receipts would be issued as participation payments to farmers who marketed through the Pool. No binding or long-term contract would, however, be involved and farmers would be free to deliver as much of their wheat to the Pool for as long as they wanted without penalty.⁵³

The Dunning proposal successfully outmanoeuvred the Saskatchewan Progressives. Venerable insurgents like Crerar,

Murray and Rice-Jones immediately offered it their support, but for the leaders of the struggling Progressive opposition in Saskatchewan, an open endorsement of the Liberal Premier would have been political suicide. Consequently, an unlikely spectacle revealed itself, with Maharg, Musselman and Langley aligning themselves against a pooling proposal which they themselves had advocated barely one year before.⁵⁴ This Progressive confusion over a marketing strategy only served to underscore the divisions which wracked the Saskatchewan farmers' movement. Musselman and Maharg had recently been driven out of the SGGA and their power base was being eroded by the pressure of the mid-sized farm revolt and the machinations of the Liberal Premier. Frustrated and vengeful, the middle strata farmers severed their final connection with the old patrician leadership and renounced the insurgent cause. Membership in the SGGA declined rapidly and desperately, the new leaders struggled to provide the Association with a revised sense of purpose. Dunning had successfully broken the back of the Progressive revolt, but in so doing, he had destroyed the credibility of agrarian insurgency at a time when the Saskatchewan farmers' movement was in the throes of an agonizing reorientation. By systematically neutralizing both the middle-sized producers' demand for a Wheat Board and the patrician plan for voluntary pooling, the Liberals had fractured the cement of agrarian progressivism. The reform movement was now adrift and an immovable wedge was driven between the old élite and their insurgent supporters.

At the SGGA Annual Convention of 1923, the new Secretary, A.J. McPhail, lamented the presence of "a more or less wide-spread feeling that the Association had been suffering from an inability to interpret to itself or to its members a reason for its existence."⁵⁵

IV

Virility returned to progressivism in Saskatchewan only by default. It happened in the brilliant August haze of 1923 when Aaron Sapiro blistered a swathe of energy across the Canadian Prairies. It began first in Alberta; the apostolic gestures, the fervid eyes, the short vibrant body thrown forward towards the crowd, the cascading baritone voice of the skilled orator. Day after day, he stumped the Provinces and word "spread like wild-fire that this man Sapiro had brought...the contract pool." He became the redeemer, the savior of the wheat economy and "the name Sapiro had become sacred to the people of the land."⁵⁶ In the wake of the failure of the Dunning-Greenfield wheat board proposal, the middle-sized producers joined with the militant leadership in proclaiming the contract pool a solution to their economic woes. Unlike the voluntary pool, Sapiro's plan bound the farmers to a five-year comprehensive contract, and it thus offered a mechanism whereby the open market could be circumvented by cooperative methods. "There is not a thing

that the Grain Exchange can do which the pool cannot do," stormed C.H. Harris, the leader of the Alberta section of the Farmers' Union of Canada, "with this difference, the pool will be working in the interests of the producers, while the Grain Exchange has been working in the interests of the grain dealer and speculator."⁵⁷

In Alberta, the drive for a contract pool threatened to create a realignment in the economic composition of agrarian dissent. Frustrated with the incapacity of political insurgency to guarantee them a competitive advantage, the moderately prosperous farmers had begun to drift away from the Progressive élite.⁵⁸ Between 1922 and 1923 membership in the UFA had declined by almost twenty thousand, and the number of accredited delegates to the Annual Convention had decreased by over fifty percent. The farmers who remained in the movement were becoming increasingly militant, and at the 1923 Convention, the delegates ignored the opposition of the Executive and passed a resolution endorsing the Contract Pool.⁵⁹ Membership in the Alberta section of the Farmers' Union of Canada began to increase and optimistically, the Unions' leadership debated the possibility of absorbing the UFA.⁶⁰ Never oblivious to a threat, Wood sensed the danger and in the wake of Sapiro's visit, he swung the Executive of the United Farmers' in behind the contract pool. By moving swiftly, Wood hoped to bolster membership in the organization, while simultaneously overpowering the threat from below.⁶¹ Although the harvest was almost upon them,

the leaders of the UFA initiated an intensive and enthusiastic campaign to secure contracts covering at least one half of the wheat crop acreage. Unwilling, however, to fully endorse the concept of a binding contract, Wood offered participants the option of withdrawing from the Pool if the acreage objectives were not realized by a stipulated date.⁶² Remarkably, Henry Wise Wood found himself the President of a five-year contract Wheat Pool which barely six months before, he had derided as being both inadequate and revolutionary.⁶³ As the Edmonton Bulletin shrewdly noted, the old Progressives had supported the idea "not because the price of wheat is low, or because the Pool would make it higher, but because the leaders of the UFA organization decided that the time had arrived to reassert their control."⁶⁴

In principle, the advantage of pooling was that it provided the producers with influence over the market price of their commodity. According to the Sapiro model, a pool could dominate a market if it could be guaranteed a sixty percent share of the total supply of a particular product. The basic objective was to eliminate price spreads and to equalize returns so that each producer received the average unit value for his goods.⁶⁵ Clearly, large farmers who were able to capitalize upon price fluctuations would be no more attracted to contract pooling than they would be to a wheat board, and even among the mass of producers there was no single concept of the goals involved. To the poor farmers

the pool offered security and a return to the prosperity of the war years. It was "a weapon of enormous power...against the mortgage, banking, grain and transportation companies." Small farmers thus saw cooperative marketing as a key to their survival, a cure to their economic ills and a force of equality and stability in an ever changing world.⁶⁶ These impulses were not, however, shared by the more prosperous producers. Rather than perceiving the Pool as a universal palliative, the middle-sized farmers believed it to be a means of equalizing transaction margins, of increasing profits and of assuring "safe and sane conditions." For the prosperous farmer, the Pool promised "to build on the Prairie a new aristocracy of achievement," to make producers into monopolists and to "turn the Man Behind the Plow into the mightiest merchant in the Dominion."⁶⁷

Due to the polarized nature of farm protest in Saskatchewan, these divergent perceptions were to be more pronounced and disruptive than they were in Alberta. However, in both provinces, they were to exert a lasting influence. Under Henry Wise Wood's unwilling tutelage, the Alberta Wheat Pool was to lean heavily towards conservatism and it was to become a simple marketing organization rather than a weapon in the poor farmers' struggle against debt and depression. This was not particularly surprising, for the UFA had successfully coopted the pooling movement and had thereby prevented the organization from falling into the hands of a more radical element. In Saskatchewan, the situation was more complicated,

for the entire pool idea owed its origin to the militant leadership of the poorest strata of the society. Here too, was the Wheat Pool to betray the desires of the debt-ridden farmers, but in Saskatchewan's turbulent atmosphere, the task of reorienting the organization was to be a costly and ap-
probrious endeavor.

"We in the Association are in a rather delicate position," mused Alexander McPhail, the Secretary of the SGGA in May, 1923. The Association's supporters had recently "reiterated their demand for a Wheat Board just as strongly as they had in former years," but McPhail realized that there was little chance for a reinstitution of closed marketing, after the failure of the Dunning-Greenfield plan of 1922. Membership in the SGGA was continuing its downward spiral, and ideologically, the movement had lost not only its self-esteem, but also its raison d'être. For McPhail, the Association's only hope for revival lay in a bold new direction and he fully understood the potential dynamism of a pooling plan. "If our Association...were to come out flat-footed...for the organization of a farmers' owned and controlled cooperative agency," he told Violet McNaughton, the President of the Women's Section, "it would be the greatest boost that our Association could have. If we don't do it in the near future, the initiative is going to come from other sources."⁶⁸ Circumstances were to prove McPhail's words to be prophetic, for by the summer's close, the FUC had emerged from obscurity to steal the garland of dissent from the SGGA, and to launch

Saskatchewan's first drive for the Contract Pool.

When Aaron Sapiro spoke, people started doing things. He had already twirled a web of contractual obligations around Alberta, and now he was entrancing Saskatchewan with the moral legalism of his invective. Conspicuously, Louis P. McNamee appeared with him everywhere and he seized upon every opportunity to link the futures of the Pool with those of the Farmers' Union of Canada. Together, they seemed an unlikely pair; the one subtle, oratorical and precise, the other brash, impolite and overbearing. In a peculiar way, however, they complimented each other, for McNamee lent the shrewd lawyer a legitimacy which he perhaps would not have possessed in the eyes of the Canadian farmers. When at one meeting, a dissident voice had called Sapiro a 'Jew', McNamee had leapt to his feet and, filling the hall with thunder, exclaimed, "so was Jesus Christ."⁶⁹ The Farmers' Union rode the crest of the wave and with every step the Wheat Pool made, the Union swelled and rumbled; 700 members in July, 1923, over 2,000 by year's end and 10,000 by the time of the 1924 Convention.⁷⁰ "The farmers," mused E.A. Partridge, the social conscience of agrarian dissent, "had bitten the business bug."⁷¹ Lamentably, members alone were insufficient, for despite a heroic campaign, the Union failed to obtain contracts covering more than one half of the necessary wheat acreage. The problem for the FUC was more than one of tactics, for it was inextricably linked to the nature of the organization's socio-economic composition. In the

Autumn of 1923 the Union was still a movement of poor farmers and in the Wheat Pool's first unsuccessful campaign, it garnished its greatest support in small farm areas like Batteford, Biggar, Humboldt, Wynyard and Shellbrook.⁷²

Despite their large numbers, small farmers cultivated a relatively small proportion of the wheat acreage, for in 1926 farms under three hundred and twenty acres made up eighty-one percent of the total number, but comprised only forty-one percent of the aggregate acreage.⁷³

In this respect, the Farmers' Union would have to expand the movement's basis of support if it were to obtain the Contract Pool, and this implied attracting the middle and large farmers who had remained in the SGGA to the cause of cooperative marketing. Grimly, McNamee faced the inevitable and contacted the leaders of the SGGA with a view to having them "bring the force of your organization behind the Wheat Pool movement."⁷⁴

Paradoxically, the leaders of the SGGA had anticipated the Union's dilemma and were already moving to expropriate control of the Wheat Pool campaign from the FUC. In July they had established a committee to devise a voluntary, non-contract pool, but during Sapiro's visit to Canada, they altered that policy and adopted the same program as the Farmers' Union.⁷⁵ In many ways, this volte face was somewhat belated, for the Union had already gained public recognition as the true spokesman for the contract pool, and large numbers of farmers were turning towards it as an alternative to the Grain Growers' Association. Realizing this, President Edwards,

Secretary McPhail and George Robertson approached McNamee and agreed "to come in with the Farmers' Union of Canada and the Sapiro plan," renouncing forever "the thing they called a pool, yet had no contract."⁷⁶ Ironically, the leaders of each organization believed that they could use the joint pool drive as a means of emasculating the rival group. McPhail told members of the SGGA that he had only agreed "to fight en masse" because "our backs are to the sun," and he made it clear that "our Association will survive."⁷⁷ McNamee was far more precise in his intentions, for as he stated emphatically, "the Provincial farm organizations could...find common ground" only in an acceptance of "the Farmers' Union principles."⁷⁸

With the support of both the FUC and the SGGA, the organizational campaign of 1924 was an overwhelming success. By June, the fifty percent acreage objective had been exceeded and 46,509 contracts secured.⁷⁹ From the beginning, however, tension and internal disruption characterized the operations of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. Alexander McPhail, who became President of the Pool, considered Louis C. Brouillette of the FUC to be an unnecessary annoyance and he was pleased that he had been elected Vice-President only because it was "a nominal position and I was afraid if anyone did defeat him that they might turn around and elect him to the Central Board and that would have been much worse."⁸⁰ The FUC responded in kind and McNamee was even chastized by the Union executive for insinuating that McPhail was not concerned

with advancing the interests of the farmer.⁸¹ The first major confrontation between the two groups erupted over the issue of elevator operations; the Union advocating the establishment of an independent country points' network, while the Association wanting to use the existing machinery of the Cooperative Elevator Company.⁸² Ultimately, a compromise was secured under which the Pool established some independent elevators and then purchased the Cooperative outright, but no solution had been found until the FUC used "the sledge hammer" with the SGGA delegates "in seeing that this Pool was kept along the proper course."⁸³

Behind the intense and protracted debates over pooling strategies was a fundamental difference of opinion. For McPhail, Robertson and the executives of the SGGA, the Pool was simply a vast marketing cooperative, and as such it must cultivate friendly relations with the other grain companies. In this sense, they perceived the function of the organization as being limited to the elimination of "the chances of speculation as much as possible" and they believed that "orderly" trading meant, quite simply, the "even distribution of sales over the crop year" which, it was argued, would facilitate the search "for an average price for the season." A second mechanism by which an average wheat value was determined was through a conservative adjustment of sales to parallel market demand. By this method, wheat was sold when prices were rising and withheld during declines, in the interests of exploiting periods of inflation and supporting temporarily

depressed markets. The implication of this method was that the pool tended to accumulate residual stocks, rather than buying futures during market dips with the interest of speculating on long positions. In effect, this approach emphasized a cautious, non-influential approach to the grain trade where "the pool could not raise prices but could introduce various economies in marketing and increase the steady returns to the farmer."⁸⁴

In a vital sense, the attitude of the FUC to the Wheat Pool was radically different from that of the Association. McNamee had opposed using the elevators of the Cooperative because he objected to the fact that "many of the heaviest share holders in the farmers' grain companies are not farmers at all." By using the Coop's elevators and paying the fixed charges on grain handling to an unrepresentative organization, "the thousands of farmers who are too poor financially to buy shares" were in essence those who supplied "the toil that pays the dividends to the few fortunate ones that own shares."⁸⁵ For the FUC, the Pool was a means of controlling the grain trade and ending the exploitation of "the farmer by the man who farms the farmer." The Pool was therefore more than a trading company; it was designed "to battle and to conquer the interlocking financial, commercial and industrial interests." By regarding the Wheat Pool as no more than a mechanism for "orderly marketing", the executives of the SGGG were attempting "to keep the farmers controlled rather than to have the farmers control."⁸⁶ Distrust thus char-

acterized any attempt by the Pool to adapt rather than to fight with the open market, and the FUC frequently challenged McPhail's corporate attitude towards grain trading. "McPhail does not want to attack the grain companies," mused the radical press. "and...the companies...don't want to attack the Pool...There is something wrong somewhere."⁸⁷

Unfortunately, the giant-slaying mood of the militants was grounded in instability. It was a doctrine particularly suited to the poor and oppressed, but it had little appeal to those who still believed in economic opportunity. As the FUC expanded, it grew to embrace more than the failures and as it did so, its character and its message began to change. One afternoon, Louis McNamee turned to find that his derisions of capitalism evoked not so much applause as chagrin, and that the movement now sought to reinterpret progressivism rather than to reject it. The old hard-hitting dogmatism began to fade and refinement transformed an ideology of protest into a doctrine of reform. These changes pushed the Farmers' Union of Canada back into the mainstream of progressivism and made the rule of the dirt farmers anachronistic. Tragically, the Wheat Pool proved to be both the militants' greatest triumph and their surest misjudgement.

V

L.P. McNamee had always been a man in a hurry. As a

boy, he had escaped the Gaelic conviviality of his father's home near Sandy Bay, Ontario and had hustled through school in nearby Lansdowne. At twenty, he was wandering the burgeoning West and working railroads across the American prairie. In Proctor, Minnesota, he became a member of the Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, and in Minto, North Dakota, he became a married man. His wife, Katherine Feenie, bore him five sons and five daughters and in recompense, he left his locomotives and settled on a quarter section homestead near Kelvington. As leader of the FUC, bull-necked Lou McNamee was blustering, tactless and uncompromising. Where other farm leaders sported pin stripes and spats, he stomped the Province in boots and overalls; where others negotiated, he was uncongenial; when others explained, he merely asserted. "He has...a lack of balance," remarked an affronted A.J. McPhail, "I have never seen a man...display so much offensive egoism." Even his friends were distressed by his aggressiveness. N.H. Schwarz believed him to be an autocrat "whose offending mistakes at meetings always alienated somebody's feelings." In much the same way, his old ally, George Booth, frequently urged him to "study tact and diplomacy" and not "to try to run the show single handed." Jealous of his authority and incapable of taking advice gracefully, McNamee alienated the very people whose support he most needed. Ultimately, when the Farmers' Union plunged itself into dangerous waters, Lou McNamee was to turn instinctively to his old friends, and amazed, was to find himself alone.⁸⁸

Like most craft unionists, Lou McNamee had a profound mistrust of socialist ideology. An aggressive and militant opponent of monopoly and industrial concentration, he nonetheless held an intense faith in the ability of democratic capitalism to correct its worst excesses. Unlike N.H. Schwarz, he did not believe that capitalism, as a socio-economic system, was inherently unjust and he was convinced that "human reason and common sense" would be sufficient to assure universal prosperity. When he urged farmers to organize penny auctions and moratoria, he emphasized that he was advocating only "passive resistance" and that his aim was simply "to persuade the Sheriff and Bailiff and the employer of such", of the necessity to respect the farmers' right to their "homes and farms and the means whereby they must live."⁸⁹ Socialist propaganda, according to McNamee, was merely "damn fool work" and he saw it as an injurious influence upon the Union's creed.⁹⁰ "Opposition to authority," he told the delegates to the FUC's annual convention would, "result inevitably in disaster for your class." The only sensible alternative was to have the farmers "organized and powerful" and then to bring their just demands "before the legislators...who represented us."⁹¹

As the FUC expanded in the wake of the Wheat Pool campaigns of 1923 and 1924, the Union's leadership began to realize that a much less militant group of farmers was beginning to enter the organization and that there was "a danger of affairs of the Union getting a little out of

hand due to the phenomenal growth."⁹² Drawn largely from the SGGA, these new members were financially more secure than were the Union's original adherents and because of this they were less interested in the problems of debt and foreclosure. Gradually, "two schools of thought" began to develop; the one favouring the continuation of militant struggle against the banks and mortgage companies, and the other opting for a more respectable response to the agricultural depression. The question of what to do was of vital importance, for the leaders realized that if the Union were going to become a "solid one hundred percent organization", it would have to develop a policy which appealed to the more sedate elements of society.⁹³ In attempting to broaden the movement's appeal, the leadership would have to demonstrate its moderate credentials, and this implied a renunciation of the popular belief that "the mentality behind the Farmers' Union of Canada was Communistic and promised nothing but evil."⁹⁴ As the summer of 1924 slipped into autumn, the leaders of the FUC began to search for a scape goat to use in their efforts to solidify and strengthen their control over the growing moderate segment within the organization. By an instinct born of a generation when red-baiting was a national pastime, the Executive turned upon the element which it believed was the most inimical to middle-class sentiments. Ignoring former gratitudes and battle-forged loyalties,

McNamee led the leadership into a wild and spectacular campaign against the outspoken left-wing of the movement.

In a general sense, revolutionary sentiment within the FUC was polarized between two distinct groups, one comprised primarily of Saskatoon based free-lance radicals, and the other, made up of purely local talent. The latter was concentrated in the Sturgis area, where a farm worker named Shannon had introduced his employer, Fred Ganong, to socialist propaganda in the pre-war period. Ganong had taken an immediate interest in Marxism and along with his brother Oattie and some of their neighbours, he had organized a socialist debating club. When McNamee brought the Farmers' Union to Sturgis in the summer of 1923, the tiny group of home-grown revolutionaries had taken charge and for the next three years, they formed the backbone of the farm movement in the area. Ideologically, these radicals shared the same socialist vision of a conspiratorial capitalist intrigue as did Schwarz. Their Marxism was a creed of praxis and they were distinguishable from the mass of farm militants only by the character of the invective and the aggressiveness of their tactics.⁹⁵

The Saskatoon-based socialists were a far more diverse and cosmopolitan collection. Some, like H.M. Bartholomew and Ben Lloyd, were professional radicals who had passed through the organizational inferno of the Socialist Party of Canada. A formidable theoretician and inspiring orator, Hugh Bartholomew unquestionably dominated the Communist movement among the farmers in the 1920's. An experienced

agitator, he developed a comprehensive theory of agrarian dissent, whose central argument was the proposition that the farmers were merely archaic proletarians. "The overwhelming mass of farmers," he asserted, "are completely divorced from the land they till although that divorcement is still concealed from their eyes by fictitious land titles." In fact, "they have actually been reduced to the level of landless peasants and are completely at the mercy of finance capital."⁹⁶ Since he conceived of society as operating under the strains of a complete polarity, Bartholomew had little faith in cooperative or pooling proposals, which he charged were subject to the cupidity of the "bankers, the real estate sharks and the manufacturers." As he told McNamee, "in my opinion, Sapiro erred when he stressed the need for help from these people...they are in supreme control of the situation and the farmer is worse off than ever."⁹⁷

A second group of socialists were those who, like George Stirling, had come to Marxism through the Non-Partisan League. Like Bartholomew, Stirling argued that the farmers did not possess real ownership over their land. "Rather it owned them body and soul...what the farmer calls profits...are really wages of superintendence." Stirling's vision was, however, more "agrarian" than was Bartholomew's, and this lent it a certain freshness and relevance. Rather than lump all farmers together, Stirling proposed that there were two rural classes: "those who farm the farms and those who farm the farmers...these latter are capitalists. They own big tracts

of land and also considerable machinery"; they were "the gentry".⁹⁸ The immediate objective of the proletarian farmers was to end their exploitation by both the urban and the rural capitalists, and this they could only do by gaining control over the goods which they produced. In this sense, Stirling had great faith in the Wheat Pool, which he perceived as a means of simultaneously increasing the "wages" of the "real farmers", narrowing the rural class polarity and expropriating control of the means of distribution from the finance capitalists.⁹⁹

Finally, there was a large group of proto Social Creditors who organized themselves into the "Economic and Educational Committee of the FUC", under the leadership of Ernie Bolton and J.W. Robson. These men believed that banking was the mainstay of the economic system and that by attacking the "financial monopoly" the farmers could end the exploitation of labour by capital. "Bankers control the medium of exchange," asserted A.E. Bolton, "control every commodity on earth...the bankers have the greatest monopoly in all history." Similarly, Robson blamed the ills of society on the "monetary system...which by its refusal of purchasing power, save on terms, arrogates to a few persons selected by the system the right to disinherit...the other individuals who compose society." The solution for the social-monetarists was nationalized banking and credit which would place the economic system in the hands of the majority of electors and thereby "destroy the world's greatest enemy of

progress...prevent war...and end capitalism"¹⁰⁰

When the hammer blows fell, they came in a series of short, vigorous strokes. Methodical Harry Schwarz was the first to suffer the effects of the Executive's assault upon the socialists. While in Saskatoon, Schwarz's natural inclinations had propelled him inexorably into the revolutionary orbit and he had developed close connections with the monetary theorists, Bolton, N.S. Bergren and Tom Faulton. As Secretary of the Union, he was a public symbol of the organization's radical sympathies and as founder of the movement, his dismissal was an open demonstration of the leadership's new-found commitment to moderation. In December, 1924, McNamee demanded his resignation, contemptuously refused him an organizer's post and offered him \$300 remuneration for his services. Tragically, the discharge left Schwarz destitute and forced him to dig coal at the Sugar Loaf Mines in Taylortown in order to support his family. An acrid and disillusioned radical, he ended his days a night clerk in a B.C. hotel; bitterly opposed to McNamee, the Farmers' Unions and the duplicity of public service.¹⁰¹

The dismissal of Schwarz was swiftly followed by a concerted campaign to denounce the objectives of the other Saskatoon-based radicals. In August, 1924, McNamee had forbidden lodges of the FUC from inviting Bartholomew to speak and by the year's end, he had been expelled from the organization.¹⁰² A.C. Weaver, editor of the organization's newsletter, turned upon the "Economic and Educative Committee"

and announced that "it had no right to misrepresent the Union cause...The Union can't buck stuff such as that," he told McNamee. "It is making impossible Union organization for the future."¹⁰³ The President clearly agreed, and in both The Winnipeg Free Press and the Regina Leader he denounced the Communist element and confidently predicted that socialism in the movement would be 'smashed'.¹⁰⁴

In Sturgis, Fred and Oattie Ganong's revolutionary fraternity watched developments with a growing feeling of perplexity and consternation. Since early 1924, they had sensed that a strange moderation was spreading over the movement, and they were particularly distressed by McNamee's obvious efforts to deny the Union its militant animus. The first indication of things to come had occurred at the January Convention, when George Williams, an outspoken militant from Semans, had called on the delegates to declare themselves in favour of a moratorium "until such time as we obtain a price for our produce that will allow us to pay." Strangely, McNamee had spoken against the motion, and striking a new pose of pseudo-progressivism, had led the Convention in passing a resolution calling for debt adjustment "by mutual agreement between affirmer and vendor, or if no agreement be arrived at, to be fixed by arbitration."¹⁰⁵ Since then, relations between the Executive and the radicals had been steadily worsening. In late 1924, the Sturgis local had passed a resolution demanding "mass resistance to Sheriff's officers," and had forwarded the petition to the Executive to circulate

it. The leadership had refused to do so, arguing that it did not sanction "organized resistance" of any kind, and in frustration, the local had decided to publicize the resolution itself without the permission of the Central Office.¹⁰⁶ This action had elicited an official reprimand, and McNamee had salted the wound by publicly affirming the Union's loyalty to the existing mechanisms of debt adjustment.¹⁰⁷

However, times were changing for everyone, and for all McNamee's tactical manoeuverings, circumstances were moving relentlessly against him. In attacking the radicals' 'moratorium' and 'mass resistance' proposals, the Executive had struck at the soul of small farm militancy. The sudden desire to compromise rather than to fight was unattractive to debtors and poor farmers who had neither the time nor the resources to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude. After the 1924 Convention, the FUC lost the support of the small farmers and became increasingly moderate in its outlook and in its policies. As it did so, it moved inexorably towards the struggling progressivism of the SGGA.

In July of 1924, James Stoneman and Bob Fischer began negotiating with the SGGA, with the idea of merging the two organizations into a United Farmers' of Saskatchewan.¹⁰⁸ Preoccupied with his struggles on the left, and busy establishing locals in Manitoba and Alberta, McNamee seemed completely oblivious to the danger, and as late as February, 1925 he was asserting that, "I have heard all the talk about an amalgamation with the SGGA that I want to here [sic] and

if I here [sic] any more, I will make an official statement that will put an end to all this damn fool talk."¹⁰⁹

Unfortunately, Louis P. McNamee had fallen a step behind the movement and he did not realize his mistake until he returned to Saskatoon in the third week of February, 1925. Desperately, he attempted to stem the tide of progressivism which he himself had released from carrying the organization towards the SGGA, and he frantically sought to stir the small farmers into opposing the amalgamation resolution. "Speaking [for] the sentiments of the rank and file," he announced, "I must say... that the proposals submitted by the SGGA...was [sic] to say the least, A Most Damnable Insult." In particular, he tried to arouse the militants against the clause which suggested "that the new organization would have to be a law abiding institution" and he reversed his previous position and declared this would never happen, "while I am permitted to stand on the bridge of this farmers' Union craft." As for the middle-sized farm element in the FUC, "we do not ask [them] to retain their membership. Because they are out of latitude with us in the Farmers' Union of Canada. And we would willingly present them to the SGGA as a free gift."¹¹⁰

The more reckless McNamee became, however, the more obvious was his isolation. With his fervid attacks against the left wing, he had alienated the socialists and with his passionate appeals to moderation, he had estranged the small farm militants who had initially provided the dynamic force

behind the Union. In July of 1925, James A. Stoneman quietly succeeded him as President of the FUC and exactly one year later, the organization merged with the SGGA. The amalgamation convention was a gala affair, choreographed and synchronized to provide maximum dramatic effect. It began in two separate convention halls, tactfully situated a few blocks from each other. Joint resolutions were passed, speeches and endearments given and then, on the night of the last day, the conventions culminated with a march of the delegates from one meeting hall to the other. There, amidst handshakes, cheers and celebration, the two organizations consummated their engagement and adopted the compromise title: "The United Farmers' of Canada, Saskatchewan Section". It was not a reconcilliation of foes, it was a meeting of old friends.¹¹¹

VI

By the summer of 1926, progressivism was again triumphant across the middle-west. The cult of modernity had survived the blows of reaction and had swept into an epicyle of its own the lingering fragments of revisionism. For a time, however, the outcome had not been a surety. The failures of society had challenged the awesome assumption that the future would excel the past, and had thrashed out wildly against the drift of modernity. Without deliberation or inventiveness,

they had challenged the scientific and industrial principles upon which the progressive credo had rested and had proved the fallacy of the insurgent's universalist pretensions. The poor farmers did not want scientific management, academic rationalizations or democratized politics; they wanted security, stability and a return to the just arcadia of the frontier ideal. They saw government as exercising a paternalistic duty and they were uninterested in the progressive notions of broadening the base of democracy. They clung to the old faith, the old languages, the old Liberals and they thrust their militant revisionism upon an age that had already accepted the concept of advancement through change. Paradoxically, the ferocity and vitality of their assault upon the future had drawn them into the mainstream of revolt, and almost instinctively, they had atomized under the pressure. The more prosperous progressives, drawn by their actions, had decimated their principles and their leaders had naively tripped to the new tempo. With the abandonment of militancy and the gradual return of stability after 1924, their protest had lost its immediacy. Swiftly and silently, the revolt from below had embraced respectability and softly, the failures had slipped back into anonymity.

To an extent, however, the poor farmers were to exert a more lasting influence over the progressives than they themselves were to receive. In a structural sense, they had spawned the Wheat Pools and these organizations were to become the mainstay of the progressive revival. Under the

control of H.W. Wood and A.J. McPhail, the Pools became symbols of efficiency and scientific management. Rather than fighting the mortgage companies and grain dealers, the Pools not only applied for seats on the Grain Exchange, but also offered their Claims and Assignments Departments as collecting agencies for creditors. 'Orderly Marketing' became the clarion call of cooperative organization and the Pools set out not to transcend the open market, but simply to stabilize wheat trading by equalizing supply with demand, and by eliminating the excesses of speculation. Limited in their objectives, they were nonetheless eminently practical and efficient and their aim was the quintessence of progressivism: "It will bring in the rural businessman... and it will send the rustic out."¹¹² The Wheat Pools were the symbols of the agrarian future and their prosperity was a justification of the insurgent ideal. It was in them and through them that the Western progressive saw the grandeur of modernity, and it was through their successes that he nurtured his ambitions.

Perhaps of even greater significance than the Wheat Pool, however, was the impact the howl from the backwoods had made upon the soul of progressivism itself. While the Farmers' Union of Canada did not alter the substance of agrarian insurgency, it nonetheless had a profound effect upon the movement's ingrained tendencies and dispositions. The Union's ominous references to 'consuming' and 'producing' classes were swiftly dropped from the rhetoric of reform, and instead

the progressives interjected the more traditional concepts of 'the people' and 'the Interests'. Despite this, however, the notion of a social class inched its way into the progressive creed, replacing the earlier ideas of a simple 'industrial group'. The insurgents now accepted the quasi-socialist concept of 'class struggle', but tempered their radicalism with the qualification that the real conflict was between the masses and 'big' or 'monopoly' capitalism, rather than between labour and capital. New ideas of banking, credit and social reform, designed to break the power of the 'Interests' suddenly replaced the tariff, currency and railway regulation as the central pillars of insurgency. Rationalizing and expanding the base of democracy continued to be of crucial importance, but some of the small farmers' paternalistic notions slipped their way into the ideological superstructure. Government now became a mechanism for equalizing opportunities and a concentration of power into the political system was heralded as the surest guarantor of a businesslike society. Unquestionably, this new reformism was an amalgam of the 'Best People's' progressivism, and of the nobody's extremism, and as such, it was an intrinsically intermediate doctrine for an era rapidly committing itself to a middle-class way of thinking.

The new progressivism accepted the business of Canada just as surely as had the old, but a growing awareness was seizing the movement that somehow the program was not enough. Throughout the West, insurgents began to recognize

the vapidty of their ideology and they began to question the fact that their ethics had been nurtured not in despair — but in prosperity. The ugly face of poverty had been thrust towards them by the desperate militancy of the FUC, and they wondered how legitimate was their claim to speak for the mass of agriculturalists. Their doubt might not have altered their perceptions, but it made them more susceptible to the tirades of extremism. Self-consciously, they turned away from the complacency of the old Progressive elite and listened with gathering humility to the fatalistic exhortations of the socialists. "People listened to them," recalled one farmer, "they may not have agreed with them, and most of them didn't...but what they said made us think, got us involved...what they were talking about seemed logical."¹¹³ As the twenties reeled spasmodically towards the next decade, opportunity beckoned, and the socialists plunged themselves headlong into the algid waters of authority. Never good swimmers, they foundered and dove, but the movement surged forward, swirling and turning forever around the vortex, moving always onward, towards the vast, nameless and inscrutable shore.

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Edward McCourt, Home is the Stranger (Toronto, 1950), p. 135.
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CHAPTER FOUR

'We Are Beclouded With Humbug'

Ideological Imbroglios and the Impact of Depression

It was a time for haloed babbits and heroes. In sports 'Big Bill' Tilden dominated Men's Tennis Singles for seven years, Babe Ruth hit sixty home runs in a single season and Jack Dempsey was finally dethroned by Gene Tunney, the lightest man ever to win the champion's belt. After 1925 there seemed to be more of everything; more money, more leisure, more cars, more dance halls, sex and jazz. In the movies Gloria Swanson raised one lascivious eyebrow and H.L. Mencken quipped that the Americas now had the morals of Port Said. Thousands thrilled to hear Emile Coué incant assertively, "day by day, in every way I am getting better and better", until his death in Nancy in 1926. Business was everywhere big and triumphant. In Ottawa, the MP's whooped up pro-corporation legislation and in America, Henry Ford was a major threat in the race for

the Presidency. Even the academics worshipped the abstract God of Capital Accumulation. "The success of enterprises like the T. Eaton Co., the Massey-Harris Co., the Bank of Montreal and other such concerns," noted the socialist scholar, Frank Underhill, "has done more to strengthen our national feeling than all the speeches and posturing of our politicians since we first elected representative assemblies."¹

By now it is commonplace to argue that the prosperity of the late twenties was ephemeral; economists having long since demonstrated that for Canadians, economic growth would have tapered off significantly in the 1930's even if world conditions had not sharply deteriorated.² The national income was high, unemployment was low, but the control of the nation's industries was steadily concentrating and the increases in wealth were not being evenly distributed. Sharp inequalities in wealth meant an uneven distribution in the spending power of the consumers and this implied a restriction in the demand for manufactured goods.³ Nonetheless, the artificial stimulation of the stockmarket induced firms to float new issues, split stocks, offer special rates and raise their interest costs sharply. Encumbered with heavy fixed debts and saturating markets, industries that had expanded rapidly began to sense that the investment accretion could not continue indefinitely.⁴ Consequently, a number of sectors displayed declining rates of growth, though technological change and replacement needs temporarily maintained investment levels. In railroad construction, for example,

net investment for road expansion declined sharply from pre-war levels, but that deterioration was offset by an increase in expenditures for equipment and machinery.⁵ Despite this temporary maintenance of investment, the rate of growth in the major older sectors was slowing down and in the newer industries, such as automobile production, the demand had simply been exhausted. Unfortunately, before these problems could be resolved, "the rest of the world had also suffered set-backs so that what might have been but a minor recession for Canada developed into a major depression."⁶

In Western Canada the wheat economy's upswing after 1925 proved to be both exhilarating and illusory. Wheat prices that had fallen to below the one dollar mark in 1923-24, began a slow recovery and gradually climbed back upwards to a relatively stable price of \$1.40 basis No. 1 Northern for the succeeding half decade.⁷ Stirred by the rising prices and a series of good harvests net farm income rose steadily, though family living expenditures and wages increased at a slightly faster rate.⁸ Technology made its first major impact upon Prairie agriculture during the twenties and new techniques improved the quality of not only crop but also livestock production and soil management practices. Between 1921 and 1931 the number of motor cars and trucks on the Prairies doubled and the number of combines increased from none to over nine thousand. There was also a startling expansion in the usage of farm tractors; sales tripled between 1926 and 1928 and total numbers increased

over the decade by almost forty thousand.⁹ Despite these obvious indications of growth, however, the wheat economy remained troubled throughout the latter part of the decade. The prices of agricultural implements were rising steadily and it was becoming difficult for the average farmer to parallel this inflation with an increase in his volume of production. In 1925, for example, two hundred and thirty-two bushels of wheat were required to buy a binder; by 1927 two hundred and eighty-eight bushels were needed, and by 1929, this amount had risen to three hundred and seventy-four.¹⁰ Ominously, a situation was developing whereby a farmer, faced with static grain prices, was being compelled to purchase more machinery in order to grow more wheat in order to maintain a fixed standard of living. Those who were unable to mechanize, and thereby increase production, either because their farm was too small or because they were already heavily into debt, found themselves in a worsening economic position. Tragically, the 'good times' were proving to be as disastrous for large numbers of Western farmers as had been the depression conditions of the early decade.

Twisted by the dialectical relationship of prices and farm technology, the rural community continued to polarize throughout the 1920's. Though there was little alteration in the relative number of small farms there appears to have been a considerable turnover in their owners. The twenties witnessed a sharp increase in farm evictions, foreclosures and abandonments, and the vast majority of these forsaken

homesteads were a quarter-section in size.¹¹ Unquestionably, the places of those leaving agriculture would have been swiftly occupied by recent immigrants, but it is also probable that a large proportion of the new homesteads were settled by farmers who had been forced to reduce the size of their operations. In fact, there was a precipitous decline in the number of farms of one hundred and sixty to three hundred and twenty acres, which decreased from fifty to thirty percent of the total. Though part of this reduction is accounted for by the rapid appearance of more successful farmers operating over four hundred and eighty acres, and who in 1931 comprised twenty-eight percent of the aggregate farm population and owned almost fifty-five percent of the total cultivated land, the numbers indicate that there must also have been considerable downward mobility. No matter where they were going, however, it is evident that the gap between large and small, rich and poor, was being widened by the disappearance of the middle-sized farmers, and in particular, by the exodus of agriculturalists owning between a quarter and a half section of land.¹²

To an extent, this widening social gulf was muted by the universally low quality of farm facilities across the Prairie Provinces. In the West a farmer would have had to have been extremely fortunate in order to have enjoyed comparable conveniences to those possessed by the agriculturalists in Central Canada. In 1931 barely two percent of Western farms had kitchens with running water and only one out of

every seventy-three had water piped into the bathroom. Three in every hundred farm homes were lighted with gas or electricity, and rural Ontario had twice the number of telephones for a smaller population. Roads were poor, medical services insufficient and the cultural life of the rural community was barren and unappealing. The average farmer in Saskatchewan or Alberta enjoyed few luxuries; his home was small, uncomfortable and primitive, his family clothes simply and cheaply constructed and flour sacking was everywhere the chameleonic ally of the yearning housewife.¹³

These crude conditions were commonplace, and they served to mask the sharp differences in unit size, degree of mechanization and amount of reinvested wealth, which divided Prairie farmers. They also helped to produce a general feeling of discontent which was only awaiting reanimation at the inexorable hands of perditionous circumstance.

II

Throughout the middle twenties, agrarian socialism on the Prairies was everywhere on the defensive. In Saskatchewan, Louis McNamee, President of the Province's largest farm organization, was leading a reckless, mud-slinging offensive against the left-wing of the movement, and was actively trying to present himself "as the Sam Gompers of the Farmers' Union."¹⁴ To the West, in Alberta, H.W. Wood

of the ~~USA~~ was diffusing the socialist challenge to his authority through a careful policy of slander and co-option. Carl Axelson, a former Wobbly from the United States who had settled on a small farm near Bingville, was the butt of most of Wood's attacks. A handsome Swede with flashing eyes and a meteoric temperament, Axelson had used the contract pool as a pitch for his first dramatic appearance at the 1923 Convention of the UFA. Within three years, he was grand master of rural socialism in Alberta, perennial candidate in the UFA's presidential elections and bête noir of Henry Wise Wood. By carefully adjusting the policy of the organization to meet the left-wing challenge, and by pointedly subverting any socialist attempt to capture a seat on the Executive, Wood managed to contain the radical menace. But Axelson and socialism obsessed him, and he eventually came to accuse of being a Communist anyone who differed with him. When for example, Axelson published an article suggesting that Robert Gardiner was the most likely man to succeed Wood, the aging President convinced himself that a conspiratorial link existed between Axelson, Gardiner and Walter Smith, the editor of the journal carrying the piece. "It being known," explained Smith, "that Gardiner had walked down the street with Axelson on some occasion; it being known that Gardiner is a close friend of mine, it might be imagined that there was something a-foot."¹⁵ Unfortunately, Wood's almost monomaniacal delirium induced him to surround himself with unimaginative individuals who shared his own beliefs

and attitudes and the consequences of this consensus were disastrous for the organization. "Today we have no presidential timber," mourned one UFA member, "there is not a man on the Board who would seriously oppose Mr. Wood on any major issue, and the organization is simply dying from lack of action."¹⁶

In order to better challenge the authority of the UFA administration, while simultaneously expanding their basis of support, the Alberta Socialists organized themselves into a Progressive Farmers' Educational League. The object of the PFEL was not "to destroy any of the exalted farm organizations, but rather to assist in their upbuilding and to create them into a unified militant fighting body along the right lines."¹⁷ The League was a loose alliance of radicals of many colours. At the first Convention held in Calgary in February, 1925, two Communists, Axelson and John Glambeck of Milo, were elected respectively to the posts of Chairman and Secretary, but George Bevington, a monetary reformer and proto-Social Creditor, delivered the opening address.¹⁸ From the outset the PFEL was harrassed by difficulties of self-definition. Originally designed to be a left-wing lobby group operating within the UFA structure, the League soon proved an attraction to large numbers of radicals who were not in the existing farm movement. Since the left-wing was unwilling to adopt a separate structure, the usefulness of all non-UFA members to the organization was effectively reduced. Furthermore, the refusal to declare their autonomy

meant that they collected no dues, and as a result, League organizers were chronically short of funds.¹⁹ Nonetheless, despite these weaknesses, the PFEL scored some remarkable successes, though it was in Saskatchewan and not in Alberta that the radicals found their truest gratification.

To a large extent, the record of success of the Progressive Farmers' Educational League was the record of George H. Williams of Semans. An aggressive and outspoken Social Democrat - a "modern Socialist of the Constitutional School", as he liked to call himself - Williams was the left-wing's uncrowned champion throughout the 1920's.²⁰ Unquestionably, his usefulness to the radicals lay in his respectability, for even during the socialist purges of 1924-25, Williams had succeeded in maintaining the confidence of McNamee and the moderates.²¹ Critical of lawlessness, militancy and endemic struggle, he had preserved his credibility by advocating a constitutional solution to the problems of eviction and foreclosure. The 'Williams solution' to the debt issue was to have the Province establish a series of 'arbitration boards' in each judicial district, comprised of one farmer, one government representative and one "member of the creditor class." The arbitration boards would have the power to cancel debt or to amend the terms of payment, but every farmer would be guaranteed a minimum amortized living allowance of eight hundred dollars per quarter-section, and in all cases, individuals would be allowed to decide "the medium through which the crop shall be marketed."²² In effect,

Williams had designed a wonderfully moderate, but thoroughly engaging program. By not advocating compulsion or a universal moratorium, the Debt Adjustment Plan managed to win the support of middle-sized farmers who feared the negative impact of government legislation upon future credit reserves. Similarly, for the left-wing, the proposal was "the best demand the farmers have ever made", not only because it offered them respectability, but also because it guaranteed the poor farmer "a minimum wage" and thereby "freed the mind from the worry of debts and making ends meet."²³

By the summer of 1925, it was becoming evident that the character of the Farmers' Union of Canada was changing. Stoneman had replaced McNamee as President, the left-wing had been confined and belittled and the militant croquants were being replaced by the more complacent middle-sized farmers as the backbone of the movement. In June, the left-wing organized itself into a Farmers' Political Association, a broad fusion of Social Democrats, like Williams and Lewis Gabriel; self-taught Communists, such as George King and Walter Wiggins of Sturgis; and Saskatoon-based radicals like Bartholomew, Lloyd, and for a time, N.H. Schwarz.²⁴ The goal of the Association was similar to that of the PFEL in Alberta; the unity of "left-wing elements" and the prevention of leaders of the existing farm organizations from directing "the farmers into the hands of their class enemies... by promoting the class struggle policy as propounded in the preamble of the Farmers' Union of Canada." Through the

medium of a radical broadsheet, The Furrow, edited by Hugh Bartholomew, the left-wing sought to mobilize the debt-ridden farmers in opposition to the moderate policies of the new leadership. "It is time the farmers of the mortgage belt got down to business," stormed the radicals, "and started to build a united front of dirt farmers on the basis of militant class struggle."²⁵ Moderation "may be all right for Mr. Stoneman with extensive holdings...and \$333 [salary] a month, but thousands of debt-ridden farmers are looking for change a little sooner."²⁶ The problem for the left-wing was that, despite the Political Associations' structure, it was disorganized. "There is a bedlam of ideas," pondered Bartholomew, "confusion reigns supreme... and there can be no united action by the left unless there is agreement on policy."²⁷ Clearly the radicals, in order to mobilize the dirt farmers, had to formulate a comprehensive program of action, and it was to this task that they turned their attention in the latter half of the 1920's.

In April 1926, George Williams joined the Progressive Farmers' Educational League and thereby initiated the absorption of the Farmers' Political Association into its sister organization from Alberta.²⁸ The fusion, which was formally affected in Saskatoon three months later, was clearly designed to unify the left-wing around a single program. Unfortunately, the radicals miscalculated, for the PFEL possessed not so much a policy as a name and a language of dissent. From the outset, the League's platform was unor-

iginal and vapid; an extension of the 'pool principle to the marketing of all products', the abolition of the Board of Grain Commissioners, the unity of all Canadian farm organizations and the legislation of the old FUC 'Debt Adjustment Plan'.²⁹ Indeed, the League's main thrust was not towards the implementation of a specific series of policy guidelines; rather, its attention was directed towards a reformation of the self-perceptions of the farmers. The primary objective was to liberate the farmers from "the illusion...that they are members of the capitalist class." In fact, the image of independence had "been deliberately preached by the capitalist class in order to prevent the farmers from realizing their true position."³⁰ With passionate invective, the radicals argued that the rhetoric of ownership, which "we hear... from the lips of the residents of the Western mortgage belt" was mere fabrication. "The land is mortgaged; the machinery is simply a heap of unpaid debts; the shadow of the Sheriff falls across the door" but still "the ragged slave of the farm sticks out his chest and fairly yells: This is all mine!"³¹

Gradually, the Saskatchewan radicals came to realize that there was a fatal insufficiency in both their ideology and their program. Progressivism was resurgent in the newly-formed UFC (SS) and the organized farm movement was representative only of the more prosperous farmers in its composition and sentiment. Those farmers seemed uninterested in the left-wing's calls for militant direct action and

they resented being termed 'deluded proletarians'. Within months of the formation of the UFC (SS) a complacent disinterest settled over the movement and the militancy and aggressiveness of the old FUC completely disappeared. Recognizing the drift of events, the Socialists attacked the organization as "reactionary" and "class collaborationist", and modestly wealthy progressives like Stoneman and Vice-President Edwards were derided as being "capitalist pimps."³² The old insurgents, they concluded, "had gained much of advantage" by merging with the FUC and as a result, "the spirit of the SGGA dominated the amalgamated body."³³ Confused by the new situation, the left-wing divided over strategies; Williams, Wiggins, George Stirling and certain other radicals believed that the PFEL must struggle to sharpen the revolutionary zeal of the existing farm movement and this implied winning the middle-sized producers to socialism. Others disagreed, however, and many Communists, in particular, argued that the Educational League should concentrate its attention upon a mobilization of the lowest strata of the farm population. "At this stage in the development of the farmers' organizations," asserted Axelson, "it would not be correct for the left-wing to seize control. We must work until we have the mass of the farmers behind us."³⁴

For the League, the crisis came in the Spring of 1928 when George Williams unilaterally announced his candidacy for the Presidency of the United Farmers. Fred Shunaman, the Secretary of the PFEL, and Ben Lloyd, the President,

failed to endorse his nomination and in disgust, Williams withdrew from the race and resigned from the League. "If you cannot support a man wholeheartedly," Williams stormed, "then do not have anything to do with him," and he went on to attack the Executive for countenancing separatist ideas. "The radical group is a unity group, not a separatist group," he asserted, and if the League allowed itself to split with the UFC, "then the whole value of the left would be lost."³⁵ The resignation of Williams from the League divided the left-wing even further. Those who followed his gradualist strategies began to drift out of the movement and organize themselves into a distinct lobby group that had no other objective than the election of Williams as President of the UFC. The remainder of the League members, having lost their brightest star, reached out to a new Moses to lead them out of the wilderness. Under the influence of the old Socialists and with the careful guidance of J.M. Clarke, who had replaced Bartholomew as editor of The Furrow, the League drifted into the consoling arms of the Communist Party of Canada. As the decade lumbered to a close, the Farmers' Educational League ruptured and divided and as it did so, a new age dawned over the Prairie.

III

Seven years after the formation of the Saskatchewan

Progressive Party, political insurgency remained a disappointed and unfulfilled cause. The Party had failed to expand its provincial base to the mass of farmers and it remained a spokesman for only the most affluent class of agriculturalists. By failing to adapt to the demands of middle-strata reformism, the patricians had been unable to forge the broad alliance which the UFA leaders had achieved in Alberta. Even the revised sixteen point platform of 1925 offered little attraction to men pressuring for an extension of social services and an introduction of a contract Wheat Pool. Calling for little expansion of governmental activity, the Progressives maintained their policy of favouring moderate regulation of large industrial combinations, prohibition of intoxicating liquors and voluntary agricultural cooperation.³⁶ Small and sectarian, the Progressive Party had enough money to continue entering elections and holding extravagant rallies, but insufficient support to win more than a half-dozen seats. By 1926, many Progressive leaders were searching for a means of advancing their political fortunes and some prominent insurgents began discussing the possibility of cooperating with the Conservatives.³⁷ Despite the fact that the two parties held antithetical views on such vital issues as the tariff and corporate legislation, there were few other options. On the Prairies the Liberals had always been the Party of the poor, the dispossessed and the immigrant, and some Progressives even accused it of encouraging Eastern European immigration as a means of sub-

verting the Progressive vote.³⁸ The Conservatives, on the other hand, represented the 'best sort of people', and as such, they not only divided the Progressive base but they also endorsed many of the same social programs. Predictably, when the final merger of Progressives and Conservatives was affected, the mortar of the alliance was not policy or objective, but sentiment and a common mistrust of the lower classes.³⁹

Looking back across the post-war decade, the patrician Progressives saw that their crusading drive for morality and business responsibility had become little more than a ludicrous caricature of its former self. Battered by the machinations of the Liberals and undermined by the revolt of the poor landowners, the Progressive movement had been transformed into only a shadow from the past, a tragic mockery of a once opulent impulse. The cause of the decline was not hard to locate and resentfully, the insurgents began to thrash out against their enemies' least common denominator. Surreptitiously, maliciously, vehemently, the Progressives turned upon the ethnic minorities which they perceived as comprising not only the FUC but also the Liberal Party. Realistic politicians witnessed this assent of racism with trepidation and as early as 1925, Premier Dunning warned that the FUC revolt might drive the "saner" and "more level-headed farmers" towards Conservatism.⁴⁰ The plaster for the Tory-Progressive alliance came, however, from the outside and it took the unlikely form of the burning crosses

and moralistic revivalism of the Knights of the Invisible Empire.

By all accounts, the Ku Klux Klan should have had a brief and inauspicious career in Saskatchewan. First established in the Moose Jaw area in the Spring of 1927, by three renegade swindlers from Indiana, the Klan raised a small fortune selling thirteen dollar memberships through a Regina Post Office Box Number. The organizers, Lewis Scott (the Provincial King Kleagle), his son, and a man going by the name of Hugh Emmans, used propaganda to conjure images of a Roman Catholic Conspiracy against Anglo-Saxonism. They discovered a fertile field for their message in the Moose Jaw area and along the CPR line from Weyburn to Shaunavon, where Catholics were few and men were affluent. The blow soon fell, however, for in September the Klan organizers disappeared as suddenly as they had arrived, only this time, they were about one hundred thousand dollars the richer. Miraculously, the Klan survived this initial desecration and under the guidance of Doctor J.H. Hawkins, a local revivalist, the organization soon restored its prestige and public image.⁴¹

The Klan's durability appears to have lain in its ability to touch upon the sentimental dissaffections of both urban and rural reformers. Unlike the parent organization in the United States, the Prairie Klan was not primarily a movement of poor whites and misfits. Its adherents were mostly influential citizens who could afford the high costs

of membership; doctors, lawyers and ministers figuring prominently in the cities and towns, with large landowners forming the nucleus in the countryside. Unified by a desire to advance the progressive credo through a defence of Anglo-Saxon virtue, the Klan members successfully synchronized nativism, Protestantism and reform. In the cities, the organization assumed the mantle of urban progressivism and presented demands for urban renewal, vice-prevention and municipal reform, while in the countryside, the Klan became the embodiment of patrician insurgency in its rejection of partyism, its appeal to patriotism and its faith in scientific management and the Protestant ethic. Under the Klan's propagandistic guidance, insurgency and reformism began to appear under a new guise; a guise of moralistic revivalism which altered the traditional boundaries of political and social consciousness.⁴²

Originally, rural progressivism had been grounded in a counter-reaction against the Old World ideal of marginal farming and small unit production. Men like Crerar, Hawkes and Musselman and even reformed 'dissident progressives' like Edwards, McPhail and Wood, had sought to lead the farmers out of the primitive poverty of a self-sufficient agricultural frontier by growing hard money through an application of industry to agriculture. The progressive farmer embraced technological innovation, he sought to make his labour extend faster and over more land; he drove towards increasing his production and he burned with a desire for wealth and

abundance. "He wanted land and not landscape," wrote Frederick Philip Grove of the archetypical Prairie farmer, Abe Spalding. "Yet, half unbeknown to him, there was a dream of a mansion such as he had seen in Ontario...a mansion dominating an extensive holding of land, imposed upon that holding as a sort of seigneurial sign-manual. Dominating the Prairie."⁴³ Like Spalding, the progressive farmer had a fixed star which kept him on course despite all the innovations, improvisations and novelties, and the glitter of that star was of silver and gold. It lay across a firmament of rationally-divided lines of ownership and across a complex of axiomatic laws of public interests and private rights. Beneath his feet, however, lay solid earth; the sound, deep loam of nineteenth century Protestantism, the inviolable emotional supports of Church, school and neighbourhood. The industrial farmer had never respected the small unit producer who, he felt, lacked ambition, resourcefulness and ingenuity. "Success is due to thrift associated with intelligent methods of buying and selling," ran the progressive creed, and those farmers who lacked a sense of "industry" were an obstacle to the advance of commercial agriculture.⁴⁴ Armed with a rabid dislike for 'peasant' values and 'Old World' attitudes, the progressives succumbed easily to the appeals of racism. Those who did not share the industrialists' zeal for modernity were clearly aliens and reactionaries, and it was an easy thing for the progressive to transform his distrust for the non-competitive

into a hatred for the "dirty", ignorant, garlic-smelling, non-preferred Continentals."⁴⁵

Paradoxically, the Klan's greatest contribution to the politics of agrarianism in Saskatchewan was probably not the fusion of Progressive and Conservative into a new 'right wing', but rather the stimulus it gave to the left. Between 1925 and 1928, all of the major strands of revolt - patrician and middle-farm progressivism and socialism - called for an application of technology to social relations, though they differed over the extent to which they were willing to countenance the intervention of government and public society into the marketplace. The differences between them were relatively distinct, and despite a considerable interplay of memberships, each strain had its definite organizational manifestation. By injecting into the environment the prefabricated issue of ethnic intolerance, the patricians initiated a temporary realignment in the nature of agrarian dissent. Suddenly, men began to take sides not so much over the question of ideological principle as over the problems of cultural plurality and farm cooperation. Endorsed by the clergy, and backed by the commendation of two political parties, the Klan stimulated a new radical fusion on the basis of nativism and provincialism. Almost unconsciously, the socialists began to form the kernel of a tolerant opposition within the farmers' movement to the excesses of the nativist offensive. If the medium for the 'right wing' alignment was the divisive appeals of racism, then the

socialist assent was powered by an equally potent call to universalism. Ironically, in much the same way as the insurgents turned to the Invisible Empire for inspiration, the leftists sought guidance from a shrewd fast-talking lawyer from Chicago. In the summer of 1927, just as the Klan spread its grisly shadow across the Prairie, Aaron Sapiro reappeared in Saskatchewan.

IV

"The economic weapon of the pool," mused the prominent Communist, Tom McEwen, in 1927, "has been ... 'rationalized' ... it has passed out of the hands of the farmers and... [has been] garbed in bourgeois respectability."⁴⁶ Radicals everywhere had sufficient cause for dissatisfaction with the results of contract pooling, for under the guidance of men like McPhail and Wood, the pools had failed to develop into "active organs of the class struggle" and had become "purely marketing institutions."⁴⁷ Even for middle-sized producers, the pools had proven a mild disappointment, for they had made no significant impact upon the overall grain price picture.⁴⁸ In a sense, this was not surprising, for the chief executives of the Wheat Pools had never perceived the organizations as panaceas to the problems of low grain prices and had continuously operated under the assumption that their goal was to rationalize and not to revolutionize

the marketing structure. Consequently, the Pools had not attempted to monopolize the grain trade after the fashion of the Wheat Board, and they had made no effort to expand their base of support. In particular, the Pools had made no further incursions into the small farm areas; the organizations had become representative only of the more secure farmers.⁴⁹ The Socialists recognized that any radicalization of the Pool's policies would have to be predicated upon an attraction of the more militant class of farmers into the organization. With this in mind, the Educational League began to demand that the cooperatives aid the 'dirt farmers' in their fight against foreclosures and evictions, and that they begin pressuring the Government to declare a moratorium.⁵⁰ Unfortunately, rhetoric alone could not induce the poor farmers into signing a contract, for not only were the executives of the cooperatives uninterested in changing their strategy, but also most debt-ridden farmers were prevented from joining the Pools by their mortgage agreements which stipulated where, when and how the debtors' grain was to be delivered.⁵¹ The solution to all of these problems came in the summer of 1927 when, like the breath of redemption, Aaron Sapiro returned to Saskatchewan to introduce the notion of compulsory pooling.

The object of pooling by compulsion was to bring all farmers into a single cooperative and thereby eliminate the competition of the private grain trade. According to Sapiro, the Provincial "Legislature should pass a law providing that

...all growers alike should be compelled to deliver all grains to the Pool only, and that the Pool shall sell all the grains produced in this Province."⁵² This, he argued, was necessary because the "distressed farmer [who] owes money everywhere, to the banker, to the dealer who will not let him sign up with the cooperatives...is so involved that he cannot do anything."⁵³ The Socialists immediately adopted the new pool proposal as their own, and in the Fall of 1927, they initiated an active campaign to convert the larger unit farmers of the UFC (SS) and the UFA to the cause of compulsion. Unfortunately, they met with instantaneous and concerted opposition from the leaders of both the cooperatives and the educational organizations. Though the antagonism of many of the farm leaders appears to have originated in a simple dislike for the Socialists, and in an unwillingness to provide them with any policy advantage, the roots of the opposition were of finer construction. Clearly, many of the larger farmers who had signed the Pool contract had not committed all of their crop to the cooperative, for in Saskatchewan the average 'pooled farm' acreage was only slightly more than half the amount of the Provincial farm average when measured in terms of improved acreage.⁵⁴ Since the Pool officials admitted to have attracted disproportionately few of the smallest farmers, it is evident that the average acreage of the pooled farm should, in fact, have been larger than that of the Provincial mean. That this was not the case is an illustration of the extent to which

many of those producers who pooled their crop maintained the option to sell some of their grain on the open market. These farmers could have been expected to oppose compulsory legislation, for it would deprive them of the ability to capitalize upon the advantages of the speculative grain trade. A further reason for the opposition of farm leaders to one hundred percent pooling was their belief that compulsion would reduce the sale price of their grain. Ironically, H.W. Wood, the President of the Alberta Cooperative Wheat Producers, was the most outspoken in his attacks upon universal cooperation as a potentially detrimental force on the wheat trade. One hundred percent pooling, he argued, would cause a "false stimulation of prices for a few years" which would, in turn, motivate "concerted efforts to produce more of that which brings the higher prices. Place agriculture in the class of higher paying industries and what will be the result?....Just how long could the Pool maintain a high level of prices with continued overproduction."⁵⁵

If the Progressive leadership's response to compulsory pooling was subtle, the radicals' counter offensive was electric. Wood, charged the Socialists, was nothing more than a "farmer-clad champion of the grain trade", who spoke in favour of "the great speculative system."⁵⁶ Sapiro joined in the attack; "whose voice are we hearing?" he mocked, arms flailing widely, "whose voice are we heeding, Henry Wise Wood's or the farmers'?"⁵⁷ The radicals made their arguments especially compelling by stirring golden images

of the post-War Wheat Board. Producers who had always hoped that the Pool would eliminate speculation now saw in the compulsory pool the fulfillment of their ambitions.

"The organization must stand preeminent," declared the Socialist press, "the Pools [must]...be saved from becoming... merely part of the grain trade. To destroy the grain trade by any means in its power is a prime necessity developing upon the Pool idea, for the Pools will not be safe until the private grain trade is uprooted. Both cannot exist."⁵⁸ Inevitably, the debate divided the organized farmers along lines of loyalty and economic self-interest. Larger landowners who benefitted from both Pool and Exchange joined with those smaller Pool farmers who remained faithful to their leaders in opposing the Sapiro plan; advocates of socialist marketing and radical sympathizers endorsed compulsion, and most of the others remained confused and undecided. In February, 1928, George Williams led the UFC into endorsing compulsion by a narrow margin, though the delegates cautiously added the proviso that they did not believe legislative action to be justified until seventy-five percent of the farmers had signed the Pool contract.⁵⁹ The executives of the Farmers' Union refused to recognize the motion, however, and continued to declare that in an official sense the UFC remained opposed to compulsion.⁶⁰ Criticism of this arbitrary policy mounted swiftly, and even sympathizers began to question the leadership's justification in ignoring the demands of the Convention. "It is

autocratic in its authority," chastized one erstwhile supporter, "assuming it [sic] officials to judge what is good for the body farmer...In my opinion it will not take many such actions to wreck the faith of our membership in the organization."⁶¹

Scenting blood, the left-wing heightened the intensity of its educational campaign and closed ruthlessly upon the leaders of the UFC (SS). Williams, who had already broken with the Farmers' Educational League, but who nonetheless preserved the loyalty of many League radicals, set about constructing a coalition of dissidents who were willing to operate within the structure of the existing farm movement. Joined by Communists like Walter Wiggins and Hopkins Mills and by the venerable Socialist, George Stirling, and the young Norwegian Aesir, Frank Eliason, Williams led the drive for the one hundred percent pool, and the end of the old progressive domination. At the 1929 convention, the campaign reached fruition when the delegates not only reasserted their demand for compulsion, but also renounced their former cautions and urged the executive to lobby the Provincial Government for the necessary legislation.⁶² In the elections, the left-wing swept into power; Eliason became Secretary, A.J. Macauley was chosen as Vice-President and Williams handily defeated the senior progressive potentate, George Edwards, in the race for the Presidency. Shocked by the electoral reverse, Edwards, William Thrasher and three other Directors resigned, offering as an explana-

tion their opposition to compulsory pooling, but tempering their complaint with the accusation that the Socialists had railroaded the Convention.⁶³ With the Union now firmly in the hands of the radicals, and with the Pool membership supported by the Vice-President, Louis Brouillette, demonstrating a favourable attitude to compulsion, the progressive leadership was forced to "agree that the time for aggressive action had come to combat the insidious campaign being carried on by the UFC."⁶⁴

In the Autumn of 1929, President McPhail campaigned across the Province against the compulsory pool proposal. Relations between the UFC and the cooperative deteriorated swiftly and consequently, the Pool moved closer to the other farmer-owned grain companies and the existing market structure. This swing away from the Farmers' Union was speeded by the economic catastrophe of 1929-30. In their efforts to subvert public enthusiasm for the compulsory idea, high interim payments on the 1928 crop, and an unprecedented initial payment on the 1929 crop had been offered by the Pool leaders.⁶⁵ This tactic miscarried, however, for with the collapse of grain prices in early 1930, the Pools found themselves confronted with the problem of cancelling an inflated debt at a time of widespread financial panic.⁶⁶ Grimly, the Pool executives in Saskatchewan faced the inevitable and agreed to circulate a petition to test the strength of support for compulsion. By September 1st, 1930, only fifty-eight percent of the ballots had been returned,

of which 32,653 favoured and 12,991 opposed compulsory legislation.⁶⁷ For the new Premier of Saskatchewan, the leader of the Conservative-Progressive alliance, J.T.M. Anderson, this seemed sufficient cause for the invocation of a time-honoured convention - an inter-provincial conference of Premiers on marketing strategy. Unfortunately, agrarian interest in compulsory pooling had been successfully muzzled by the leaders of the Farmers' Associations in Manitoba and Alberta, and Colin Burnell, spokesman for both the Provincial Pool and the UFM, set the pace by stating that outside of Saskatchewan, the producers were uninterested in a grain monopoly in any of its guises. With convenient haste, Premiers Brownlee of Alberta and Bracken of Manitoba pleaded the pressure of other business and tactfully excused themselves from the marketing conference.⁶⁸ Suddenly, progressivism in Saskatchewan found itself alone on the field with the radical menace.

Fortunately for the Cooperative Government, Dr. James T.M. Anderson was always a man willing to make the necessary tactical adjustments. In February, 1930, the Prairie Premiers had each agreed to provide a bond guarantee to cover the Pool's indebtedness, in a effort to save the co-operatives from collapse and the banks from ruin. This assistance temporarily saved the Pools from bankruptcy, but it was evident that the Provinces would be unable to indefinitely finance the organizations' staggering deficits.⁶⁹

With the farmers in large numbers marching upon the Leg-

islative Building in Regina to demand one hundred percent pooling, Anderson moved his Party cautiously into line.⁷⁰

Carefully emphasizing its neutrality on the issue of compulsion, the Government introduced two Bills which promised to monopolize grain trading in the Province. Clearly, no one in the Legislature really approved of the concept of compulsion, and quiet criticisms were continually voiced on both sides of the House.⁷¹ Possibly, the Legislation was adopted only on the understanding that it was completely unconstitutional and the Government even postponed enforcing it until it had been overturned by the Courts.⁷² Tactfully, the Legislature then shelved the problem by passing it on to the Federal Government, probably recognizing that at that very moment, the Pools were negotiating a solution of their own with the formidable R.B. Bennett.

Realizing the inability of the Provincial Governments to continue financing the Pools in the face of worsening economic conditions, the directors of the Cooperatives had turned instinctively to the Federal Government for assistance. Lamentably, they were to pay a high price for Federal support, for Bennett chose as a precondition for Dominion guarantees the appointment of John I. MacFarland as General Manager of the Pool's Central Selling Agency. MacFarland, who was R.B. Bennett's chief wheat advisor and the cleverest trader of the Grain Exchange, soon became a symbol of the decaying autonomy and individuality of the Provincial Wheat Pools. From the outset, his tone was one of conciliation and reser-

vation in his management of Pool affairs. "The duty of this great organization of farmers," announced MacFarland in his first policy statement was, "to take such action as will assist in removing from the public mind a prejudice that has unwittingly become prevalent that the Pool's policy was designed to combat the world and plow a lone furrow to the detriment of consumers abroad and to the grain and milling trade in general."⁷³ Systematically, the new General-Manager stripped away the remaining sheathes of uniqueness; he ended the direct selling operations, he closed the foreign offices, he brought the Pool into the mainstream of the Grain Trade and he issued official statements that the cause of the depression lay in overproduction and that the solution to the wheat problem was to reduce the cultivated acreage.⁷⁴ Gradually, the Pool began to lose the distinctiveness of its character and it started to offer advice that was antithetical to the interests of large sections of the farm community. By popularizing the progressive argument that the key to economic recovery lay in sound production methods, the Pool not only exonerated its own reputation, but also drew itself completely back into circle of progressive thought. The last vestiges of the militant beginnings were foresworn, the remaining obligations to the non-competitive and distressed farmers were renounced and the reunion of progressivism and cooperatism was finally and irrevocably consummated.

The drive for the compulsory pool ended soon after MacFarland assumed the directorship of the Central Selling Agency.

In Alberta, the call for compulsion had never gathered sufficient momentum to make it a direct threat to the authority of the leadership of the UFA and the Wheat Pool. The times, however, were changing; Henry Wise Wood celebrated his seventieth birthday in 1930 and within a year, he had passed on the President's chair to Robert Gardiner. In a sense, Wood's suppression of socialism and his evasion of the compulsory pooling debate were his last great actions as champion of Alberta progressivism. Deprived of the facade of cohesion which his leadership had given the farmers' movement in Alberta, and stricken by the horrors of the Depression, the rural community succumbed to the dissensions which had, for so long, been successfully repressed. Across the border, in Saskatchewan, the campaign for the compulsory pool had cemented the control of the Socialists over the "educational" wing of the farmers' movement, and, in so doing, it had aggravated the differences between the militants and the gradualists. Stimulated by the defeat of the Sapiro plan and sparked by the Conservative ascendancy in Saskatchewan politics, Williams moved the UFC (SS) along the labyrinthine path to democratic socialism. Against him, the extreme left arrayed its forces to fight a magnificent delaying action which shifted the balance of alliances and facilitated the ultimate union of positive thinking with the Socialist imagination.

In a small, cluttered room on the second floor of Saskatoon's Grainger Building an awkward, tense man hammered out some more careful words on his dilapidated typewriter. For John Magnus Clarke, the long, lonely years of journalistic agitation were finally reaching fruition. "There is no doubt about the rising tide of discontent on the Prairies," he confided in his old friend, Tom McEwen, "it compensates for living in this howling wilderness for three and a half years."⁷⁵ 'Jack' Clarke had come to Saskatchewan in 1927, having been assigned by the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) as the replacement for H.M. Bartholomew as editor of The Furrow. An imposing propagandist, Bartholomew had incurred the displeasure of the Party through his failure to apply the Comintern line to the Canadian context. According to the "Thesis on the Agrarian Question" accepted by the Second Congress of the International, the goal of Communist agitation was to intensify the class struggle inherent in agricultural production. The object was to recognize the fourfold division of small and middle peasantry, agricultural proletariat and kulaks and to promote the union of the rural poor with the rural and urban proletariat. This, it was stated, could only be achieved "by persuading the middle peasantry to maintain a neutral attitude and by gaining the support of a large part, if not the whole, of the small peasantry."⁷⁶ Unfortunately, Bartholomew rejected this notion, and instead attempted to base the PFEL's policies upon "the conflict between agrarian capital and industrial and finance capital, rather than upon class struggle on the farm."⁷⁷ As the League's Manifesto explained, the radicals sought not to divide the farmers but rather to create "a united front of all producers against all forms

of exploitation of man by man, with the objective of securing producer control of industry and the powers of government."⁷⁸

Since most of the leaders of the Farmers' Educational League were also members of the CPC, it was not difficult for the Central Executive Committee to secure control over the League's ideological organ by the replacement of Bartholomew. The man chosen to supplant him, J.M. Clarke, was a shy, dour Scot who had carved out his reputation in the British Columbian woods as Secretary of the Lumber Workers' Industrial Union in the half-decade following the Great War.⁷⁹ A penetrating theoretician and committed Leninist, Clarke was a strong supporter of the International and he was anxious to instill in the agricultural masses a revolutionary understanding and discipline. Unfortunately for the Party, he was also too astute a Socialist thinker to become a docile, malleable instrument of its policy. From the outset, he strove to acquire a first-hand knowledge of agricultural conditions.⁸⁰ From his cramped one-room office-apartment in the Grainger Building, Clarke churned out a steady flow of polemic which developed upon his research discoveries. Swiftly, he came to realize that the Comintern approach to the agrarian question was inapplicable to the Canadian context and he criticised Party ideologues who had attempted to make the "facts fit into an existing theory."⁸¹ In a series of 'Draft Agrarian Programmes' and in his editorials in The Furrow, Clarke moved to correct the inaccuracies in the Communist Party's policy and in so doing, he constructed an intellectual synthesis that remains among the most original and insightful studies of the dynamics of capitalism in Prairie agriculture.

According to Clarke, the problem with the Comintern's approach to the agrarian question was that it based the mobilization of the rural poor

on two fundamental misconceptions: the direct class exploitation of small by large farmers, and the harmony of interest between debt-ridden producers and the agricultural proletariat.⁸² In contrast, Clarke proposed that an optimistic concentration upon the agricultural proletariat ignored the overwhelming difficulties involved in organizing the rural workers. Farm labour in Canada was migratory and seasonal in character, generally working the woods of B.C. and Northern Alberta, the cities, mines and railroads of the West, and when the demand warranted, the wheat fields at harvest time. Hitherto, all efforts to mobilize migrant labour had been undermined by its geographical dispersion and Clarke had sufficient experience with the problems of organizing the lumber workers to appreciate the hazards involved. Furthermore, an alliance of small farmers and workers was unfeasible because of the mechanization process which only served to aggravate the conflicts implicit in contractual employment. Mechanization created a deflationary price pressure which effectively undermined the economic position of the non-competitive small farmers. Unable to curtail unit production costs by technological adaption, the poor farmers were compelled to reduce overheads by diminishing expenditures on labour. Rather than drawing small farmer and proletarian together, the dynamics of capitalization only served to augment tensions by forcing the employer to assume an increasingly exploitive attitude to his employees. In this sense, the poor producers and farm workers confronted each other not as allies, but "as class enemies, as exploiter and exploited."⁸⁵

In addition to his criticisms of the emphasis placed upon the rural proletariat by the Comintern's theory, Clarke attacked the belief that the class struggle in the countryside was derived from the direct exploi-

tation of the 'poor peasantry' by the 'kulaks'. Though he did not deny the existence of class conflict in the rural community, he proposed that its clear expression had been muted by a pervasive bourgeois ethic. In his view, all farmers were being deluded by a Turnerian 'free land myth' which muffled social tensions and maintained the illusion of an indefinitely expansive and upwardly mobile economic environment. Consequently, the ideology of the lower stratum 'wavers between that of the petty bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and finds its expression in a multitude of demands for more or less utopian reforms.'⁸⁴ The ideological misperception was anchored in the particular character of agrarian class relations, which were not powered by the internal conflicts, but were born of indirect rivalries. 'The theory that in Western Canada, rich farmers directly exploit poor farmers is a delusion,' Clarke wrote, 'it does not exist except in the very few isolated cases where a farmer has bought up a considerable amount of land and then rented this land to his less fortunate neighbours, or in the even fewer cases where a rich farmer holds a mortgage on a poor farmer's land.'⁸⁵ Altering the focus of analysis, he then argued that rather than exploiting each other, all farmers were at the mercy of the finance capitalist and that the different positions each class of farmer occupied in relation to the bourgeoisie determined its social interests.

"Usury," Clarke wrote, "is the main avenue for the control of agriculture, the toiling farmers and their families by the lords of finance. This control extends to all sections of the rural population and includes the rural bourgeoisie."⁸⁶ Though similarly enslaved by the finance capitalists, however, the 'bourgeois agrarian', in contrast to the poor farmer, was "the class representative of finance capital."⁸⁷ This par-

adoxical situation was produced, according to Clarke, by the degree to which the rich farmers profitted from the domination of urban capitalism. Poor farmers, who were unable to pay the interest charges on debts and mortgages, suffered evictions and foreclosures, but the wealthy farmers profitted from their losses. Decreases in the number of small producers meant that rich farmers could further expand their holdings, improve the cost effectiveness of their machinery and thereby increase the profitability of their operations. Furthermore, large farmers benefitted from the credit system, which allowed them to borrow the necessary money to continue expanding and they shared with the urban bourgeoisie a common interest in technological innovation. Clarke saw these divergent interests reflected in the policies of the various farm organizations, for "it is chiefly inside these bodies that the class clash finds its expression." Within "these organizations the rich farmers advocate policies which coincide with their class interests, and the class interests of the rich farmer are almost invariably the opposite of the class interests of the poor farmers."⁸⁸

The object of Communist Party agitation in the countryside, according to Clarke, was the mobilization of the poor farmers for militant struggle. However, owing to the indirect character of class rivalries, he rejected the Comintern's notion of a direct conflict between rich farmers and poor, and instead argued that the real struggle for economic emancipation would be fought against the exploitive instruments of finance capitalism. In this sense, Clarke believed that the farmers should be induced to organize a general resistance to foreclosures and evictions, which he argued was a tactic similar to that of taking strike action in industry. In addition, he advocated the issuance of interest-free state credit, the leg-

isolation of a standard price for all agricultural commodities based on the small farmers' costs of production, the abolition of the Board of Grain Commissioners and the control of the grading process by the farmers' themselves.⁸⁹ Clarke's agrarian thesis was a sharp departure from the official policy of the Communist Party, and it was clearly designed to attune revolutionary theories to existing conditions. Noting that the poor farmers did not direct their frustrations and animosities towards the rich farmers, he realized that their main enemies were not their neighbours, but their creditors. He understood the antipathy between the farmers and the proletariat, and he recognized the difficulties which the Party would face in attempting to harmonize their divergent interests. Perceiving the basic conservatism of the militant small producers, he argued that the radicals must design a programme of immediate demands that would be "objective enough to lead the farmers to struggle and, at the same time, evade the pitfalls of reformism."⁹⁰ He knew that the poor farmers had not developed a revolutionary consciousness despite their "rising discontent" and he emphasized that for all their militancy, they continued to be "beclouded with all the usual humbug, though perhaps to a lesser degree than formerly."⁹¹

In October 1930, the leaders of the Farmers' Educational League began to transform the organization into a "militant body" designed to unify "the debt-ridden farmers around a program of immediate action and united struggle."⁹² Clarke's editorials in The Furrow assumed a more aggressive, warlike character and prominent Socialists introduced the notion of founding "committees of action, pledged to resist any attempt to throw debt-ridden farmers out of house and home."⁹³ Pressure for a change in League strategy had been accumulating for some time,

and at least since the departure of Williams and Stirling, the demand had been increasing for the FEL to "adapt...to the situation" by forsaking the UFC (SS) and launching a direct "appeal to the people."⁹⁴ The stimulus for the League's reorientation came both from the Communist Party, which had adopted a program calling for greater direct involvement in the farmers' movement and from the Depression, which had created the conditions demanding "a radical change". Optimistically, radicals across the country predicted that the Depression signalled "the breakdown of the capitalist economy" and they moved to develop strategies which would prepare the select "for their future emancipation."⁹⁵ In the agrarian field, this implied an immediate domestication of the poor farmers' reviving militancy and the revolutionaries set themselves to the task of transforming a mentalité of rebelliousness into a perception of class war.

Small farm unrest had largely been dissipated by the economic recovery of 1924-25, but with the subsequent collapse of wheat prices in 1929, a general feeling of desperation again began to assert itself. In June 1929, the Wheat Pools announced that they would be forced to reduce their initial payments to an unprecedented low of sixty cents a bushel and six months later, the Western Premiers petitioned Ottawa for the legislation of a minimum guaranteed price of only seventy cents.⁹⁶ Small farmers, whose costs of production exceeded the value of their goods, found themselves again confronted by the problem of having to pay previously acquired fixed charges with sharply declining incomes. Confidence in a rapid recovery faded quickly and again the farmers began to fear the ominous shadows of the banker and the sheriff. "There has been no time during the twenty-four years we have been in Canada," remarked one

farmer, "that the moral [sic] of the country folk have been so low."⁹⁷ Characteristically, familiar faces, whose presence were the traditional harbingers of revolt, began to reappear on the Prairie. In Alberta, George Bevington, the monetary reformer, began "to stage a come-back," and he stumped the Province with a call for the nationalization of the banks and a moratorium on farm debt.⁹⁸ Far to the East in Kelvington, Louis P. McNamee emerged from retirement and unsuccessfully attempted to organize a 'Farmers' National Union'; a new movement pledged to the resistance of foreclosures and evictions, and the 'nationalization of money'.⁹⁹

In December, 1930 the Communists moved to harness this rising discontent through the formation of the Farmers' Unity League (FUL), an independent, militant replacement for the FEL. At a series of conferences held on successive days in Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon and Edmonton, the revolutionaries set out their program for struggle. The ideology of the new organization was based upon a recognition of the class division in agriculture and it presented the poor farmers as the "sole power in country districts for the struggle against all forms of capitalism." The League's immediate demands included a minimum income of one thousand dollars to be paid by the State, free medicine and hospitals, non-contributory social insurance and old age pensions and a moratorium on farm debt.¹⁰⁰ George Williams, who as President of the UFC (SS) was present at the foundation conference in Saskatoon, attacked the Communists for their preoccupation with the 'immediate struggle'. Calling for 'scientific Socialism' and not militancy, he urged the two hundred and fifty attendant farmers not to be preoccupied with local issues, but to search for comprehensive solutions. Predictably, Williams' appeals were re-

jected by the farmers, for he had failed to consider the real character of the new movement.¹⁰¹ Economically anxious and socially excoriated, the poor farmers were concerned not with achieving the Cooperative Commonwealth, but rather with preventing their immediate demise. Realizing this, the Communists eagerly undertook to build the FUL into a potent instrument of small farm dissent, but in so doing, they were inadvertently to sacrifice their cherished ideology on the flaming pyre of revolt.

George H. Williams returned from the founding conference of the Farmers' Unity League sullen and irascible. His old associates had stolen a march on him, and their virulent faith in the inevitability of revolution played seductively upon the sensitive chords of his divided soul. Forced into self-justification by the radicals' decision to break with the UFC, he responded with apologies and defiance. "I am not satisfied with the UFC," he told the Communists defensively, "but unlike you, I am not trying to destroy it because I am not satisfied, rather I am trying to bring an apparently much-divided group...to a line of common action - politically and economically."¹⁰² For Williams, the solution to the problems of capitalism had never lain in violence or civil disobedience and even in his early days in the FUC, he had championed the 'constitutional' approach. However, the Communists continued to make him feel "altogether too self-conscious" though he reasoned that "their objective is to make us feel that way, in order that we resent them...and by so doing, place ourselves in a position where the Communists can accuse us of repudiation of various organizations which ostensibly, at least, are there for the purpose of helping the masses in their day to day difficulties."¹⁰³ Carefully, Williams attempted to chart a course of constitutional action which would lead peacefully and quiescently towards Socialism.

without succumbing to 'reformism'. With subtle strokes he drew the UFC towards independent political action and an alliance with the urban socialists, while simultaneously radicalizing the Union's platform. Unfortunately, he misjudged the malleability of his charges, for though he could cajole the middle-sized agrarians of the Farm Union into accepting his tactics, he could not induce them to embrace his visions.

At the 1930 Convention of the UFC, Williams, A.J. Macauley, who succeeded Williams as President, and the other Socialist leaders, had attempted to guide the organization into an endorsement of independent political action. Though the motion had been rejected by the Convention, the undaunted Socialists had revived the old Farmers' Political Association with the objective of contesting the Dominion election of that year. Remarkably, the Association succeeded in capturing twenty-five thousand votes, and though the young Party's popularity was probably a result of anti-Liberal sentiment sparked by the Depression, it impressed the farmers sufficiently to induce them to support direct political action at the 1931 Convention.¹⁰⁴ The platform of the agrarian group, which merged with the Independent Labour Party to form the Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour Group in 1932, was clearly socialist in character. The Provincial economic program, adopted by the Party, was a collage of radical demands and called for a moratorium on debt, a fixed price on grain above the cost of production, nationalization of the railroads, currency and credit, one hundred percent pooling, the abolition of the Grain Exchange and a system of 'use-leases' on all land and resources.¹⁰⁵ Though the Farmer-Labour Group was to merge with other radical organizations across the Dominion to form the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1933, this basic agrarian platform was to remain unchanged. Indeed, when the

program was eventually amended, the pressure for revision came not from an ideological reorientation on the part of the leaders, but from the necessity of adapting the Party's outlook to the predisposition of the people.

Clearly, the popularity of the Socialist Party in rural Saskatchewan was strongest in the prosperous farm areas where the UFC had found its greatest support. Among the poor farmers, and particularly in the non-English small farm regions, the Party remained weak until the Depression had ended and the economic conditions had been stabilized by the War.¹⁰⁶ Preoccupied with direct action and bound by a traditional suspicion of political entanglements, the small farmers were reluctant to support the new Farmer-Labour alliance. For the middle-sized producers, however, independent politics was the natural fruition of long-standing ideological orientation. Since the Wheat Board agitations of the immediate post-War years, middle-strata progressives had believed firmly in the corrective powers of legislation. They had never feared compulsory legislation or socialist methods and they had consistently pressured for the extensive use of government in the private sector. To this extent, compulsory pooling, socialized marketing, nationalized banks and railways and the other policies which called for an enlargement of social services originated as much in the progressive tradition as in the Socialist ethos. Tactically, the concept of independent politics was not new to the Progressive mind. Never having advocated direct action or farm militancy after the fashion of the FUC and FUL, the middle-strata progressives had sought throughout to advance their interests through political lobbying. Many of their spokesmen, such as George Edwards, A.J. MacPhail and Harold Ellis, had come to the movement through the

medium of the Progressive Party and the UFC had maintained close ties with the political insurgents. Unquestionably, however, the actual decision to organize a Farmer-Labour Party had been spoiled not by latent tendencies, but by the immediate failure of the compulsory pool campaign coupled with the pervasive sense that politics in Saskatchewan was moving in a new direction. The electoral victory of the Conservative-Progressive alliance in 1929 convinced many farmers that the political situation was polarizing. The organized Farmers' Party had displayed its patrician tendencies by aligning itself with the Tories and the Liberals had been momentarily discredited by their relations with the ethnic minorities and their attacks upon the Klan and Anglo-Saxonism.¹⁰⁷ Given these disaffections, the Socialist leaders of the new Party evidently believed that their greatest support would come from the moderately prosperous and the poor farmers, and they designed their policies largely to attract the militants away from the Communists and into the new political organization.¹⁰⁸ Paradoxically, however, the expected support did not materialize; the small farmers continued to vote Liberal and the Farmer-Labour group found itself a spokesman, not for the militants, but for "the farm reactionaries...of the old Progressive Party."¹⁰⁹

As the Farmer-Labour group evolved into the CCF, it attracted increasing numbers of the larger farmers who had been alienated by the Cooperative Government's inability to confront the Depression. These farmers were appalled by certain aspects of the Party's platform however, and by 1934, they were pressuring the Socialist leadership to amend their policies. The central issue of contention was the 'use-lease' clause, which proposed the granting of tenancy in perpetuation to all farmers upon application to the government.¹¹⁰ Williams had first

become addicted to this notion of nationalizing the land and then returning it to the farmers during a visit to the Soviet Union in 1930. Nationalization, according to Williams, would "remove the greatest overhead that farming has had to contend with - Mortgages, Interests and Rent Tolls," and when coupled with a socialization of the transportation system, it would ensure "the maximum amount of efficiency at the lowest possible cost."¹¹¹ The CCF's agrarian supporters, however, did not share in his radical enthusiasm and they clearly disliked the concept of an alienation of legal ownership to the State.¹¹² In fact, M.J. Caldwell, the leader of the Party in Saskatchewan, believed that the use-lease clause was the "major cause of the defeat of the CCF" in the Provincial election of 1934.¹¹³ Responding to the moderation of their supporters, the leadership in 1936 reformed the Party platform, dropping all references to Socialism and expunging the policy of land nationalization.¹¹⁴ Gradually, agrarian Socialism in Saskatchewan was being coopted into middle-strata progressivism and by losing its radical flavour, it was becoming increasingly more acceptable to the politically active large farmers. The CCF, wrote one spokesman revealingly, "is not radical...it simply follows the lines of least resistance."¹¹⁵

VI

To many people it seemed like just so much more of the same old thing. Progressivism and popular protest might have assumed strange guises, but their newly-tailored finery covered not their time-honoured souls. To all who cared to listen, the CCF spoke with a strangely

familiar voice. "Socialism," said George Williams, "does not mean, as some people would have you believe, that if you have two shirts you must give one to your friend...Socialism not only recognizes the right to possession and enjoyment of personal property, but wants to make it possible for people to enjoy a great deal more of it."¹¹⁶

In effect, rural Socialism was not collectivism, it was progress made rational; "there would be no glutting of the markets with unsold goods; there would be no booms and no depressions. We could make use of all the technocratic advances and the application of further labour saving devices...to lower the cost price, and therefore the sale price of that article. The money so saved would be used for the purchase of other goods or services, such as a trip to see relations in the East."¹¹⁷ If the Socialist Party seemed little more than progressive wine in a new bottle, then the Farmers' Unity League, for all its Communist affiliations, appeared to be nothing so much as a revitalized Farmers' Union of Canada. Evidently, it was close enough to attract many of the same old faces, for when the FUL founded a local in Kelvington, the first name in the lodge book was Louis P. McNamee's.¹¹⁸ "Ah well," remarked one veteran progressive to George Edwards, "you know what Barnum said."¹¹⁹

In Alberta, time had finally achieve what no man could accomplish, when Henry Wise Wood was forced from the UFA. The enigmatic old President had been perhaps Canada's most successful conservative and his systematic repressions of both the left and the right maintained an abnormal stability in Alberta's farmers' movement throughout the 1920's. In a sense, radicalism here had been twice damned; Wood and his cohorts had prevented the dissidents from influencing the UFA's policies and the economic serenity of the later twenties had subverted any attempt to

organizationally circumvent the reigning farm body. Pathetically, radicals like Carl Axelson were driven from despair unto despair. "The farmers are the most changeable individuals that I have ever come across," Axelson lamented, "whenever they have some luck and things come their way, they want to go it alone...and have nothing to do with you."¹²⁰ Unable to effect any change in the farmers' attitude, radicalism in Alberta remained an unfulfilled promise, and its organizations, in consequence, became "far too loose to exercise any influence."¹²¹ In a vital sense, however, the failure of Albertan radicalism was simply the most salient example of a widespread phenomenon. Across the West the late twenties was a time firmly bound by orthodox presumptions which delineated the proper limits of not only debate, but also opinion. Though unquestionably an 'Age of Excess', it was also an 'Era of Progressivism' and it was in the materialistic, technocratic mind that the corporate culture found its surest expression. The dissident reactionary voice of the poor had been silenced by the siren song of good times, and even the Socialists had divided and scattered under the successive blasts of consensual materialism. The Ku Klux Klan was a symbol of the age; brash, nativistic and self-serving, a narrow instrument of social homogeneity designed to shrink the vistas of cultural permissability. Its direct triumph in the 1929 election in Saskatchewan was not merely a victory for primitive sensibilities, it was an ugly reflection of the narrowness of the modern mind.

The Depression ended the corporate celebration before it had had time to crest. Progressives began to sense that the system had failed them, and though they refused to abandon their technological modernistic values, they belligerently turned upon the superstructure of capitalism. An-

grily, many progressives became 'Socialists', but few understood the meaning of the term, and fewer still were willing to accept its implications. Characteristically, the disconsolate progressives bastardized their adopted ideology into their own image and they thereby confined it within the narrow spectrum of 'acceptable' dissent. Unwittingly, agrarian Socialism was drawn into the reigning political culture and by embracing cooption, the radicals lost the possibility of understanding the system into which they were being propelled. However, the economic collapse of the thirties also stirred a militant revival of small farm protest, and in so doing, it provoked a groundswell rejection of the progressive ethics. Heretics in a land of true believers, the poor farmers saw the drift of modernity, and repudiated it. They knew that the future, as the progressives envisioned it, held no place for them, and they fought bitterly to deflect society from its corporate path. Their struggle and their defeat animated the next two decades of agrarian dissent, and set a creative standard for the Canadian century.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CLASS WAR AND CHAOS

The Depression Years

Outside of the UGG elevator at Mundare, a small cluster of uneasy, overalled men waited quietly for the wagon which moved towards them. Apprehensively, they saw that the driver, John Lamash, was no longer alone and they easily distinguished the dark silhouette of an RCMP officer sitting beside him. As they approached, the picketters again tried to turn the wagon back, shouting that they were legally on strike, and that they would allow no grain to pass through their blockade. The wagon creaked ominously forward; Lance Corporal Perlson ordered the striking farmers to clear the road and threatened them with arrest if they continued to obstruct a public highway. Angry words followed, and then, as the wagon eased through the picket line, one of the farmers struck at the horses sharply with a stick. The animals panicked and charged; the wagon broke free, swung over

to the roadside and overturned in a ditch. Lance Corporal Perlson was thrown free, cracking his head on the ground, Lamash suffered a broken leg. The grain was scattered over the swaying Prairie grass. In an instant, two black cars screamed forward, depositing eight Mounties with swinging clubs and drawn revolvers. Two farmers were injured, ten were arrested and one policeman was struck in the face. The next day, the Central Strike Committee redoubled the size of its picket line along the road to the UGG elevator.¹

The Mundare delivery strike which had begun early in November, 1934 was not the first case of the withholding of produce and the picketting of highways by farmers. Barely one year before, a similar grain strike had erupted at nearby Myrnam, and in both instances, the Farmers' Unity League had rushed in to provide its assistance and support. The nucleus of the farm strike area was the predominantly Ukrainian, black soil region to the north and east of Edmonton. Here, the tradition of homesteading had proved more tenacious than in any other region of the Western Prairie, sustained by an ethnic exclusiveness and a culture rooted in peasant traditions.² Farms in this area were much smaller than elsewhere on the Prairie, with quarter and half section production units predominating and, owing to the forested nature of the terrain and the difficulties involved in clearing, the proportion of improved to total acreage was also significantly less than the rural average. Investment ratios in farm machinery and livestock were among the lowest in Alberta,

with an attitude of reaction and a tradition of non-competitiveness retarding the acceptance of technological innovations and diversifications.³ One observer was surprised to see that many small farmers continued to cultivate their holdings "in the manner of the old country...seeding their grain by hand from a bag slung over their shoulders."⁴ Predictably, the progressives believed this to be a region of economic stagnation and they attacked the Ukrainian settler for being "personally impractical, unenterprising and unambitious with regard to wealth, ease and worldly advantage. He does not want better food, better clothes or to do less than the minimum of work."⁵

For the Ukrainian farmers of East Central Alberta, as for all small producers on the Canadian Prairie, poverty was the unfortunate corollary of methodological conservatism. Faced with depressed wheat prices which reduced their already limited incomes, the small producers were being transformed by economic circumstance into an anachronism. By the mid-thirties, analysts were discussing "the problem of the 'Quarter-Section' farmer", and attempts were being made to develop alternatives to marginal wheat production.⁶ The crux of the small farm problem was the inability of the quarter-section unit to produce wheat on a competitive basis with larger, more mechanized farms. As one Western economist noted, "because the price of wheat is [being] forced down...by lower selling possible on the larger acreage...reasonable returns on a half section cannot be assured."⁷

In effect, the industrialization of wheat farming created a situation under which an individual's income was directly linked to the size of the unit operation.⁸ Indeed, from the early thirties, analysts were discovering that a one hundred and sixty acre farm would be unable to meet its operating costs without a diversification into dairying or market gardening.⁹ For the administrators of the Saskatchewan Debt Adjustment Board, the position of the small farmer was quite simply "hopeless" and they grieved over his inability to develop a "debt paying capacity."¹⁰ Lacking an adequate income to meet expenses, the small operator was unable to maintain his equipment or risk experimenting with new technological innovations. Consequently, his economic position worsened over time and his continued existence came increasingly to depend upon his ability to suffer.

During the inter-war years, the settlement area between Edmonton and Lloydminster contained the largest concentration of small farm holdings in Alberta. Here, low earnings and an escalating level of indebtedness were the salient features of economic life throughout the Great Depression. Over half of the farms reported mortgage indebtedness in 1931, and within the quinquennium the numbers of debtors in the area exceeded those of any other Census District of Alberta by five hundred percent. The total amount of indebtedness in the small farm belt was \$15,650,500 in 1930; an average of \$2,780 per mortgaged unit. By 1935, the average debt had fallen slightly, however, the numbers of borrowers

had increased by twenty percent. This staggering burden was made only more cumbersome by the astonishingly low value of the agricultural products sold. In 1930, the sale of farm products brought an average income of \$1,216 to each operator, and within five years that amount was down to only \$850. In short, the average farmer at the outset of the Depression earned barely enough to pay forty three percent of his debt and by 1935, he could cover only one third of his crop liens and his mortgages. When amounts were reduced for the costs of production and familial subsistence, the income of the farmers of the area was insufficient to pay for the interest on their debt.¹¹

Clearly, however, the small farmers were not alone in their misery over declining wheat prices and unmanageable fixed interest charges. The economic collapse indiscriminantly affected the entire rural community and neither farm size nor family background was an adequate defence against the ravages of the Depression. In general numerical terms, financial losses appear to have varied directly with the size of the business unit, though operating deficits for the middle-sized producers, whose costs per acre were higher than those of the larger farmers and whose profit margin was smaller, would probably have been the most severe.¹² In fact, the Depression continued the trend towards a polarization of the agrarian community, as many of the mid-sized producers were forced to sell or rent large parcels of their land in order to meet operating expenses.¹³

Nonetheless, despite these facts, a distinction must be drawn between temporary hardships and long-term impoverishments, for throughout the 1930's there were clear advantages attached to large scale production. In particular, farm size had a direct influence upon the operator's relationship with his creditors, as banks and lending institutions were more willing to renegotiate mortgage agreements or to countenance an adjustment of debt or a temporary moratoria on interest payments on large farms than on small. In 1929, 12.8 percent of overdue loans on farms under two hundred acres were foreclosed, while only five percent of debtors owning over four hundred and eighty acres suffered a similar fate. Prior to the establishment of the Debt Adjustment Boards in 1935, conditions were even more pronounced, for 23.3 percent of debtors owning less than two hundred acres and 14.2 percent of farmers operating over three quarters of a section were foreclosed.¹⁴ Furthermore, though the Depression might have severely impoverished the largest landowners, they were at least provided with the comfort of knowing that their hardships would be ended by a return to moderate prosperity. For the smallest farmers there was no such security, for simple calculations revealed that unless they altered either the laws of finance or their way of living, many of them would be unable to continue in agriculture. Predictably, the middle stratum of producers fell somewhere between these two poles; they suffered great loss during the thirties and they realized that their individual

recoveries depended upon a significant revival of the wheat economy. To the mid-sized farmers, a simple return to the moderate affluence of the late twenties would probably have been insufficient; they desired definite guarantees of prosperity and it was to the government that they looked for their provision.

Though the Depression caused much individual hardship and incalculable personal suffering, its immediate impact upon the economic structure of the agrarian society was astonishingly slight. During the height of the economic collapse, from 1930-35, the proportions of small and large landholders remained constant, and though the relative numbers of middle-sized farmers continued to decline, their rate of disappearance was no greater than it had been during the later twenties.¹⁵ Simple statistics, however, conceal the incredible geographical mobility of the farmers during the Depression, for if numbers did not vary, individuals certainly did. On a regional scale, the thirties witnessed a revival of the process of depopulation on the Southern Prairie that had begun in the early post-war period. In Saskatchewan over forty-five thousand people moved north between 1930 and 1938. In Alberta, some areas suffered losses of upwards of thirty percent of their populations.¹⁶ As in the drought period of the early twenties, most of the abandoned farms were small; twenty-seven percent of them being homesteads, and sixty percent had been owned by their last operator for less than five years. One half of the evacuated farms were

a quarter-section in size and only seventeen percent were greater than three hundred and twenty acres; few of those who abandoned their homes owned more than one section.¹⁷

The large influx of new settlers from the south combined with the vast numbers of dispossessed northern farmers to create a form of 'lumpenagriculturalist' class on the Western Prairie. Many found their way into the new settlement areas around Peace River, Grande Prairie and Meadow Lake. Others wandered into the cities, towns and forests of the West, and still more formed a mobile group of tenants and homesteaders in the established areas of the Central Park Belt. If the migrations of these dispossessed farmers maintained Provincial population levels, and accounted for the sharp alterations in demographic distribution, they also served to modulate the shocks of economic change. The image of the dried out, hopped out, starved out or foreclosed farmer was a blow to the pervasive myth of the social stability of agriculture. Farmers were suddenly confronted with their own transience on an unprecedented scale and the shadow of mass dispossession clouded even the small farmers' faith in the immutability of ownership. For the progressives, the Depression ingrained their feeling that they were simply businessmen dealing with a commodity in an industrial setting, though it also filled them with a sense that they must not merely rationalize their own labours but also the essence of capitalism itself. For the poor croquants, the thirties spawned the understanding that a choice had to be

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made between tradition and survival and they fostered a sense of universal resignation.

Into this maelstrom of intellectual reorientation and seething tension, the emissaries of Canadian Communism plunged, intent upon harnessing the wind that was eroding the ideological supports of the agrarian mind. For a moment, it seemed as though they might well succeed, but when the time of testing finally arrived, it was they, and not the farmers, who lacked the resilience to continue.

II

In Moscow, everyone seemed more than a little perturbed. For years, the International had been pestering the Toronto leadership of the Communist Party of Canada to develop a programme of struggle for the countryside, but no one had expected anything like this. In early October, 1930, Stewart Smith, Canadian Communism's seemingly permanent contribution to the International Socialist fraternity, had received a copy of J.M. Clarke's "Draft Agrarian Programme" from his old friend, Tim Buck, the energetic new General Secretary of the CPC. Smith, whose Simeon mind had already been constricted by too many lessons at Moscow's Lenin School, was understandably shocked by Clarke's approach. "I feel...it has to be rewritten from the first to the last line," he told Buck, and then he dutifully presented the document to

the Krestintern, the reigning authority on agrarian socialism.¹⁸ As Smith had expected, the Delegates to the Peasant International were exceedingly disturbed by Clarke's discussion of the agrarian problem and they hastily warned the Central Executive of the CPC to revise the "Draft Programme".¹⁹ It was, Smith explained, studded with "great shortcomings and gross deviations", and it revealed all of "the opportunistic theories" and "basic deviations of Comrade Clarke." For the Communist ideologues, Clarke had committed the venal sin of reviving "the old opportunistic theory of the class antagonism between the proletariat and the poor farmer" and he had further dishonoured himself by advocating debt adjustment, state credit and a minimum farm wage. This, Smith cautioned, was little other than "pink reformism" and he advised Buck to remember that "the only solution we have to offer...is the abolition of capitalism."²⁰

Greatly embarrassed, the Central Executive of the Party bowed to the Krestintern's wisdom and removed Clarke from the editorship of The Furrow, dispatching him to Moscow for a much needed rest and reorientation.²¹ Unfortunately, Clarke's dismissal in June of 1931 was to prove disastrous to the CPC's agrarian work, for without his intellectual guidance, the Farmers' Unity League swiftly atomized. Tragically, all those best suited to replace him as the League's ideological fulcrum were removed from the revolutionary stage within a year of his departure. Hugh Bartholomew, who had preceded Clarke as editor of the farm paper, committed

suicide in the summer of 1931, tormented by charges of child molesting.²² One year later, Carl Axelson, the father of the Progressive Farmers' Educational League, and troubled master of Alberta Communism, shot himself in the head in an Edmonton hotel room.²³ Those who remained lacked both the formal Socialist training of their departed brethren and the capacity to formulate a broad ideological synthesis. Fred Schunaman, who replaced Clarke as editor of The Furrow, was a courageous and energetic worker, but he neither understood the processes of agricultural development, nor possessed the propagandistic skills necessary to develop the farmers' perceptions of the class war. Of the other prominent League members, only Walter Wiggins and Hopkins Mills were sufficiently acquainted with the Socialist approach to undertake the task of encouraging the development of a revolutionary class consciousness. An immigrant from Glamorganshire, Mills was a formidable platform speaker and an outstanding agitator, but his writing talents were limited and his organizational abilities were questionable.²⁴ Wiggins, the League's President, was an Irish Canadian from Western Ontario, who after having served in the Fort Garry Horse in World War One, became converted to socialism by the Ganong brothers while homesteading near Sturgis.²⁵ A kind, conscientious and sincere man of considerable personal charm and meticulous habits, he was the most effective of all his comrades at forging grass roots' contacts and friendships. Unfortunately, Wiggins was not a man

sued to the drudgery of preparing educational propaganda; his Communism was torrid and not calculated and his radical invective was a product not of his mind but of his heart.²⁶ Thus, though the League continued to generate an emotional intensity after 1931, it did not succeed in maintaining its ideological depth. Unquestionably, the CPC was in large measure responsible for this situation, for after the CEC repudiated Clarke's radical programme, it lost interest in the agrarian work and failed to develop an ideological line for the struggle.²⁷ Without intellectual direction or propagandistic guidance the FUL swiftly degenerated into a mechanism for militant struggle rather than class war, and condemned by its limited role, it became not so much a leader in the fight for the Cooperative Commonwealth as a follower in the poor farmers' revolt against the progressive ethos.

Predictably, there was nothing complicated about the FUL's organizational response to the Depression. Recognizing that the League would be restricted by a shortage of funds and experienced agitators to local protests, the leadership established a series of independent committees of action across the 'mortgage belt' of the Northern Prairie. These local units were often completely isolated from each other and despite the constant efforts of League organizers to group the committees into 'district' or 'regional' 'councils of action'; no unifying infrastructure was ever established.²⁸ Consequently, there was a constant "lack of coordination

among units" resulting in a "sense of isolation" among local members "which tends to lead to a feeling of weakness." As Winnipeg's Tom McEwen, who periodically appeared in Saskatchewan to investigate League activities complained, "Large numbers of units in our districts are absolutely isolated from each other...The central office appears to recognize the need for Councils of Action but they have never taken the steps to translate the theory into action...and most of the units do not understand the purpose and work of the councils of action."²⁹ Given this decentralization, it is hardly surprising that League organizers never knew the actual size of the membership in their movement. Schunaman calculated the readership of The Furrow to be around two thousand, however, he had to admit that many subscribers were not members of the FUL.³⁰ There was, however, considerable popular sympathy for the Communists, which displayed itself indirectly in a number of the League's activities. In the Athabasca by-election of February, 1932 Carl Axelson polled over twenty three hundred votes, winning fifteen percent of the total and helping to defeat the incumbent Liberal candidate. Two months later, a League 'Farm Relief Petition' containing twelve thousand signatures was presented to R.B. Bennett, and on a local level, as many as eight hundred farmers might gather under FUL auspices to prevent a tax sale or to hold a penny auction.³¹

Clearly, the FUL was at its most effective in the revitalization of the old FUC idea of resisting foreclosures and

evictions through the use of a 'binder twine' sale or a 'penny auction'. Throughout the early thirties, crowds of obstructionist farmers ranging from a few dozen to several hundred would gather to surreptitiously blockade highways and prevent the sale of an insolvent's property. Often, no bidders, but friends of the owner would be present and by arrangement with the auctioneer, only one bid would be accepted. Any attendant prospective buyer, not party to the scheme would immediately find himself surrounded by a cluster of glowering farmers. If he were foolhardy enough to speak, a heavy hand would land on his shoulder, and a gruff voice would mutter, "plenty high enough already, ain't it?"³² The nucleus of this anti-foreclosure activity was the small farm belt of the northern plains, but demonstrations against mortgage sales speckled the map of the entire Prairie. Unquestionably, the resistance movement was in large measure a direct consequence of depressed conditions, and to an extent, the FUL did little more than provide an organizational appellation to a spontaneous impulse. Nonetheless, although there would have been a penny auction movement without a Communist front organization, the role of the League in publicizing and popularizing the impulse should not be underestimated. No other farm group condoned the extra-legal methods farmers used in dealing with forced sales, and without the League's support, the movement might have been suppressed by the simple antagonism of the established farm organizations. To this extent, the Communists provided a form of legitimacy to the penny auction and offered the farmers participating in them a sense of justification which they might not otherwise have enjoyed.

For the poor farmers, a policy of local resistance to foreclosures could not alter the grim realities of impoverishment and debt. Ruined by

falling prices and legally defenceless against their creditors, many small farmers began to search for more comprehensive solutions to their economic problems. "The outlook for the Western farmer is certainly blue," wrote one observer in 1931, "and it may be necessary to tinge it with red before justice is done to him."³³ In response to the farmers' demands for relief, the FUL heightened the intensity of its agitations in favour of a moratorium and carried its programme before the legislators, arguing with passionate intensity that farm debts must be cancelled "because they cannot be paid...we are not abject slaves and we cannot be treated as such."³⁴ Unquestionably, the League's propaganda scored a psychological victory for the farmers, for it convinced many politicians that the impecunious were "in a revolutionary frame of mind and find nothing good in what we have done or tried to do."³⁵ It did not, however, succeed in effecting a change in governmental policy. For Premier Brownlee of Alberta, individual negotiation and personal restraint were the only reasonable answers to the debt problem, and he refused to announce a general moratorium, hoping that a simple "threat of proclamation" would be sufficient "to obtain voluntary concessions from creditors that will go a long way to meet the situation."³⁶ In Saskatchewan, J.T.M. Anderson's Cooperative Government was no more anxious to pass comprehensive protective legislation than was Brownlee's and though a Debt Adjustment Board was established in 1933, its effectiveness was limited. In fact, of the sixteen hundred and eighty-three petitions from creditors requesting the right to foreclose, nine hundred and fifty-six were allowed by the Debt Adjustment Board, and a full two-thirds were approved without the debtor's consent.³⁷ Frustrated by the politicians' intransigence and circumscribed by their own organizational weaknesses, the revolutionaries

began to search for other methods of advancing the poor farmers' interests. Some turned to proto-monetarism and advocated extensions of government credit or the issuance of script to needy farmers. Others sought deliverance in a guaranteed grain price, or a minimum agricultural wage. A few turned towards politics, and sought to capture the instruments of government for themselves.³⁸

Apparently, the Rumsey local of the FUL was the first to propose the calling of a farm strike to protest "against the intolerable conditions under which the poor farmers are forced to live." Petitioning the League organizers in December, 1932, the Rumsey radicals asserted that a mass "non-production strike" would be the most effective weapon in the struggle "against the relentless robbery of the banks, through the Provincial and Municipal authorities, [and of] the mortgage and machine companies." Fred Schunaman, The Furrow's editor, was immediately drawn to the idea, however, he cautioned that there was more than one variety of strike action which could be taken. The farmers, Schunaman suggested, could choose between non-production, which meant a curtailment of the amount of acreage sown to wheat; non-delivery, or the picketting of elevators and the prevention of grain sales until demands were met; and non-payment, which implied the sale of produce and the refusal to pay creditors, despite seizures or notices of foreclosure.³⁹ The Rumsey farmers' suggestion and Schunaman's explanation inaugurated a lively debate in the pages of The Furrow, which was only ended when the FUL called a conference to decide upon the proper type of strike action to endorse.⁴⁰ Unfortunately, even before the farm strike convention could be held, the League was dealt a particularly devastating blow. In May of 1933, The Furrow's credit at the printers was curtailed, its office in the Grainger Building was

closed and for the next eight months, it was forced to cease publication.⁴¹ Without an organ to popularize the farm strike, the League's agitations ground to a premature halt, and Communist organizers were compelled to fall back on less ambitious tasks such as contesting the Mackenzie by-election in Saskatchewan, or organizing a Hunger March on the Regina Legislature.⁴²

The brief debate over farm strike strategies had, however, successfully popularized the idea, albeit only in the FUL's Park Belt stronghold, and particularly in the area between Edmonton and the Saskatchewan border.⁴³ Consequently, when a serious problem arose at Myrnam concerning the grading of wheat by local agents, the affected farmers had decided to take strike action by boycotting the elevators in question. The dispute had arisen in mid-November, 1933, when a rumor had circulated among the local farmers that the five elevators in Myrnam had been instructed to grade all grains tough. Complaints had immediately been lodged with the Board of Grain Commissioners, but the companies had successfully disproved the charges by producing receipts demonstrating that they had purchased dry wheat since November 15th, when the charges were made.⁴⁴ The rumors persisted, however, and on December fourth, one hundred and forty farmers voted to boycott the elevators until a formal investigation had been undertaken by the Grain Commissioners, and until the local agents had been replaced by the Elevator Companies. A Strike Committee was established, roads leading to the elevators were picketted, and an appeal for support was sent out to both the Farmers' Unity League and the United Farmers of Alberta.⁴⁵

Paradoxically, despite front-page coverage in major Alberta newspapers, such as the Edmonton Bulletin and the Calgary Herald, it took

about a month for the Board of Grain Commissioners to dispatch an investigatory legation to the Myrnam area. In early January of 1934, Commissioners Blatchford, Thompson and Creighton appeared with representatives of the Grain Companies and an officer of the RCMP to inform the farmers that although they sympathized, "the Board of Grain Commissioners has no power to act in this case and it is up to the Companies represented here to take the necessary steps."⁴⁶ By week's end, the Mounted Police had moved into the area and the farmers' pickets had been forcibly dispersed.⁴⁷ Frustrated by their inability to win concessions from either the grain companies or the Government, the Strike Committee attempted to legitimize its grievances by obtaining the support of the UFA. Although few in the Myrnam area would have been members of the United Farmers, and though the organization had previously ignored the Committee's appeals for support, the leaders of the strike clearly hoped to publicize their grievances by winning the sympathy of the Province's largest farm body.

On January 17th a handsome young Ukrainian named William Halina appeared at the UFA Convention in Calgary and in fluent English, appealed to the delegates for support. Denying the presence of both "agitators" and "Communists", Halina explained that their major demand was simply to have the offending elevator agents removed, "because we have lost faith in them." One delegate promptly asked him if any Pool elevators were involved, and when he replied in the negative, a sigh went up and at least one member muttered, "Thank God." Vocal opposition to the strike soon became manifest however, as one delegate after another rose to explain that as "a director of one of the companies named", he objected to Halina's "charges of unjust practices." Tactfully, the Convention avoided an outbreak of hostilities by appointing an 'impartial committee' to research

into the Myrnam strike, though the predisposition of the delegates was reflected in the fact that of the three individuals appointed to investigate the dispute, one was a member of the Provincial Cabinet, and another was a director of one of the companies involved.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, the investigatory report submitted three days later flatly denied the existence of unfair grading practices at Myrnam, though the Committee admitted that owing to time constraints, it had based its findings solely on evidence offered by the Board of Grain Commissioners, the Department of Agriculture and the companies involved.⁴⁹ Scorned by the UFA, Halina returned to Myrnam and the Strike Committee resigned itself to eventual defeat. Late in February, a compromise was reached between the farmers and the Grain Companies; several of the local agents were replaced, and in exchange, the strikers dropped their charges of low grading, and abandoned their demand for a reimbursement by the companies of all grains undersold. On March 11th, 1934 Western Canada's first farm delivery strike came quietly to a close.⁵⁰

Throughout the Myrnam strike, the role of the Farmers' Unity League had been not only secondary, but also somewhat inauspicious. Lacking in funds, the League had been unable to provide either organizers or financial assistance to the Strike Committee, and without an organ to disseminate information, it had even failed in its function as a propagandistic body. Nonetheless, if the Communists could be faulted for their inability to aid the strikers, the United Farmers of Alberta were guilty of directly opposing them. The Brownlee Government's response to the unrest at Myrnam was repression; for the RCMP was dispatched to the area with the simple objective of opening highways and restoring order as swiftly as possible. The reaction of the UFA's educational

organization was no more favourable than had been the Government's, for the Convention had displayed a complete lack of sympathy for the protesters, and had even prepared a report which endorsed the attitude of the authorities. Remarkably, despite its isolation, the Strike Committee successfully maintained the boycott on grain deliveries for over three months, though it is clear that the secret to the strikers' success lay in the fact that they continued to deliver their wheat to points outside of the picketted area.⁵¹ Limited in its objectives and confined in its geographical extent, the Myrnam strike was a promising experiment with a new form of popular protest. Moderate concessions had been obtained through limited action, and most of the participating farmers concluded that the strike would have been even more successful had its geographical area been extended. Before the year was out, the farmers of Myrnam were to be given an opportunity to test their theories.

III

Alberta's second farm delivery strike began in Mundare, a town lying some eighty kilometers south-west of Myrnam, in early November of 1934. Unlike their predecessors, however, the Mundare strikers evidently devised their protest to be more than a local disturbance, for their demands reflected an ambitious desire to ameliorate the conditions of the poor farmers across the Prairie West. Directing their petition to the Provincial Government, the Mundare Strike Committee demanded that the elevator companies install grain cleaners at their own expense at all points; that a cost of production minimum price for all farm products

be legislated; and that a more 'equitable' system of grading be established.⁵² By emphasizing the need for better methods of grading and free grain cleaning, the protesters were hoping to improve the price of their wheat by eliminating the possibility that they would be under paid by the elevator agents. In the Park Belt region of the Prairie, the quality of the wheat was much more varied, and on average much lower than it was in the south. In this area, a full one-quarter of grain delivered would regularly be graded as poor or 'tough' by the purchasing agent.⁵³ Since the grading system stressed such characteristics as colour and plumpness of the kernel, the cleanness of the grain was often crucial if the farmer was to obtain the correct price for his wheat.⁵⁴ Large producers generally owned their own cleaners, but poor farmers could not afford to install their own systems, and they often found it impossible to pay the elevator agents for the cost of the service, even where it was available.⁵⁵ Consequently, many small farmers believed the agents used the impurities in their grain as a means of lowering the purchasing price by downgrading wheat qualities. In this regard, the apparently limited demands of the Mundare strikers represented more than simply localized concerns, for they were manifestations of the small farmers' desire to achieve justice and security for their industry.

The delivery strike began on November sixth, 1934, when four hundred angry farmers gathered at Mundare Town Hall to prepare a petition of grievances. Detachments of eight to ten men were dispatched to patrol the major highways and picket lines were established around the local elevators.⁵⁶ Vegreville's Chief Inspector Scott of the RCMP immediately sent police units into the area, and by the evening of the first day of striking, fourteen farmers had been arrested and two had been hospitalized.⁵⁷

Scott's impetuous actions probably disturbed the Government, for on November eighth, the RCMP units in the area were withdrawn, and Chief Grain Commissioner Blatchford was hurrying towards Mundare from Winnipeg, drawn "by the excessive seriousness of the situation." The following day, Blatchford met with the strikers, and explained to them that their protest "was the most futile thing they could do", indicating that their refusal to deliver wheat would have no effect upon prices since there was enough surplus grain stored in Eastern terminals to feed the country for the next three years. Inspector Scott, who accompanied the Grain Commissioner, was even more admonitory, warning the farmers that the RCMP would do everything it could to maintain law and order, and informing them that they "had a lot to be thankful for in that they were living in the British Empire."⁵⁸ Within two days, the strike had spread to encompass all of the major shipping points around Mundare, closing some twenty elevators in the area between Royal Park and Lamont.⁵⁹ By November 14th, farmers in Willingdon, Hairy Hill, Smokey Lake, Two Hills, Kaleland and Manville had joined in non-delivery and had recognized the authority of the Mundare leadership as the Provincial Strike Committee.⁶⁰ By this time, sixty elevators had been closed, and the strikers confidently predicted that their protest would soon paralyse trading across the whole of Central Alberta.⁶¹

Tragically, their optimism was to prove apocryphal, as the support for the strike began to wane soon after it reached its apex, towards the end of November. By December first, grain sales had resumed at Hilliard, Myrnam and Vegreville, and Grain Commissioner Ramsay reopened Mundare with a promise to supervise the grading of wheat delivered.⁶² Desperately, the Provincial Strike Committee attempted to avert disaster

by transforming the character of the protest from non-delivery to boycott and it urged farmers only to deliver their grain over the platform, thereby avoiding the elevators and their agents.⁶³ In Willingdon the strike leaders sought to revive the movement's unity by turning themselves into the Executive of a United Farmers of Canada (Alberta Section) and they called upon all poor farmers to join in building a permanent organization pledged to obtaining the "costs of production" through "direct action".⁶⁴ The grain strike was doomed to collapse, however, for despite the courageous exertions of its leaders, it was condemned by an internal weakness. Though the delivery strike was a supreme manifestation of the poor farmers' discipline and ability to cooperate, it was flawed by the fact that its real victims were not the grain dealers but the producers themselves. By not delivering their wheat, the farmers were depriving themselves of their only source of income, and for the small unit producers who were already deeply into debt, this implied a risk not only to their rights of ownership, but also to their means of subsistence. Unless the strike could have spread rapidly to encompass a majority of the wheat-producing area, it was bound to fail, as the small farmers' capacity to endure a curtailment of income was far less than that of the major grain companies to absorb a temporary loss of deliveries. Unfortunately, the chances of the strike spreading over an extended area in 1934-35 were limited, for across the Province the "leading farmers" had "declared their intention to disregard the strike entirely."⁶⁵ Large farm organizations, such as the UFA and the Wheat Pools, refused to endorse the strike and the weakness of the FUL in the southern areas of the Prairie restricted the non-delivery

movement to an isolated area of poverty in the heart of the Park Belt.⁶⁶

For the Farmers' Unity League, the Mundare delivery strike was a final curtain call which served only to ease the organization from the revolutionary stage. Initially, prominent Communists had hoped that the strike would inaugurate "a new stage in the development of the impoverished farmer...it signals a definite radicalization of the farming masses; a definite swing to the left; a definite growing militancy; a definite breaking with old traditions and methods of struggle."⁶⁷ Anxious to harness this new movement, League organizers had moved swiftly into the strike area, and they had freely offered their support and guidance to the dissident farmers. The Canadian Labour Defence League, a front organization of the CPC, had volunteered to act in the defence of arrested picketers; the FUL offices in Edmonton were transformed into the headquarters of the Provincial Strike Committee; Communist organizers canvassed non-strike areas for support and The Furrow agreed to publish and distribute the strikers' bulletins and broadsheets.⁶⁸ One League organizer, George Palmer, even made the headlines in the Edmonton newspapers when he was tarred and feathered by strike breakers after giving a speech in Vegreville.⁶⁸ Sadly, for all their good offices, the Communists were unable to win converts to the cause of class war, and even at the height of the strike, an FUL conference in Edmonton attracted only eighty-four farmers; a grim reminder of the fact that despite their best efforts, "the League is extremely sectarian, isolated from the main mass of the farmers...[by] its traditions no less than by its composition."⁷⁰

Soon after the delivery strike, at the ninth Plenum of the Central Executive Committee of the CPC held in Toronto in November

of 1935, the decision was made to disband the Farmers' Unity League and to fuse its various elements 'with the mass reformist farm organizations to which it is...parallel and in general, in competition.'⁷¹ The Party passed the resolution eliminating its agrarian wing as part of a general reorientation in favour of an anti-fascist, 'United Front' of radical elements.⁷² The League was attacked for its 'sectarian' and 'isolated' nature and its methods were characterized by the CPC as being overburdened with 'generalities' and 'theorizations'.⁷³ The leaders of the FUL drifted into a new organization, the Farmers' National Committee of Action (FNCA), a 'United Front' body that had been established in August, 1935 in anticipation of the discontinuance of the League's operations. The objective of the revised organization was similar to that of the old Progressive Farmers' Educational League; the unification of the various farm groups and the maintenance of a radical predisposition on the part of the farmers.⁷⁴ In short, the new strategy was to penetrate, and not to oppose, the rival protesting organizations. Lamentably, the FNCA failed to make a significant impact on the farmers' movement, in large part because its headquarters had been established in Winnipeg, where they were too far distant from the centre of radical activity to be of much value. Furthermore, many of the most successful Communist agitators began to disappear. Mills retired from the farm movement and eventually moved with his family to Vancouver, Wiggins left Saskatchewan for Winnipeg and the Secretary of the Alberta Section of the FUL, the dynamic, young Bill Kardash went to Spain to fight in the Mackenzie-Papineau Battalion.⁷⁵ By 1936, the Communist star on the the Prairies had been eclipsed, and the revolutionaries had manoeuvred themselves into premature obscurity.

In many ways, however, the FUL deserved better; better than the treatment it had received in life and better than that accorded to it by posterity. Though the League had failed to win the poor farmers to Communism, it had nonetheless been an organizational success, in that for a brief time it had provided inspiration and guidance to the militant croquants of the countryside. With limited resources and chronically handicapped by a deficiency of organizers, the FUL had led the struggle against the financial and grain trading plutocracy and had assumed the mantle of militancy that had been discarded a half decade earlier by the FUC. If it failed as an organization, it was because the ideological goals it set for itself were too ambitious for both its leaders and its followers, for the League sought not merely to lead a struggle, but to change men's thoughts. Consequently, the FUL imprisoned itself in a doctrinal framework which restricted its freedom to lead the small farmers against the forces of capital. Though the League fought for immediate reforms, it alienated its supporters by declaring the very policies it advocated to be insufficient and ephemeral. As one farm leader noted of the FUL, "I don't know how to place this outfit...they make a big noise about the toiling farmer and they knock the UFC. They profess to be Wheat Pool supporters and yet their activities appear to be opposed to the Marketing Act. They support the CCF and yet their organization claims the CCF is a tool of capitalism."⁷⁶ Ultimately, the FUL was more adept at exposing deceptions and leading independently generated protests than it was at evolving a concrete programme which might permanently attract the toiling farmers.⁷⁷ Thus, when the demand of the United Front terminated the League's existence, it left not so much a revolutionary legacy as a vague militant

enthusiasm. Rather than converting the masses to Communism, the FUL succeeded only in reinforcing their belligerence, and this protestant spirit found its expression not in support for the CPC, but in a vivification of the United Farmers' of Canada in both Alberta and Saskatchewan in the years immediately following the League's demise.

IV

Preeminently the politician, the new President of the UFA was clearly not cut from the traditional cloth of Albertan exceptionalism. A member of Parliament since 1921, and a leader of the 'Ginger Group' throughout the twenties, Robert Gardiner was too clever and too accomplished a man to tailor his talents to the patterns cut by anyone else; even Henry Wise Wood. Devoted to the cause of social democracy, Gardiner shared none of his predecessor's antipathy for political involvements and he frankly endorsed the idea of forging a radical alliance of farmer and labourer. From the outset, Gardiner sought to transform the UFA into the Provincial arm of the nascent Canadian-Socialist Party and as early as 1932, he close-hauled the organization's sails and tacked it into the radical wind.⁷⁸ The phrase 'cooperative commonwealth' began to appear in UFA publications and a resolution in favour of adopting a 'use-lease' system similar to that being discussed by the Socialists in the UFC (SS), was appended to an official manifesto.⁷⁹ The architect of the official drive to bring the organization into line with developments in Saskatchewan, was Norman F. Priestly, who acted as leader of the UFA while the President was away serving in Ottawa. Originally educated for the Ministry, Priestly

was an energetic and determined Socialist with a penetrating mind and an overwhelmingly single-minded devotion.⁸⁰ Under Gardiner's tutelage, and fired by the energetic zeal of Priestly, the UFA's official position underwent a sharp transformation in the first years of Wood's retirement. Inevitably, this radicalization of the organization's policy drove a rift between it and the Brownlee government; a division ignored by the new Socialist leadership, who set about affiliating themselves with the CCF first and then discussing the issue with the UFA's political wing after.⁸¹ Overenthusiastic and often callous in their efforts to inject Socialism into the farmers' movement, the new Executive displayed an absurd disregard for the proclivities of both the UFA legislators and the mass of Alberta farmers. Predictably, their penchant for building ideological castles in the air, without waiting to test the current of the wind, was soon to send the entire structure of the UFA crashing to the ground.

For Robert Gardiner and Norman Priestly, the Cooperative Commonwealth would convert the farmers by a logic all its own and they consistently emphasized the inviolable link between socialism and material progress. The capitalistic system in agriculture, according to Gardiner, was intrinsically different from previous systems, "inasmuch as machinery is now the important factor in production." By mechanizing their methods of production, farmers were in fact 'rationalizing' their economic habits, freeing themselves from endless toil, and thereby opening the way "to a better social order" which depended upon "social units...directing the process of change."⁸² Confident of the appeal of their vision, the new leaders devoted most of their efforts to building the CCF, and consequently, "as far as the old UFA is concerned, little is being done by

way of organization."⁸³ Membership continued to decline; in 1934, there were 14,862 supporters of the UFA and by 1935, that number had fallen to 9,838 - a gaunt shadow of the original forty thousand farmers who had joined in 1921.⁸⁴ "Finances are very low," complained one organizer in 1934, "membership not coming up... But I can well understand many of our people holding back when we have not sufficient funds to hold midsummer board meetings and yet send full delegations to the CCF Convention in Winnipeg."⁸⁵ By their actions, it appeared that the Executive of the UFA was almost completely out of touch with the majority of its supporters, and they certainly failed to notice the changing current of opinion that was moving the organization from below. Since George Bevington's return to grace in 1929, following a temporary retirement from the farmers' movement imposed upon him by Henry Wise Wood, the popularity of Social Credit theories had been growing in Alberta. Clearly, ideas of monetary reform had had wide currency in the Province since the early twenties, but it was only with the onset of the Depression that Social Credit really began to garnish an autonomous following. Propagated within the UFA by Bevington and the editor of the farmers' organ, Walter Norman Smith, and in the House of Commons by William Irvine and George Coote, Douglas's theories and works were extensively appreciated in rural areas and soon became what one sociologist has called, "a preferred group tendency" among the farmers.⁸⁶

To those who watched with trepidation the creeping growth of Social Credit doctrines within the UFA, it was a dogma of irrationality and fatuity. Resting upon the simple postulate that the sum of available purchasing power was insufficient to buy, at prevailing prices, the aggregate of goods produced, the Social Crediters advocated an equalization

of spending power with production costs. Douglas explained this notion in his notorious 'A plus B theorem', where A represented all wages, salaries and dividends paid to individuals, and B signified all organizational payments, such as bank charges, raw materials and external costs. Of these two factors, which together comprised the total cost of production, only A was circulated as purchasing power, implying that consumer spending could never equal the total value of goods produced. For the Social Crediter, the only solution was the creation of more money, distributed to enable them to price their products below costs.⁸⁷ Vague in its prognosis and misleading in its prescriptions, the appeal of Social Credit lay in its emotional implications; its attacks upon the banks and financial institutions which indirectly controlled society through their dominion over the 'organizational' or 'B' factors of the production function; its explanation of the frustration felt by a productive people unable to buy the goods which they desired and its emphasis upon the freedom of the individual and the need to liberate the masses from plutocratic domination. Not surprisingly, critics of the Social Credit theorem in Alberta assumed that the popularity of the doctrine was derived from the poor and the non-competitive members of society. "Social Credit," wrote C.W. Peterson, appeals "to the comparatively small group of people who are forced to become heavy borrowers," who are "vulnerable and often subject to bank influence and even dictation," and who consequently feel that "the banking business is the key and pivot of our whole economic fabric."⁸⁸ Douglas's rural supporters, wrote J.K. Sutherland, the Secretary of the UFA, were "invariably" residents of the small farm regions of "the North, and along the foothills area of the Province, and as a rule the burden of their contentions is

based on that local environment."⁸⁹ Paradoxically, however, while Social Credit unquestionably drew much of its support from the mass of rural debtors, it was not among the poorest strata of the farmers that it found its most significant following. Rather, it was among the middle and large-sized producers of the Southern Prairie. In fact, the great threat to the UFA and its new doctrine of socialism came not from the outside, but from within.⁹⁰

If Bevington, Smith and the other UFA monetarists had prepared the foundations of the Social Credit revolt in Alberta, it was the Calgary schoolteacher and fundamentalist, William Aberhart, who gave the movement life. A prominent revivalist in the 1920's with a large personal following, Aberhart had been converted to Social Credit in 1932 and had immediately decided to redeem Alberta from the sin into which it had been plunged by the unscrupulous bankers and financiers. Eyes burning like coals in his florid face, skin flexing and rippling over the words that poured now metallic, now harsh, now compassionate from his lips, Aberhart swept the province into the circle of his revivalist fervour. His voice, which echoed over the airwaves, was compelling, his gestures which brushed aside his opponents were earnest and commanding; his vast size which alone matched and submerged the massiveness of his rhetoric, was overpowering. Only in Sapiro had the West seen an orator of such magnificent and garish imagination, and only in Henry Wise Wood, had it witnessed an ambition of such ferocious and monomaniac intensity.⁹¹ The comfortable, self-confident reason of the UFA's socialist message withered before the blasting, scornful emotion of Aberhart's redemptive crusade.⁹² The Social Credit virus rampaged through the heart of the United Farmers' organization, and when the crusade turned political,

it converted whole locals en masse. In the Provincial election of 1935, Aberhart was swept into power. His Party captured ninety percent of the Legislature, completely eliminating the political wing of the UFA in a single electoral confrontation. The cause of this devastating defeat at the hands of a Party that had been in existence for less than a year, lay in the Social Creditors' penetration of the heartland of UFA support. In the large farm area of the Southern Prairie, Aberhart won the largest percentage of the popular vote, whereas in the less industrialized region of the North, and particularly in the small farm belt east of Edmonton, the new Party was less successful.⁹³

There was much in the doctrine of Social Credit that was attractive to the progressive ethos of the middle and larger unit farmer. In a vital sense, Douglas's doctrine rested upon an acceptance of an increasingly technocratic society and emphasized the importance of controlling the course of industrial expansion in the interests of the "common heritage". There was a strong presumption running through the Social Credit theory that technology had already provided the means for personal improvement and had opened the way to material prosperity and increasing wealth and leisure. The fact that the producers were not already enjoying the benefits of modernity was evidence for the existence of a plutocratic cabal which was manipulating the instruments of capital to the detriment of the mass of humanity.⁹⁴ To the progressive farmer, the appeal of Douglas's vision was organic; they had harnessed the machines of the future, and yet they could not overcome the obstacles of insufficient credit and low prices. Like the socialism of the CCF in Saskatchewan, the appeal of Social Credit lay in the fact that it explained the failure of capitalism without rejecting materialism and technology. In fact, so close

were the implications of the two theories, that on one occasion, Aberhart confessed that "conditions in Alberta almost made me a Communist...[but] instead, I turned to Social Credit."⁹⁵ Like socialism, Social Credit appealed to the industrial farmers' sense of frustration in the face of financial collapse and terrible hardship and it offered a simple universalist answer to the question of how the Depression had come about which exonerated them from blame. Far more appealing than the staid determinism of the Marxian vision, Social Credit filled a people trapped in rural obscurity with images of a global financial conspiracy of horrific magnitude and evil intent. Seductively, the dogma weaved messianic religion, macroeconomics and rural parochialism into a brilliant tapestry which was rivalled only by the ritualistic wizardry of the Ku Klux Klan in its emotional appeal and mystical grandeur.

For the UFA, Aberhart's political victory was a reversal made only more demoralizing by the fact that it was accompanied by a drastic reduction in the organization's membership.⁹⁶ Most of those deserting the UFA were politicized Social Creditors, confident that Aberhart would soon correct the ills of society. Some, however, were socialists intent upon organizing a powerfully autonomous CCF opposition to the new government. Those who remained were generally "the more conservative farmers"; large landowners whose interest in the UFA was commercial and not political. Indeed, within a year of the 1935 election, one leading member of the Association noted that "the chief activity of the UFA Central Office is concerned with cooperative buying of farm supplies. But for this, it would have been difficult to keep the office open after the election. The best locals are those engaged in cooperative buying."⁹⁷ Before the Aberhart victory, the UFA Executive had maintained a reserved attitude

towards the wholesale cooperatives; the Association's Trading Department had consistently followed a policy emphasizing direct control over farm supplies, even where consumer societies had existed. In fact, so intense had been the competition from the Trading Department that in 1932, the Cooperative Wholesale Organization had been forced to suspend its activities, only reopening under the auspices of the Cooperative Union of Canada, three years later.⁹⁸ The triumph of Social Credit altered the UFA's attitude towards the cooperative societies, for although it did not end competition from the Trading Department, it brought the Association into a closer working harmony with the farmers' commercial organizations. Indeed, while the twenties had been a period when "the money reformers were prominent in the UFA", by the late thirties, the remaining members appeared "to have lost their faith (in Social Credit) and have now pinned their faith in cooperatives - without financial reform."⁹⁹ Abandoned by the advocates of direct political action, and purged of the more radical elements in the movement, the UFA's policy underwent a subtle reorientation in the closing years of the Depression. Dominated now by the patrician farmers, the UFA gradually moved in the direction of conforming to the old progressive ideal of a farm movement devoted to political lobbying and commercial organization.

The symbol of this changing direction was George Gibson Coote, a UFA member of Parliament from 1921 to 1935, and a strong defender of agrarian corporatism. In keeping with the new tenor of Prairie insurgency, Coote was a Social Democrat who believed that the political system had to be rationalized so as to be made more representative of the different commodity groups within society.¹⁰⁰ In 1938, Coote became Secretary of the Canadian Chamber of Agriculture, and thereby merged the UFA

into an embryonic alliance of patrician farmers and cooperatives that was soon to become the authoritative voice of corporatism in the agrarian West. The Chamber had been founded on the instigation of Prairie and West Coast cooperators in 1935, and its objective was to unite Canadian agriculture for collective action and to advise governments in the formulation of agrarian policies. Within two years, the Chamber had provincial organizations across Canada and had emerged as a spokesman for the agricultural cooperatives, and in particular, for the Prairie wheat pools.¹⁰¹

The CCA was, however, generally recognized as a representative of only the more prosperous elements in the rural community and the policies it advanced were clearly those of the most financially secure strata of farmers. The UFA fitted easily into this evolving pattern of protest, and in cooperation with the Chamber, the Association gained a powerful voice on the Western plains. The organizations' patrician tendencies were revealed indirectly in the policies advocated by both the CCA and the United Farmers' Association. When, in 1938, the Federal Government decided to revise its wheat pricing policy, and set a minimum price floor, both the UFA and the Cooperatives were united in suggesting that eighty-seven and one half cents was the lowest price that the farmers could possibly accept.¹⁰²

This in itself was a low price, tailored only to the requirements of the large, mechanized farmers, for reasonable estimates held that one dollar a bushel was required to cover the cost of production on the smallest farms.¹⁰³ However, when the Government announced that its minimum price would be eighty cents, the CCA and its member organizations revealed their true colours by respectfully acquiescing to the Cabinet's decision. Lew Hutchison, the President of Alberta Wheat Pool and Vice-President of the Province's Chamber of Agriculture, set the tone of

responsiveness by stating passively that "if the Government feels eighty cents is the best it can do, we must abide by that."¹⁰⁴ As one observer complained, the problem with both the Government and the organized 'Farm Bloc' was that when "they want to quote costs," they invariably "quote... the large acreage man...and [consequently] there is a constant tendency to depress prices to the big farm level and to try to justify that procedure, regardless of how many thousands of small farmers are put out of business through the use of this procedure."¹⁰⁵

Paradoxically, in its efforts to unite the farmers into a single commodity group, the CCA only aggravated the tensions which existed between the different strata within the rural society. Indeed, by consistently emphasizing the necessity for compromise and reason, the patrician farm leaders failed to consider the desperate conditions of the mass of poor farmers. Unrepresented by the established agricultural organizations and undermined by their inability to influence governmental policy, the small farmers of the West became increasingly outspoken in their demand for a guaranteed right to exist. While the patricians moved to a reassertion of their corporatist ideal and while the politically conscious middle-sized farmers searched for legislative relief, the poor producers turned towards an escalation of their demand for protection. When they searched for models of action, they found their inspiration not in the 'authoritative voice' of the CCA, nor in the revivalist messages of the Aberharts and Coldwells, but in the memory of their once ferocious champions, the Farmers' Union of Canada and its pugnacious successor, the Farmers' Unity League.

V

Frank Eliason was facing a major decision. Pacing his office in the Indian Summer of 1934, his lips compressed, his face drawn with concentration, he weighed his future course with infinite exactness. Behind him lay the disappointments of the June Provincial election. Rather than sweeping Saskatchewan as had been predicted, the CCF had finished third at the polls and had failed to capture more than five seats in the Legislature. For Frank Eliason, the Secretary of both the fledgling Party and the UFC (SS), the defeat seemed an overwhelming reversal. Optimistically, he had believed the election would signal the birth of Canada's first Socialist government, and in his despondency, he began to recognize the terrible implications of his overconfidence. Having devoted all of his attentions and energies to the political struggle, he had neglected the UFC (SS) and consequently the organizational structure was now all but moribund. Furthermore, general interest in the Association had fallen precipitously, for the "politically minded membership in the UFC, or at least the major portion of them, are pinning their faith to political action." Unfortunately, as Eliason now realized, "they seem to forget that it will be years before we can elect a government in support of our program and in the meantime, some organization must speak for the movement."¹⁰⁶ In early December of 1934, he resigned from his post as Secretary of the CCF and decided to concen-

trate his administrative skills upon a revivification of the farmers' educational organization. The task before him was, however, a monumental one. The financial situation at the UFC was "unbearable", his secretaries were bringing the Association before the Debt Adjustment Board for non-payment of salaries and "without one dollar to pay on rent", the landlord was pressuring "that unless we paid the rent by the end of the month, we must close up and get out."¹⁰⁷

Aggravating this financial stress was hostility from Eliason's colleagues in the CCF who believed that he had abandoned the political movement the moment that it had suffered a reverse.

"I suppose you think that I have turned into a real reactionary," he apologized to one associate, "but I am quite a lot more radical than a lot of people who claim that all we have to do is to shout "down with capitalism" and the thing will disappear." As Eliason realized, a Socialist political triumph was a distant possibility and, in the meantime, the farmers had to be protected and efforts had to be made "to alleviate present conditions" under the capitalist system. "I am not kidding myself that we are going to be able to get any money," he wrote sadly, "but I feel that we should go down with flags flying."¹⁰⁸

Surprisingly, despite the formidable constraints under which Eliason was working during 1935, the UFC organization neither staggered nor fell. Rather, it changed. Lacking in the funds necessary to provide publicity, organizers or "adequate Services" to a full-fledged lodge structure, Eli-

ason developed an alternate strategy for rebuilding the local basis of the UFC which was not only practical but also cost-efficient. Borrowing heavily from the example of the Farmers' Unity League, he urged producers to establish "defence units" which would operate "along the lines of immediate struggle", organizing penny auctions and localized resistances to "fight foreclosures and evictions."¹⁰⁹ For Eliason, the value of the defence units was that they were able to "stand on their own feet" while, at the same time, win recruits to the UFC who would eventually be numerous enough to form themselves into local lodges.¹¹⁰ Unlike the Communists, however, he did not perceive simple resistance to be an answer to the small farmers' economic problems, and it was Eliason's firm belief that the non-competitive wheat producer could survive only through the development of mixed farming operations. In fact, "based on the present price structure, he will have to endeavor to build his farm as a more or less self-contained unit, and produce small quantities in an effort to retain whatever equity is still left on his farm."¹¹¹ To this extent, the defence unit strategy was originally adopted as a purely operational expedient; however, for the small farmers it represented a continuation of militant protest under different auspices. In the Spring and Summer of 1935, the rural poor simply transferred their allegiances from the now defunct Communist FUL to the UFC and the revitalized Association began to assume all of the characteristics of a small farm protest organiza-

tion. The core of the UFC's support, which had originally lain in the southern Prairie moved north, and a new area of strength developed in the region between Saskatoon and the Alberta border.¹¹² Pressure began to develop from the new membership for the Executive to continue the FUL's struggle in favour of an adjustment of debt and in response, the leadership of the UFC echoed the Communists' demands for a guaranteed minimum wage for agricultural producers, and a general amortization of farm debts.¹¹³ Augmenting this program of relief, statutory income and direct resistance, was a delivery strike provision which endorsed mass action as a legitimate means of advancing the farmers' interests.¹¹⁴ Eliason clearly recognized that the revived UFC had become an organization of "the poor toiling farmers" and his central concern was not to deny the movement's character, but to emphasize that despite the similarities of membership and methodology, the farmers' union had no affiliations with the FUL or the Communist Party.¹¹⁵ Ironically, an organization which had originally been forged in the flaming pyre of the West's first poor farmers' revolt, had restored the character of small farm militancy and for the UFC (SS), fortuna's wheel had spun full circle.

As Frank Eliason moved to reorganize the disjuncted form of the UFC, he was filled with uncertainty. He recognized the need for a militant educational organization in the countryside and he sensed the small farmers' demand for representation, but he was unsure of the indispensable

support of the more experienced agrarian organizers. "I can only express the hope," he wrote to a friend, "that there will be enough of the old war horses who remain loyal to the movement so as to make it possible for us to carry on."¹¹⁵ He was not mistaken in his fears, for the movement was to be plagued by a deficiency of competent organizers and it was to suffer temporarily from the hostility of the other farm groups and in particular, of the CCF. Many prominent Socialists believed the UFC would prove a divisive force in the countryside, distracting the farmers from the primary goal of socialism by satiating them with incremental reforms.¹¹⁷ Others felt that Eliason had betrayed the political movement, and they argued that the CCF must fight back by becoming involved in the "immediate struggle" through "direct action".¹¹⁸ Deprived of the assistance of the most experienced farm leaders who were already pledged to the CCF Eliason was to be further constrained by his inability to attract permanent organizers because of a shortage of funds necessary to pay their salaries.¹¹⁹ That the UFC survived and grew despite these hardships was an attestation not only to the needs of the dirt farmers, but also to the selfless organizational energies of Eliason and the brilliant propagandistic skills of the Association's chief spokesman throughout the later thirties and forties, George W. Bickerton.

Born to a poor, working-class family in Newcastle in 1880, George Bickerton had always believed strongly in the

dignity of agrarian life. As a boy, he had travelled with a black-face minstrel troupe around the villages that dotted the moors of Durham and Northumberland, and he had found in the quiet serenity of the countryside an escape from the smoking, grey pillars and thundering factories which dominated the dark streets of Scotswood, Elswick and Byker. Emigrating to Canada in 1910 with the intention of realizing his image of an agricultural Arcadia, he had immediately been struck by "the life of isolation of the people" on the plains. A gregarious and enchanting man with a keen mind and a penchant for telling endless stories, Bickerton had joined the farmers' movement soon after his arrival in Canada as much out of a desire to make friends as out of an interest in the problems of Prairie agriculture. Often he spoke of his ideal of rural life, keeping "the theory of farm villages of the old country ever in my mind."¹²⁰ For Bickerton, mechanization and farm expansion were dividing the people from each other, and were driving increasing numbers of them into the towns and villages of the West. The only defence for the small producers was to "pool their resources into a village unit", which would serve as a "self-contained agricultural community, with all members having an equal investment and interest in the community enterprise." The advantage of village life would be that while each farmer "would hold his own property...all machinery would be purchased in common and work would be done that way too."¹²¹ By forming cooperatively, the small producers would be able to afford the

higher price of large power machinery, while at the same time, would be able to enjoy the economies of scale which extensive holdings allowed.¹²²

Unfortunately for George Bickerton, few of the property-conscious small producers were attracted to the idea of co-operative farming. Indeed, when one UFC organizer attempted to establish a cooperative village at Landis, the local farmers were outraged, declared it to be "a form of Bolshevism" and expelled the individual from the UFC lodge.¹²³ Sensing that his agrarian ideal was unrealizable, at least until the farmers' collective consciousness had been improved, Bickerton turned his fertile imagination towards the problem of protecting the small unit producer from the ravages of the current competitive system. His solution, which he evidently derived from the implied workings of the McNary-Haugen Bill and the speeches of the dynamic American Senator, George W. Peek, was agricultural parity; the pegging of the price of farm goods to a level correspondent with that of selected other commodities.¹²⁴ Parity approached the issue of pricing not from the perspective of the cost of production, but from the angle of relative exchange value, for "the farmer is not worried about wheat going down to fifty cents a bushel, he is worried about the great difference there is and will be between his fifty-cent wheat and the goods he must buy in order to grow his product."¹²⁵ A parity formula sought to equalize the purchasing power of both the consumer and the producer by establishing a base period (usually taken

to be 1909-1914) and then determining the relative worth of goods in relation to each other. Prices would then be adjusted according to the relative scale so that changes in the cost of one commodity would immediately be counter-balanced by an upward or downward fluctuation in the value of the others.¹²⁶ In effect, "parity prices mean that even before your steer is ready for market, you know what you will get for him. It means that in Spring when you are planning your seeding you will know just how much you will get for your rye, oats, wheat, flax, barley, or anything else you plant. The farmer will be in a position to plan his future knowing that economically he is secure."¹²⁷

George Bickerton became President of the UFC (SS) in July of 1935 and in his opening address before the Convention, he called upon the Government to guarantee the farmers' survival or face "an agricultural revolt" on the Prairie.¹²⁸ The threat was a sincere one, for within a year the Executive of the UFC was attempting to organize a delivery strike to protest against depressed grain prices.¹²⁹ Unsuccessful though the organization's first strike call proved to be, it set the pattern for future developments and marked the revitalization of the Union as a militant organization determined to fight for the survival of the poor farmers. To this extent, the goals of the UFC were preservative rather than progressive, for the Union's primary objective during the 1930's was not to advance the farmers' income; its function was simply to "protect what we have".¹³⁰ The leaders of

the UFC envisioned parity in this defensive light, as a mechanism whereby "the average farmer under average conditions" would be assured "a farm income necessary to maintain a decent Canadian standard of living."¹³¹ Like the FUL before it, the UFC of the Depression was an organization devoted to protecting the small farmers' way of life through militant struggle and it was symptomatic of this similarity that when the Offices of the Union were moved in 1937, the premises chosen were in Saskatoon's Grainger Building, one floor below the old editorial apartments of The Furrow.¹³²

During the 1930's, the lines of popular protest had been drawn tightly across the Prairies. The poor had resisted, with often frantic determination, the pounding assaults of modernity, and for a time, they had found in the FUL and the UFC a potent weapon in their struggles against industrialization. However, by the close of the decade, the continuities were about to be broken. The language of dissent survived, the old battles continued, but the small farmers now sensed that existence depended upon more than mere struggle. It was this which motivated Bickerton's faith in the village as the savior of the non-competitive producers, and it was this which powered Frank Eliason's appeals for mixed farming and agricultural diversification. As the Depression and world peace raced to their photo-finish, the small farmers began slowly to heed the call to change. Finally, they came to decide that their leaders were right, and they began to experiment not only with mixed farming, but also with communal

production. However, it was too late; for the poor farmers of the West the game was lost.

VI

"Well, Cairns," said Thomas Alexander Crerar, smiling in the August heat of 1935, "I may be as mad as a March Hare, but I am very optimistic about Canada's wheat future."

Andrew Cairns' face reddened, but diplomatically he refrained from informing the Liberal statesman that there could be no doubt about his madness. Cairns, a former Director of the Alberta Wheat Pool and recently appointed head of the Canadian Wheat Advisory Committee in London, did not share any of Crerar's optimism concerning the wheat economy's immediate future.¹³³ No major industry in Canada had suffered during the first half decade of the Depression as much as agriculture and there were few indications that the West would enjoy a rapid recovery. Admittedly, the large carryover of wheat had been partially reduced and farm income was rising slowly, but levels of indebtedness were high and the costs of production were increasing.¹³⁴ Furthermore, even the improvements paled when placed in the broader perspective, for prior to the moderate accretions in farm cash income, there had been a decline of almost seventy-one percent and throughout the 1930s, the price of wheat was below sixty-two cents a bushel, except for brief increases in 1936 and 1937.¹³⁵

In addition, a distinction had to be drawn between the interests of the politicians and those of the farmers, for while the Government was encouraging acreage reductions as a method of decreasing the surplus, the poor harvests of 1933 to 1938 were a catastrophe for the western farmers.

As one farm leader noted, "anyone who believes he can work his way up ... during the present state of social disorder should be subject to a mental or educational examination."¹³⁶

Still, when all was said and done, some farmers, and in particular the larger producers who retained clear possession over their capital and resources, did survive the Depression intact. Government programs and policies were designed to help them, at times indirectly, but often overtly. Measures such as the acreage bonusing scheme, which offered cash payments to producers who could reduce their yield per acre, were evidently of greater benefit to the extensive farmer.¹³⁷ Other programs, such as the Debt Adjustment Act, provided general moratoria for the dried-out areas of the south, thereby increasing the pressure upon debtors in the north.¹³⁸ Similarly, Federal relief programs, such as the Farm Loan Board, were flawed by the fact that they offered credit only for expansion and not for debt reduction, and it stipulated that before a farmer could borrow money he had to subscribe and pay for a percentage of the loan's capital stock.¹³⁹ For the more prosperous farmers, the Depression did not undermine all the potential for growth, as both farm size and mechanization increased rapidly soon after the recovery

began. The numbers of combines and tractors in Saskatchewan and Alberta almost doubled in 1939-1940 and there were sharp increases in the numbers of threshers, binders and other powered implements. Predictably, these changes were limited largely to the southern Prairie, where farms were larger and Government programs more lenient, though even in the Park Belt region, there were noticeable changes in attitudes, if not in material possessions.¹⁴⁰

Throughout the twenties and early thirties, the small farmers had resisted the encroachments of progress with the belligerent suspiciousness of a people bounded by traditions. They had struggled against modernity and they had called, almost unknowingly, for a return to a more stable and less urgent time. The long years of the Depression altered this time-honoured resilience and, in so doing, began the final chapters of homesteading in the West. A decade of economic misery convinced the small farmers that they could no longer rely upon the traditional methods of cultivation and the old values of subsistence agriculture. Social mobility, mounting levels of debt, mass dispossession and price collapse uprooted the deep psychological underpinnings of the non-competitive farmers' mentalité. After the Depression, the small farmers would continue to fight desperately to survive, but their protests would be fundamentally changed by a new demand that they should be allowed the chance to alter their habits and diversify their methods of production. As the thirties moved to their frenetic and bloodied

conclusion, the small farmers looked with cautious optimism towards the future. No longer would they simply resist change, now they had a quiet faith that the modern world would hold a place for them. Loudly they sang, half in hope, half in disbelief:

"The Depression of course is all over,
And worries have scattered away;
From now on we wallow in clover,
Our country begins a new day."¹⁴¹

NOTES TO CHAPTER FIVE

1. Edmonton Bulletin, November 8, 1934.
2. T.C. Byrne, "The Ukrainian Community in North Central Alberta" (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Alberta, 1937), pp. 31-34.
3. Baldur Kristjanson, "Land Settlement in Northeastern Alberta" (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1949), pp. 11-12.
4. Robert England, The Central European Immigrant in Canada (Toronto, 1929), p. 82.
5. William Scott, "Ukrainians: Our Most Pressing Problem" (Toronto, 1931), p. 26.
6. See, for example, Western Producer, April 17, 1930; and A.H. Brinkman's articles in the Western Farm Leader, in 1938-39.
7. GIA, Walter Norman Smith Papers, Box 2, file 26, A.H. Brinkman to J.G. Gardiner, December 7, 1939.
8. S.C. Hudson, "Factors Affecting the Success of Mortgage Loans in Western Canada" (Ottawa, 1935), pp. 26-27; R. W. Murchie, Agricultural Progress on the Prairie Frontier (Toronto, 1936), especially pp. 218-20, 238-40, and 260.
9. Kristjanson, "Land Settlement...", p. 50.
10. SAB, George Edwards Papers, George Edwards, "The Problem of the Quarter Section Farm" (n.d.), pp. 4-5.
11. Census of Canada for 1931 and 1936, Vol. 1's Agriculture, Census Division 10; comparisons are made only with the older settled areas south of the Saskatchewan-McLeod River lines. This does not include the Peace River region or Athabasca.
12. S.M. Lipset, Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 167-9.
13. Interview with J.L. Phelps, January 16, 1983.
14. SAB, George Edwards Papers, George Edwards, "The Problem of the Quarter Section Farm", p. 3.

15. Census of Canada for 1931 and 1936, Vol.'s Agriculture.
16. G.E. Britnell, The Wheat Economy (Toronto, 1936), p. 202.
17. W.N. Watson, "A Study of 126 Abandoned Farms in the Lamond Area of Alberta", in Economic Annalist, Vol. VI (June, 1936), pp. 43-5; Trevor Powell, "Northern Settlement, 1929-1935", in Saskatchewan History, Vol. XXX (1977), pp. 81-98.
18. PAC, Communist Party of Canada Papers, file: Tim Buck, Correspondence, 1930-31; Stewart Smith to Tim Buck, October 7, 1930.
19. PAC, CPC Papers, Convention Series, "Minutes of the Sixth Plenum of the C.E.C.", February 1931, pp. 34-35; PAO, Communist Party of Canada Papers, Transcript: Rex vs Buck et al., Vol. II, Evidence, pp. 341-42.
20. PAC, CPC Papers, file: Tim Buck, Correspondence, 1930-31; Stewart Smith to Tim Buck, October 20, 1930.
21. Mrs. G. Hadland to the Author, December, 1982.
22. Ivan Avakumovic, The Communist Party in Canada; A History (Toronto, 1975), p. 24.
23. The Furrow, September, 1932.
24. For a sympathetic biography of Mills, see Ivor Mills, Stout Hearts Stand Tall: A Biography of Hopkins Evans Mills (Vancouver, 1971).
25. Wiggins' attractively written memoirs are soon to be published under the title Pioneers. Information on his life is derived from a manuscript copy in the authors possession.
26. The best example of Wiggins' passionate, if shallow, invective can be found in his tract, "The Progressive Farmers' Next Step" (Saskatoon, n.d.), esp. pp. 10-13.
27. The Sixth Plenum of the CEC prepared a revision of the FUL's programme, but the changes were never affected. As late as 1935, the League continued to advocate the same policies which Clarke had delineated in the Draft Programme, though without vigour or consistency. All the Party offered was a periodic warning that "closer contacts must be developed". For the CPC's policy statement, see PAC, CPC Papers,

"Minutes of the Sixth Plenum...", pp. 33-37; the League's policy is outlined in The Worker, January 12, 1935; Buck's warnings may be found in PAO, CPC Papers, A1918-9, Tim Buck to Walter Wiggins, June 19, 1931, and also in PAC, CPC Papers, folder: Agriculture, "Organize the Common People of the Countryside" (1935?), p. 3.

28. The Furrow, August, 1932.
29. The Furrow, December, 1931.
30. The Furrow, December, 1931.
31. The Furrow, March, April, and November, 1932; Canadian Annual Review, 1932, p. 153.
32. The FUL outlined its strategy for resisting foreclosure in a series of bulletins distributed to the locals. The most complete is PAO, CPC Papers, 10C 2445, "The Farmers' Unity League of Canada, Bulletin 7" (n.d.). The best account of the 'penny auction' movement is contained in John L. Shover's exceptional work, Cornbelt Rebellion; The Farmers' Holiday Association (Urbana, 1965), Chapter Five.
33. GIA, George Coote Papers, Box 11, file 94, J.J. Duggan to G. Coote, June 5, 1931.
34. PAA, Alberta Executive Council Records, Box 20, Item 363, "Report of the Agricultural Committee of the Alberta Legislature", March 12, 1933.
35. Carl F. Betke, "The United Farmers of Alberta, 1921-1935, The Relationship Between the Agricultural Organization and the Government of Alberta" (unpublished MA Thesis, University of Alberta, 1971), p. 166. Address by Premier Brownlee to UFA Executive, July 13, 1935.
36. PAA, Premiers Papers, 170A, J.E. Brownlee to N.F. Priestly, June 17, 1932.
37. P.A. Russell, "The Cooperative Government's Response to the Depression", in Saskatchewan History, Vol. XXIV (Spring, 1971), p. 92.
38. The Furrow, August, 1932. PAA, Premiers Papers, 158C, Sam Olesky to J.E. Brownlee, August 30, 1932.

39. The Furrow, December 15, 1932; GIA, George Coote Papers, Box 17, file 167, clipping, "Nationwide Farm Strike Advocated", November 5, 1932.
40. The Furrow, February, 1933.
41. The Furrow, March-April, 1933; The Worker, September 16, 1933.
42. The Worker, June 10, and November 11, 1933.
43. The area between Edmonton and Lloydminster was the center of FUL support, the League was first spread in the region by a charismatic young school teacher named Peter Kolaski. In part, FUL support probably was derived from the weakness of the UFA in the area. See PAA, Premiers Papers, 74D, A.M. Matheson to J.E. Brownlee, October 15, 1931. Also of interest is Elmer E. Roper, "The CCF in Alberta" in The Canadian Forum, Vol. XIV (February, 1934), pp. 173-4.
44. Edmonton Bulletin, December 14, 1933.
45. The Worker, December 16, 1933; Edmonton Bulletin, December 8, 1933.
46. The Furrow, February, 1934.
47. Edmonton Bulletin, January 11, 1934.
48. Calgary Herald, January 17, 1934.
49. Edmonton Bulletin, January 20, 1934.
50. The Furrow, March, 1934.
51. Edmonton Bulletin, December 16, 1933.
52. GIA, O.S. Longman Papers, Correspondence: The Southern Alberta Beet Growers', file 4, 1936, "Alberta Strike Bulletin" (n.d.); The Furrow, November, 1934.
53. Edmonton Bulletin, January 20, 1934.
54. Vernon C. Fowke, Canadian Agricultural Policy: The Historical Pattern (Toronto, 1978), pp. 242-3.
55. D.A. MacGibbon, The Canadian Grain Trade (Toronto, 1932), pp. 91-2.
56. Edmonton Bulletin, November 9, 1934.
57. Edmonton Bulletin, November 8, 1934; The Worker, November 17, 1934.

58. Edmonton Bulletin, November 9, 1934.
59. Edmonton Bulletin, November 11, 1934.
60. Edmonton Bulletin, November 13 and 14, 1934.
61. The Furrow, November, 1934.
62. The Worker, December 19, 1934; Edmonton Bulletin, December 1, 1934.
63. GIA, J.P. Brady Papers, file: Political, 1926-1951, "Farm Strike Bulletin No. 2" (December 8, 1934).
64. The Furrow, December, 1934.
65. Edmonton Bulletin, November 17, 1934.
66. William Kardash, the Provincial Secretary of the FUL, approached the UFA for assistance, but as before, the strikers' petitions were rejected. GIA, UFA Papers, Convention Minutes, 1935.
67. The Furrow, November, 1934.
68. Edmonton Bulletin, November 8, 1934; The Furrow, November and December, 1934; The Worker, December 9, 1934.
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71. PAC, CPC Papers, folder: Agriculture, "Organize the Common People...", p. 4.
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76. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, J.F. Hogg to F. Eliason, April 1, 1935.
77. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to J.F. Hogg, April 4, 1935.

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79. GIA, UFA Papers, Convention Minutes, 1931, "Manifesto of the Farm People of Alberta".
80. A biography of Priestly is provided in the introduction to N.F. Priestly and E.B. Swindlehurst, Furrow, Faith, and Fellowship (Edmonton, 1967).
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82. GIA, UFA Papers, Convention Minutes, 1932, "President's Address".
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85. GIA, Coote Papers, Box 7, file 54, H.B. MacLeod to G. Coote, June 24, 1934.
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93. Thomas Flanagan, "Political Geography and the United Farmers of Alberta", in S. Trofimenkoff, ed., The Twenties in Western Canada (Ottawa, 1972), pp. 157-58.
94. C.B. Macpherson, Democracy in Alberta: Social Credit and the Party System (Toronto, 1977) pp. 103-7.
95. Calgary Herald, September 16, 1935.
96. GIA, UFA Papers, Convention Minutes, 1936.
97. GIA, Smith Papers, Box 1, file 10, W.N. Smith to ?, n.d.
98. Ian Macpherson, Each For All (Toronto, 1979), pp. 126 and 158.
99. GIA, Alfred Rawlins Papers, Box 1, file 14, H.E. Nichols to A. Rawlins, December 18, 1944.
100. GIA, Coote Papers, Box 11, file 99, "Planning for Agriculture: A Speech Before the Kiwanis Club", November 15, 1938.
101. Ian Macpherson, "An Authoritative Voice: The Re-orientation of the Canadian Farmers' Movement, 1935 to 1945" in Canadian Historical Association; Historical Papers (1979), pp. 164-81.
102. Calgary Herald, July 26, 1938.
103. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, F. Eliason to H.R. Boutillier, November 11, 1939.
104. Calgary Herald, August 5, 1938.
105. GIA, Smith Papers, Box 2, file 26, A.H. Brinkman to W.N. Smith, February 10, 1944.
106. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to C.M. Emery, January 3, 1935.
107. SAB, George Williams Papers, F. Eliason to G.H. Williams, October 16, 1934.
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109. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to T. Bardal, February 5, 1935; J.A. Bergerson to F. Eliason, March 7, 1935.

110. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to H.A. Anslow, March 5, 1935; F. Eliason to J.A. Bergerson, March 14, 1935.
111. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 24, F. Eliason to H.H. Hannam, March 31, 1941.
112. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, G.H. Herbert to F. Eliason, October 4, 1935.
113. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to A. Hergott, August 29, 1935; B2 IX 75, Attorney General of Saskatchewan to G. Bickerton, December 1, 1934.
114. Saskatoon Phoenix, August 10, 1936 and July 15, 1939.
115. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to C.M. Emery, January 3, 1935.
116. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to J.A. Bergerson, March 14, 1935; F. Eliason to J.F. Hogg, April 14, 1935.
117. SAB, Williams Papers, F. Eliason to CCF Political Directives Board, December 10, 1935.
118. SAB, Williams Papers, G.H. Williams to J.J. Morrison, March 28, 1935.
119. On several occasions, Eliason, Bickerton, and others were forced to forego their salaries due to the shortage of funds. See, SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 67, file: Personnel, Salaries, 1932-1949.
120. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1; G. Bickerton to C. Trebalyon, March 29, 1946. -- Colourful portraits of both Bickerton and Eliason are provided in J.F.C. Wright, This Time Tomorrow: The Louise Lucas Story (Montréal, 1955).
121. UFC Information, May, 1944.
122. UFC Information, December 1942.
123. The proposed cooperative was organized under the name The Landis Cooperative Farming Committee by John Fox, and it received the support of such UFC notables as Bickerton, Jim Wright, Eliason and Fred Hart. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 XII B, F. Hart to G. Bickerton, November 15, 1945; G. Bickerton to F. Hart, November 20, 1945.

124. Parity's best annalist was John D. Black, whose Parity Parity Parity (Harvard, 1942), has never been excelled. Note that while parity had several different meanings during the period, the Peekian notion of a guaranteed price regardless of surplus is used in conjunction with the base price model throughout this paper. In general, this was the definition most widely used in Canada.
125. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 66, "Transcript of UFC Broadcast", October 7, 1946.
126. For a critique of the Base Price model, see R.L. Tontz, "The Origin of the Base Price Concept of Parity: A Significant Value Judgment in Agricultural Policy", in Agricultural History, Vol. 32 (January, 1958), pp. 3-14.
127. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 66, "Transcript of UFC Broadcast", October 10, 1946.
128. Western Producer, July 25, 1935.
129. Western Producer, September 5 and 10, 1936; BC Workers' News, August 31, 1936; SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 66, Two notices outlining strike procedure issued by UFC Offices, August 31 and September 3, 1936.
130. UFC Information, December, 1937.
131. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 83, G. Bickerton to J. Strain, March 4, 1947.
132. Western Producer, March 26, 1936.
133. GIA, Leonard D. Nesbitt Papers, Box 1, file 8, A. Cairns to L.D. Nesbitt, February 6, 1936.
134. A.E. Safarian, The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression (Toronto, 1970), pp. 194-98.
135. Canada Year Book, 1940, p. 204.
136. UFC Information, December, 1937.
137. Calgary Herald, April 6, 1939.
138. Blair Neatby describes methods of relief in Southern Saskatchewan in "The Saskatchewan Relief Commission, 1931-1934", in Saskatchewan History, Vol. III (Spring, 1950), pp. 41-56. For the poor farmers' response, see SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, J.C. Braun to F. Eliason, January 17, 1935; F. Eliason to H.A. Anslow, March 5, 1935.

139. W.T. Easterbrook, Farm Credit in Canada (Toronto, 1938), pp. 128-37; Stewart J. Willie, "Agricultural Credit in Western Canada" (unpublished MA Thesis, McGill University, 1931), pp. 50-55.
140. Census of Canada for 1936 and 1941, Vol. V, Agriculture.
141. Western Producer, March 19, 1936.

CHAPTER SIX
BLOOD FROM STONES
THE SEARCH FOR FARM PARITY

Robert J. Boutillier was a handsome, affable young man with deep, restless eyes and an aggressive shock of dark hair which rose precipitously from his forehead before cascading remorselessly down to one side. Hard working, ambitious and frank, Bob Boutillier won friends easily and had the simple, pragmatic good humour to maintain them over the years of trial and changing opinions. His father, an immigrant from Nova Scotia, had been an inveterate joiner; being an organizer for both the Wheat Pool and the political wing of the UFA, as well as the Secretary of the District School Board. From him, Bob inherited a mercurial energy and a proclivity for organizing that soon gained him, at twenty-five, a permanent position as Secretary for the rural municipality of Willingdon. Bob's elder brother, Herbert, took over the mixed farming operations at Soda Lake, followed his father as President of the Vegreville Federal Constituency Association of the UFA, and became a commanding deep-toned spokesman for the 'Ginger Group' and Canadian Socialism. In 1934, Herb Boutillier was elected Chairman of the Hairy Hill Strike Committee, and Bob's municipal office was transformed into the headquarters for the most

tenacious of all the district affiliates during the Mundare delivery strike. Four years' later, they were to be pivotal agents in the reorganization of the Alberta Section of the United Farmers' of Canada. In many ways, they symbolized the resurgent spirit of militancy that was sweeping the Middle-West.¹

The first UFC(AS) had not been a notable success. Formed in Willingdon in December, 1934, the organization had failed to make much impact in the area, and within four months had merged peacefully into the Farmers' Unity League's equally short-lived front organization, the Non-Political Farmers' Union.² Despite these inauspicious beginnings however, the demand for an independent, militant small farm organization in North Eastern Alberta persisted. The cause of the discontent lay in the fact that in the eyes of most of the poor farmers, the UFA had become a smug, complacent organization, representative only of the more prosperous agriculturalists of the south. The UFA "don't want to help no poor farmers", blasted one future President of the UFC(AS), it just "wants to make the farmers of the northern part of the Province carry the ones in the south."³ Convinced by the Associations refusal to support the delivery strikes of 1933-35 that the UFA was antagonistic to the small producers, and alienated by the demise of the FUL and the rise of Social Credit, many Alberta militants revived the idea of establishing an independent protest movement pledged to the strategy of direct action. On September 4th, 1938, some two hundred farmers gathered in

the Willingdon Hall to hear their neighbours explain the need for organization and a new withholding policy. Men like William Halina, the young Ukrainian farmer who had first carried the demands of the Myrnam strikers to the UFA Convention in 1934; Herb Boutillier and the Ropchan brothers, George and William, who had all sat on the Mundare Central Strike Committee; and Nick Boychuk, the Vegreville schoolteacher and one-time organizer for the FUL; all spoke of the need for the farmers to unite and demonstrate their disaffections. Hour after hour, their angry voices burned through the wilting heat of the old Town Hall, and when it had ended, the UFC(AS) had been reborn and an executive of thirteen men elected.⁴

At the outset, the new farm union directed its appeal to the poorest stratum of the rural community. It was a movement of failures; of men who had been driven "into a condition bordering on serfdom - bereft of all economic security, and tied hand and foot by crushing debts and onerous taxation."⁵ Vigorously and passionately, the UFC urged poor farmers to organize in self-defence, to prevent their dispossession from "the homes we pioneered for, sweated for and slaved for, denied ourselves for, and yes to our shame be it said, overworked our wives and children for."⁶ Appealing primarily to an older class of homesteaders who had to adapt to the demands of industrial grain production, the farm union preached a philosophy of rebellion through non-compliance. "The Professional politicians," taunted one propagandist, "believe the present financial and economic system must be preserved and strengthened

at all costs. To their minds, human beings must be made to adapt themselves, their modes of life, their whole being, to this diabolical economic system". However, the dirt farmers had refused, and as a result, they had suffered from "poverty, wretchedness, insecurity and debt, fear and worry, crime and insanity, and all the ills suffered by humanity."⁷ Without organization, the UFC insisted, the non-competitive farmers would be driven from the land, and "a new owner will appear on the scene, while we, the proud pioneer of other days, shall be dispossessed and remain only as a serf."⁸ In short, the UFC(AS) sought to channel the very anxieties that had first motivated the Farmers' Union of Canada in the early twenties, and to capitalize upon the frustrations of once proud homesteaders who now grubbed to survive. Unquestionably, the anger which motivated this last small farm revolt was of venerable ancestry, however the strategies that were followed, and the changes that were affected, were indicative of a new and revolutionary appreciation of the farmers place in the modern world.

Unlike its vatic predecessors, the FUC and the FUL, the United Farmers' of Canada did not propose simple and undirected resistance. Time had convinced the farmers that disconnected protests such as penny auctions and hunger marches could not prevent dispossession, and they recognized the need for a comprehensive programme of action. The most important strategic change was a new emphasis upon the price they received

for their products as opposed to debt adjustment, for the farmers realized that a reduction of debt was effective only when linked to a permanent amelioration of economic conditions. The UFC's economic platform was therefore two-fold; it called for debt adjustment as opposed to a moratorium, but it hinged that demand upon the granting of cost of production or parity. The Union's debt policy was synthesized in the "Draft Scheme for the Security of Tenure", a composite programme orchestrated by George Bickerton in the late thirties, and officially endorsed by the Alberta Section in 1944. The 'Draft Scheme' called for the establishment of a 'Provincial Land Office' of seven members - two from the Legislature, one from the Association of Municipalities, and four bona fide farmers - whose responsibility it would be to reevaluate all agricultural land on the basis of its productive value. Once reevaluated, a farmers' debts would be examined, and if interest had been paid in excess of three percent since the time that the loan had been incurred, such payments would be deducted from the principal, and the balance amortized over a period of twenty years. Having had his debts and his land reviewed, a farmer would then be granted "complete security of tenure during his lifetime," meaning that "he cannot be dispossessed for any reason whatever so long as he occupies his land."⁹ With respect to pricing policy, there was some divergence between Alberta and Saskatchewan sections of the farm union before 1940, when the Albertans were converted to the doctrine of parity pricing.¹⁰ Prior to this, the UFC(AS) advocated a

cost of production price, which was based upon the amount necessary for the small farmer to raise his crop, feed his family, and pay his debts.¹¹ The mechanism by which the farmers hoped to force the Government to grant these demands was direct action, and the strike at Mundare, small though it was, was widely regarded as both the mainspring and the model for the movement.¹²

Clearly, however, the farm strike which the leaders of the UFC envisioned after 1935 was a very different one from that which had previously blockaded the towns of Myrnam and Mundare. Having learned from experience that an isolated withholding action could not succeed, the Albertans recognized the need for a strike that would suspend grain trading across the entire Prairie, and it was evidently this which motivated them to adopt the name of the United Farmers' of Canada.¹³ Indeed, as the Union's Secretary, Bob Boutillier, noted, "it is the intention of the central office to make this organization stronger than the UFA and to work in conjunction with the United Farmers in Saskatchewan ... in calling a non-delivery [sic] strike over the west to tie up every industry in the Province and the west."¹⁴ Consequently, the UFC(AS) established close connections with the Saskatchewan Section soon after its foundation, and within a year, fraternal delegates were being exchanged between conventions.¹⁵

In many ways, however, the Alberta and Saskatchewan sections of the UFC were very different organizations. In the first instance, the leaders of the UFC(AS) were much younger

than their confederates in Saskatchewan. In 1938, Frank Eliason was fifty-five, Bickerton was three years' his senior, Elsie Hart, the President of the women's section, was forty-five, and the vast majority of the Directors were in their late forties or early fifties. In contrast, R.J. Boutillier was only twenty-eight, and his high school friends, William Yusep, Bill Shapka and Nick Shandro, at one time occupied the posts of President and two of the ten Directorates. Of the rest, most were in their early thirties, and none of the Union's original Directors were over fifty years of age. Furthermore, while the UFC(SS) was almost exclusively Social Democratic in its leadership, the political affiliations of the Albertans were far more varied. The Boutillier brothers were both strong supporters of the CCF, Nick Shandro and Bill Huculak, the Union's first President, were Liberals, and the Ropchan brothers were Communists.¹⁶ Paradoxically, the UFC(AS) which was Alberta's first indigenous small farm movement, originally revealed in its political diversity and age distribution greater similarity with the old Farmers' Union of Canada than it did with its patron, the UFC(SS).

Unfortunately, despite the youthful energies of its organizers, the UFC in Alberta was not an immediate success. In its first year, it grew fairly rapidly, expanding to include 125 locals and over eighteen hundred members, but thereafter it stabilized.¹⁷ To a large extent, the failure of the Union to expand further over the next three years was attributable to the fact that its roots lay in the firm bedrock of the

Ukrainian community at Willingdon. Built largely on familial and regional loyalties, the Farm Union displayed a marked tendency for attracting certain families in specific areas. On the Executive, there was an inordinate number of cousins and brothers, and the locals were located in the small geographical area to the north and west of Vegreville.¹⁸ However, while the UFC(AS) did not grow large, it developed a profound internal vitality, and its organizers successfully generated an enthusiasm and a loyalty that had been unknown in Alberta since the early twenties. To a large extent, this inner strength was a consequence of R.J. Boutillier's remarkable talents for coordinating both men and movements, for despite a chronic shortage of funds, he effectively maintained active contacts with the locals, publishing a small newsletter and organizing frequent conventions.¹⁹ By establishing a vital internal democracy, and by insisting upon strong grass roots involvement, Boutillier preserved the young organization's forward momentum and creativity. Lamentably, he also set a standard for himself which he was soon to find impossible to maintain.

"I did not want the job to start with", Bob Boutillier complained to Frank Eliason, "and I have asked them time and again to get someone else, but they seem stuck as they are not paying very much and they have the use of my office and equipment."²⁰ According to Boutillier, the UFC needed a permanent secretary, but the pay was too small for him to "throw up my municipal work for it until it is given the support it should have."²¹ Finally, in the summer of 1941, a replacement

was found in a retired stockbreeder from Clyde, and with a flash of relief, Bob Boutillier returned to his municipal work unfettered of the worries of the farmers' revolt. In a sense, the replacement of Boutillier by a complete outsider was an indication of the changing character of the UFC(AS). Since 1940, the organization had been subtly developing, losing its original character, and expanding slowly into the regions beyond Willingdon. In the fall of 1939, Chester McGowan, a Vegreville farmer, became the UFC's first non-Ukrainian Director besides Herb Boutillier, and within a year, he had been elected President. New organizers began to appear: J.G. Dobry of Camrose organized fifteen new locals in the Chauvin-Toffield area in early 1940, and W.G. Logan established seven lodges in the countryside around Wainwright.²² Membership grew steadily, and the movement flexed and widened, rolling across the Park Belt to the south and west; eighteen hundred in 1940, three thousand one year later, eighty eight hundred by 1942.²³ Optimistically, Herb Boutillier predicted that for the UFA, the handwriting had at last begun to appear on the wall.²⁴

In many ways, however, it might be misleading to exaggerate the role which the UFC(AS) itself played in its rapid expansion after 1940. Clearly, Herb Boutillier, who functioned as the Union's chief publicist, was an energetic and widely respected farm agitator, but the organization's successes transcended even his expectations and talents. In fact, the UFC was fortunate to have ridden the crest of a wave of farm militancy which had begun to gather in the early days of the Second War. The signs of that revolt were everywhere, and

its intensity was magnifying as 1939 looped towards 1940. In June, 1939, a Farmers' Union of Canada claiming a membership of several hundred was launched by Jack Hawson and Paul Berezuk at Lloydminster, and two months' later, a second Farmers' Union was founded at Turin. The leader of this southern based organization was Alfred Rawlins, a prominent Seventh Day Adventist from Wiltshire who had recently defected from the UFA.²⁵ Both groups emerged in response to a Government decision to lower the minimum grain payment offered by the Wheat Board, and both were pledged to fighting "this intolerable state of affairs" by a "direct action boycott."²⁶ The ascendancy of this kind of militancy augured well for the UFC(AS); which as the oldest and largest militant protest group in Alberta, was able to capitalize upon the swelling discontent. To this extent, the growth of the UFC(AS) was a product of a thrust from below and not from above, and it was the economic crisis and the war nurtured agricultural reconstruction that the Union had to thank for its ascendancy.

II

The 1930s had been a decade of discontent; born in depression, and streaked with suffering, panic and the threat of revolution. In retrospect, the 1940s could not have seemed much better. It really began in 1938, the annexations, the liquidations, the threats and the outbursts; the dark savage

furies breathed freely again, and the dim flame of peace flickered and went out. The warlords of Europe would not be appeased; not by Mr. Chamberlain, not by Mr. Daladier, and not by the inevitable umbrellas. Denmark took one day, Norway slightly more than two weeks, Belgium and the Netherlands, less than a fortnight, France survived just nine hundred hours. "God have mercy on us," a bemedalled Hermann Göring was heard to mutter, "if we lose this one." It was a grim austere war, filled with barbarity and cruelty, sadness and disillusionment. No brass bands or bugles, no 'Over There', no jaunty marching songs, not even a ship's bell to mark the watches. It lasted far too long, and when it finally ended on the final front, Admiral Halsey on board USS Missouri played the 'Star Spangled Banner' from a record over the intercom, and served coffee to his Japanese and British guests.

For the farmers of Western Canada, the War was a time for great expectations and agonizing disappointments, for retrospective imaginings and bold new directions. It had come with the promise of good times, of rapidly expanding markets and of a return to three dollar wheat. But the War had brought only economic contraction and continued distress, for while the Prairie farmers prepared their seed and cleaned their harnesses, the markets of Northern and Western Europe vanished beneath the treads of Professor Porsche's Panzers. The wheat crops of 1938 and 1939 had been excellent, and in 1940, the farmers sowed a record crop of over five hundred million bushels. This bumper harvest added four hundred million

to an unprecedented carryover, rocketing the wheat surplus upward to over seven million bushels at the opening of the August 1940 crop year. With prospective sales limited to only 185 million bushels, the Federal Government was compelled to induce a reduction of the wheat crop so as to prevent an uncontrollable surplus of unmarketable grain. In August, 1940, the Government announced a Wheat Amendment Act which limited sales to the Wheat Board on an acreage basis. The individual farmers' quota was determined by restricting deliveries to sixty-five percent of the 1940 acreage, and by offering bonuses to producers who summer fallowed or converted to oats or barley. Unfortunately, while the reduction plan worked to the extent that the farmers in 1941 sowed the smallest wheat crop in almost two decades, the excellent weather conspired to increase the surplus to almost six hundred million bushels. In response, the Government established a fifteen bushel limit per authorized acre, and compensated for the farmers' loss by closing the futures' market and raising the initial Wheat Board payment to \$1.25. By 1943, wheat acreage on the Prairies had declined by forty-two percent, and a marked diversification into other lines of production had been affected.²⁷

If the prohibitive intent of the policy-makers was to have the farmers "raise less wheat and win the War," then their prescriptive programme was, equally epigrammatically, "Bacon for Britain". In fact, hogs were the primary beneficiaries of wartime agricultural policies, for strong British demands

for bacon and ham were matched by the military's extraordinary appetite for pork. Between 1939 and 1943, the number of swine in Western Canada more than tripled, and in 1942 and 1943, the cash income from hogs in Alberta was greater than that from wheat.²⁸ The Dairy Industry was another war profiteer, for as with pork, the producers benefitted from stable markets and increased demands. Economic stability and Government incentive programmes brought better qualities of dairy cattle, increasing mechanization and an expanding number of cheese and butter factories across the West. By developing improved methods of dairy production, the volume of milk increased between eight and twelve percent from 1939 to 1944, though the number of cows actually declined.²⁹ Gradually, the Prairie economy was changing from the wheat staple basis to a more diversified concentration upon dairy, livestock and coarse grain production.

In many ways, however, the movement towards a diversification of Prairie agriculture was not a simple product of the war-stimulated demand for hogs and butter. In fact, the roots of the reconstruction extend well back into the decade of the Depression. The wholesale market price for B1 dressed hogs, creamery butter and Grade 'A' eggs had been increasing slowly over the course of the 1930s, and although the prices never climbed to above two-thirds of their pre-Depression average, the ratios were much more attractive than were those for wheat and the coarse grains. Consequently, there were modest increases in the numbers of cattle, poultry and hogs in Western

Canada during the 1930s, though there did not appear to be any systematic pattern to the expansion.³⁰ In a sense, however, these moderate changes became more significant when the the pattern of diversification in both the Depression and Second War periods is correlated to farm size and geographical situation, for it is evident that the most concentrated mixed farming areas were located in the small farm regions of the Park Belt. In fact, it was during the later 1930s, that the hog and the milch cow first became the two crucial vertices of the marginal farmers' production triangle, though the War magnified and crystallized this trend.

In the small farm region to the east of Edmonton, and in the Park Belt lands to the north and west of the capital, there was a higher pre-war concentration of livestock than in any other section of the Province. Furthermore, these were areas in which mixed farming had more stable roots, for though provincial numbers actually declined by 1946, the ratio of stock to acreage remained relatively constant in the small farm belt. That this was a function of farm size rather than soil type is clearly indicated by the economic situation across Alberta's eastern border. In the Park Belt area to the west of Saskatoon, between Battleford and Kindersley, farms were on the average much larger by the outbreak of the War than was usual in the black soil region. Here the average farm was over four hundred and sixty acres in 1941, and by 1946, that figure had increased by almost twelve percent. In this area, there was little attempt at diversification; the concentration of milch cows remained low throughout the War, and

though there was a large number of hogs in the region in 1940, within five years the number had fallen away precipitously. By comparison, in the smaller farm lands north of the Saskatchewan, between Lloydminster and Melfort, there were distinct efforts being made to adopt a mixed farming mode of production. Here farms were smaller, the average ranged from three hundred and twenty acres in 1941 to three hundred and sixty by 1946, and the concentrations of both milch cows and pigs were more significant. In 1946, there was a provincial average of one hog for every one hundred and fourteen acres, but in the small farm belt, there was almost three times that concentration. Similarly, by War's end, there were roughly two cows per acre for every one that grazed over the rest of the Province.³¹ Clearly, there were profound socio-economic causes for the reconstruction of Prairie agriculture, which can best be understood only by reference to the financial condition of the marginal wheat producers.

As early as 1930, the organ of the Prairie cooperatives, The Western Producer, observed that the "present trend in the great industry of farming is towards mechanization ... let us say, large scale farming; farming that reduces the cost of preparation of the soil, makes timeliness possible, and is directed by a management that is as conscious of loss of time as of loss of money. There will be plenty of room for the smaller units where power cannot be used ... [producing] fruit, dairy, hogs, vegetable, seed and other speciality items."³² The newspaper did not mean to patronize, it merely

stated a simple truth: the small unit farmer could not produce grain on a competitive basis with the large mechanized farmer. Having higher costs of production and a reduced ability to enjoy the benefits of technological improvements which increased yields, the small farmer could not survive the price squeeze that was the inevitable corollary of industrialization. Mechanization meant an increased wheat crop and falling prices, with the tragic result that "reasonable returns on a small farm cannot be assured."³³ The visible indicator of this process was debt, for the marginal wheat producers found themselves retarded in their capacity to repay their mortgages and crop liens by a falling income and a declining margin of profit. The only alternatives to dispossession were an adoption of mechanized grain growing or a transformation to less industrialized methods of production, such as mixed farming. Thus, it is hardly surprising that the more diversified agricultural areas in the 1940s were all regions which exhibited high levels of mortgage indebtedness.³⁴ In a sense, mixed farming was the debt-ridden small farmers belated response to the modern world.

The transformation from wheat to mixed production was not an easy one to make, however, for the farmers were constrained not only by their own deficiencies of capital and expertise, but also by often erratic and biased government policies. The acreage reduction plan, for example, was clearly more harmful to the small producers than to the large, for with limited incomes, the marginal farmers lacked the

capacity to endure a thirty-five percent reduction in their acreage.³⁵ Moreover, the bonusing schemes were of little benefit to the quarter or half section farmer, "for with a cultivated acreage of fifty to one hundred and fifty acres, he cannot increase his coarse grains or summerfallow as he has generally been a heavy coarse grain raiser over the years." In addition, since the bonusing plan would "increase coarse grain production," the price "would be reduced to the vanishing point ... undoubtedly leading to an increase in stock raising."³⁶ Driven by Government policies towards livestock and dairy agriculture, the small farmers were then confronted by a capricious and acrimonious central marketing strategy. Encouraged by the Minister of Agriculture to produce hogs in 1941 and 1942, the farmers were then presented in the fall of 1943 with an announcement that the Government would provide bonuses of ten cents on oats and fifteen cents on barley for grain delivered through the elevators. The object of this strategy was to encourage mixed farming in Eastern Canada, and the Cabinet pursued this goal by permitting the Quebec and Ontario livestock producers to buy Western coarse grains at a price less bonus and freight. This allowed the Easterner to realize a five to six dollar margin of profit over the Western hog producer, a situation exacerbated by a 1943 trading agreement with Britain which lowered pork prices. Consequently, many Prairie farmers realized that it was more profitable for them to sell their coarse grains than to feed them to their hogs, and from the spring of 1944, pork production in Western Canada spiralled downward.³⁷

Not surprisingly, the War provided a tremendous stimulus to small farm protest in Western Canada. Support for the Farmers' Unions in both Alberta and Saskatchewan increased sharply; the size of the UFC(SS) doubled between 1938 and 1944, and membership in its Alberta counterpart rose from three thousand in 1941 to over twenty thousand by the War's end.³⁸ Despite these staggering increases, funding continued to be inadequate, and the Unions were further constrained by an inability to fulfill their mandates. Careful of being accused of subversion under the War Measures' Act, and genuinely patriotic in their desire to defeat the Axis powers, the leaders of the Farm Unions were compelled by circumstances to moderate the tone of their agitation.³⁹ "It is too bad that war is on," lamented Bob Boutillier in 1941, "otherwise I would be inclined ... to talk and act strike. Strike with capital letters would seem our only remedy ... and our organization would do it tomorrow if war was not being fought today."⁴⁰ Unable to play their trump card, the small farm organizations were forced to advance their members' interests through the more temperate avenues of political lobbying, but in this line they were far out-classed by the Canadian Federation of Agriculture (CFA).⁴¹

Since the consolidation of agrarian corporatism under the auspices of the CCA in 1935, the large farm organizations and the cooperatives had been striving to portray themselves as the only legitimate mouthpieces of Western agriculture.⁴² As early as 1936, Jack Wesson, the resourceful President of

the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, had declared that the Cooperative was the "true spokesman for the organized producers," and the Pool had followed that dictum by declaring that it intended to "lead the campaign" for "agrarian justice".⁴³ Frank Eliason, who was actively struggling to rebuild the UFC(SS), was incensed by the Pool's attempts to present itself as an agrarian pressure group. "We feel that if they will do their job for which they were organized, namely cooperative buying and selling, it should be left to the membership union to take whatever steps may be necessary to enforce the farmers' demands for such larger problems as reform of banking, reorganization of the freight rate ... and other impediments to agrarian progress."⁴⁴ The cooperatives could not be daunted, however, and through the later thirties and the War, the Pool's organized conferences and circulated petitions, and through the medium of the CCA, and its successor, the CFA, presented the demands of their supporters to the Government. As Herb Hannam, the President of the CFA, proclaimed in 1941, "we see more clearly the need for comprehensive organization ... which will mobilize the best brains of our industry and co-ordinate the resources of all branches of agriculture behind one organization for Canada - the Federation."⁴⁵

In a vital sense, however, the antagonism of the militant small farm organizations to the expansion of the cooperatives and the CFA was not grounded in a simple self-centered rivalry. Indeed, the conflict itself arose from, and was nurtured by,

the different perspectives from whose vantage point the various groups perceived the agricultural industry. As one observer later remarked, the farmers "are of the opinion that one of the policies of the Federation is to urge low income farmers to leave the farm ... but the Union, while recognizing that the agricultural population is declining, believe every possible effort must be made to help those who stay on the farm to enjoy a reasonable income."⁴⁶ This conflict of approach underscored the relationship of the farm unions and the affiliates of the CFA throughout the Second War, and it exacerbated the divisions which had always plagued the farmers' movement. It manifested itself in the Federation's assertions of confidence in the acreage reduction and crop bonusing plans; it revealed itself in the cooperatives' hostility to the Alberta Farmers' Union's suggestion that production be curtailed unless the farmers' security was guaranteed; and it evidenced itself in the UFA's bitter attacks on the notions of farm parity and the delivery strike.⁴⁷ In October, 1941, George Bickerton offered veiled counsel to his small farm supporters, urging them to be wary of the corporatists' attempts to represent them. Speaking before the UFC convention, he stated that by trusting others "we will suffer the ignominy of seeing our remaining investments disintegrate, caused principally by jealous leaders blindly, if perhaps sincerely, believing that their particular branch endeavour can do all [for the farmers] that is necessary to be done."⁴⁸

III

Henry Evans Nichols was a man driven. Somewhere, deep within him, there was a dark, infernal demon which scratched incessantly at his soul. Pallid and thin, with a blunt, wrinkled face and prominent ears, Nichols had the dark, simian look of a man consumed with restlessness. Born in London in 1886, he had been educated at Harringay Boarding School and King's College, before entering the Civil Service as a junior clerk at the tender age of seventeen. Driven abroad by his ambitions, he emigrated to Canada in 1907, worked as a foreman for a building contractor, and in 1911, homesteaded in northern Alberta, near Clyde. Too shrewd to be a dirt-farmer, Nichols borrowed heavily and transformed his homestead into the 'Willow Creek Stock Farm', a breeding ground for prize Percherons, Hunters and Hampshire sheep, as well as Yorkshire swine. The Depression destroyed his business, however, and heavily mortgaged and in poor health, he was forced to abandon his farm and move to Edmonton. Suffering from a crippling arthritic condition which prevented his return to agriculture, he accepted an offer in the summer of 1941 to succeed R.J. Boutillier as Secretary of the struggling farm union.⁴⁹

Since the early 1920s, Henry Nichols had been an avid and well-respected advocate of Social Credit theory. In fact, he later prided himself on being "almost the first [person] in Canada to get Credit Power and Democracy", Major Douglas's seminal work.⁵⁰ Sympathetic to the plight of

the small farmer, Nichols was as adamant in his demand for governmental protection as had been Boutillier, but unlike his predecessor, he tinged his arguments with a vivid monetarist pigment. A powerful propagandist, Nichols argued with the authority of experience that the farmers' problems originated in the 1930s when "the people of Canada underwent enforced poverty that had been imposed on them in spite of the fact that the goods and services had been produced in abundance." All they had lacked was "purchasing power", and since "purchasing power is money", the fault must have lain with those responsible for monetary policy, namely "the Government and Bank of Canada."⁵¹ Strongly "in favour of free enterprise, fair competition and free unions," Nichols supported parity pricing because it "savours of ... social credit principles ... being the only policy which is able to give greater purchasing power to both labour employees and the farmers, and also allow a fair profit to management."⁵² But unlike Bickerton and the Boutilliers, Nichols perceived parity as a monetarist strategy, and he frequently emphasized the correlation between it and a "normal pitch of inflation." Indeed, Nichols asserted that "we need inflation ... for as Canada's production increases - gets larger - becomes inflated, if you like, so must our financial issue increase, get larger - become inflated to keep pace with production ... that is what the UNION was formed for - to get and maintain Parity Prices."⁵³

Under Nichols's tutelage, the Alberta Farmers' Union was pulled quietly into the orbit of rural Social Creditism. In becoming Secretary, Nichols provided the nascent Union with a new respectability, and many prominent Social Crediters, such as Henry Kelly, Duncan MacMillan, and H.W. Wood's proverbial antagonist, George Bevington, offered their services to the movement. Simultaneously, many of Social Credit's opponents, fearing that the monetary reformers would capture the Union for Aberhart, also joined in an effort to curb the swelling tide. In fact, the organization suddenly appeared to be a non-aligned plum, ripely awaiting its political picking. Well known CCFers, such as Henry Young of Millet, and the wild and magnetic Irish socialist, James Jackson, as well as Conservatives like Les Pharis and Communists such as Ray Garneau, moved loudly into the Union in the year following Nichols' appointment. These rival political groupings soon found themselves represented on the Union executive, and by the closing years of the War, they had transformed the leadership into an ideological battleground for their rival ambitions. The Union's future seemed open to anyone who was prepared to grasp it.

But few of the prominent radicals who joined the movement during the War had the interests of the organization itself clearly before their eyes. Many of them had their sights fixed upon larger game: the United Farmers of Alberta. They were unashamed of their motives; they sought to use the Farm Union as a means of capturing the UFA and converting

it to their particular breed of radicalism. Paradoxically, for all their ideological differences, the drift of the new leaders' actions were remarkably similar, not because they shared the same intellectual influences, but because they had passed through the same experiences. With the exception of the Communists, none of the radicals had earned their reputations in a small farm protest movement. Henry Young, who became the spokesman for the CCF lobby on the Executive, pointedly retained his Directorship in the UFA, and remained an intimate of both Robert Gardiner and his successor, George Church. A tall, charming man with an opulence of prematurely white hair, Young had joined the CCF in 1932, and had been elected to the Provincial Executive three years' later. A wealthy farmer from Millet who devoted much of his time to raising ducks, he was active not only in the Wheat and Dairy Pools, but also in two other cooperatives.⁵⁴ Never having been a member of a militant organization, Young was opposed to direct action, and believed that the farmers' surest hope for economic redress lay in a unified, politicized agrarian body along the lines of the UFA of the 1920s.⁵⁵ Similarly, George Bevington, who was twenty years Young's senior, derived his inspiration primarily from the Progressive movement. Critical of strike action and popular resistance, Bevington was another member of the old agrarian aristocracy, and he endorsed cooperation and political involvement as the only legitimate mechanisms of

protest.⁵⁵ If Young and Bevington represented the extremes of political opinion, then there were a host of other Executive members who shared their immediate, if not their millennial, aspirations. Leslie Pharis, who was first elected a Director in 1943, was a strong supporter of unity between the UFA and the Farm Union, despite his political Conservatism. James Jackson and William Logan, who were both Socialists, also supported amalgamation, though they differed to the extent that Logan endorsed the concept of direct action.⁵⁷ Ironically, what characterized the Union's new leadership was not their commitment to the small farmers, but their ambitions to use the organization as a means of rejuvenating the UFA.

There was nothing new about the notion of amalgamating the Farm Union with the UFA. As early as 1939, Frank Eliason was urging the UFC(AS) to follow the example of its eastern namesake and unify the farm movement in Alberta. The small farmers, however, had other ideas; they had grown to mistrust the Association, and they refused to consider amalgamation unless the older organization unconditionally endorsed strike action, and disaffiliated its cooperatives, which they regarded as an obstacle to militant protest. As Herb Boutillier noted, "the prejudice against the UFA is so strong that an effort to swing them back at this time would no doubt wreck the movement [the UFC(AS)]."⁵⁹ Indeed, Boutillier, who remembered the UFA's attitude during the Mundare strike, believed that the backgrounds of the two movements "cannot be ignored", and if the UFA "continued to be reactionary ...

[the UFC(AS)] would never join with them."⁶⁰ Talks between the two organizations were continuous, however, though a concerted drive towards amalgamation did not begin until after the appointment of Nichols and the accession of the new leadership in 1941-42.

From the outset, the inspiration behind the amalgamation proposal originated with the Union's Executive, and found only a modicum of support among the organization's membership of small farmers. Since the UFA consistently declined to endorse direct action, the militant farmers adamantly refused to empower their elected spokesmen to negotiate union. Surreptitiously, the leaders attempted to circumvent their supporters' opposition, but to no avail. In 1942, the Executive of the UFC(AS) did succeed in changing the Union's name to the Alberta Farmers' Union (AFU), in an attempt to demonstrate their willingness to accept the UFA's provincial bias, but they could not induce the farmers to abandon their positions on direct action and the cooperatives.⁶¹ For the UFA, the incentive to amalgamate was even less than was the Union's. Admittedly, membership in the Association had been falling away drastically ~~by~~ 1941, it was down to only seven thousand - but the organization remained financially secure.⁶² Profits from the UFA Cooperative were high, and it was naive to expect the Executive to renounce its surest source of revenue.⁶³ Furthermore, the large producers of the UFA were ideologically opposed to the notion of direct action, and they felt little kinship with the poor farmers of the AFU. Norman Priestly,

the Vice-President of the Association, spoke for his members when he declared smugly that "Communists were the chief factor" in the Farm Union, and that so far as he was concerned, it would always remain "hopelessly ... confined to the foreign settled districts."⁶⁴

Unable to convert the people to the cause of amalgamation, and frustrated by their own incapacities, the Union's leadership turned bitterly against itself. Politics suddenly became the most accusing, the most tragic, and the most damning of questions before the Executive. Implacably, it fractured the hollow peace of the Board Room, and tore at the nexus of the radicals' relationship. Nichols fired the first salvo in the summer of 1942, when he attacked Henry Young for participating in CCF rallies in the Wetaskiwin district. Stating that constitutionally no member of the Board was allowed to be a member of a political party, he charged Young with attempting "to use the Union as a strong lever in favour of the CCF."⁶⁴ Bitterly, the Socialist countered the charges, insisting that as a supporter and not an organizer for the CCF, he could speak wherever he chose. Turning then upon his accuser, he blasted Nichols for having published articles under his official title in the Social Crediter, the organ of the Social Credit League, and he followed his charges with a public indictment of the Secretary for "financial irregularities" in his management of Union funds.⁶⁵ George Bevington, an official organizer for the Union, though not a member of the Executive, now moved to

Nichols' defence. Vehemently, he attacked the Board for protecting "individuals" who "are trying to support the political aims of the CCF and bring about State Farms."⁶⁶ Voices tightened, denunciations and rejoinders split the air, and the Executive divided into irrevocable hostility. Finally, in the summer of 1945, the President decided that he had seen enough.

Brilliant, reckless, fascinating, James Jackson was irresistible. A formidable orator, solid as granite with strong shoulders and an iron frame, he had the ability to carry all before him, not by knowledge, or by rhetoric, but by storm. His language was often tasteless, inflated, and painfully theatrical - "the people", he once stated characteristically, "are being sold down the river into the grasping, drooling jaws of monopolistic crocodiles" - but he was a splendid entertainer.⁶⁷ Though a member of the Socialist bloc, Jackson remained publically neutral throughout the 'political' debate, and he visibly refrained from engaging in the mud-slinging antics of his colleagues. But as his tenure in office ground towards a close, he began to move against the Social Crediters, bent upon preventing them from seizing the initiative at the November Convention of 1945.⁶⁸ In June, the President moved against George Bevington, accusing him of speaking in favour of social credit theories before Union meetings, and calling the Executive to vote on his dismissal. Nichols and Chester McGowan spoke against Bevington's discharge, but they were overwhelmed by an anti-

monetarist alliance of the Socialists and the political moderates led by Henry Young and Les Pharis. Nichols was then moved from an annual to a monthly salary, and in October, R.J. Boutillier was eased back into the Union in the capacity of Treasurer.⁶⁹

Outmaneuvered in the Board Room, the Social Crediters "attempted to bring the confrontation before the farmers." On the first day of the 1945 Annual Convention, a delegate sympathetic to social credit rose to demand the reason for Bevington's discharge, and called upon Herbert Nichols to provide the explanation. Before the Secretary could respond, James Jackson was on his feet, his eyes burning, his face flushed with emotion. "If Mr. Nichols is your President, I say let us find out right here and now," he thundered, his tight-clenched fist waving in the storm, "for I deeply resent the efforts of a few in attempting to delegate the work of the President to the Secretary, who is a paid member, and not elected." The air became taut, the delegates hushed and motionless as Jackson swung his gaze towards Nichols. "Bevington", he stated, his voice constrained and exacting, "had been asked to resign because of his contempt for the Executive, for acting without its authorization, and for saying publically that he 'didn't give a damn what the Board or Committee did'."⁷⁰ There was a quiet stirring among the delegates, but Jackson was in control, and he ruthlessly pressed his advantage. Scanning the crowd, he spoke of the need for unity, and warned ominously against the ruinous

"infiltration of a small Gideon's army" determined to "blow down the walls of Jericho." Then, turning again to Nichols, he added, his words rising and falling like the passing storm, "no man is bigger than this organization. we can lose a Secretary. we can lose a President. But the organization will go on." There was an eruption of applause, and a wave of relief and exultation swept the Executive. For the Socialists, it appeared that James Jackson had finally won the day. But they had forgotten to ask the people.

IV

The Second World War had brought economic stability, but unlike its predecessor, it had not produced rural prosperity. Admittedly, farm prices had improved substantially by the early forties, but when correlated to the farmers' costs of production, they remained depressed prices. The ceilings on prices imposed in 1941 only perpetuated this condition, for the limitations that were placed upon agricultural goods maintained an artificially deflationary price situation. While this programme served to stabilize the wartime economy, it did not permit the farmers to improve their financial situation, meaning that for the debt-ridden producers, the "policy tends to perpetuate poverty" rather than ameliorate it.⁷² The Federal Government was not, however, primarily concerned with the long-term implications of its policy; its main objective was simply to constrain the inflationary spiral

during the immediate war-related emergency. Publically, the Government argued that by "limiting the boom during war," it could "limit the depression after the war," hoping that "stability of price, even when reasonably low, makes for confidence among farmers and helps avoid the tendency towards depression."⁷³ Unfortunately, while this form of argument might have been comforting to the large-scale farmer who was secure in his debt-paying capacity, it was anathema to the poor producers. Without price inflation, the small unit farmer would be unable to reduce his burden of debt, meaning that at the War's close, he would be no better off than he had been at its beginning. This situation was reflected in the fact that throughout the War, despite the moratorium on evictions, thousands of farmers, realizing that they could not continue under prevalent conditions, voluntarily liquidated their assets.⁷⁴ George Bickerton, a moderate socialist and strong anglophile, expressed the sentiments of most dirt-farmers when he stormed at Jack Wesson, "I am coming to the place where I believe that were the government to get off the job ... and take their dam' peg away and allow [prices] to rise to what level they would, I think that we would all be much better off."⁷⁵

To his credit, J.G. Gardiner, the Minister of Agriculture, clearly recognized that farm returns were inadequate when compared to those being paid to workers in industry. Unwilling to inflate food prices during the War, he instead

offered the farmers compensation for their depressed incomes by promising them guaranteed 'floor prices' for the 'post-war transition period'. Late in 1944, Parliament enacted the 'Agricultural Prices Support Act', which was designed "to ensure adequate and stable returns for agriculture by promoting orderly adjustment from war to peace conditions and to secure a fair relationship between returns from agriculture and those from other occupations."⁷⁶ Under the provisions of the Act, a revolving fund of two hundred million dollars was established for the purpose of supporting the prices of farm produce and ensuring that "when war ends ... the farmers do not suffer."⁷⁷ Circumstances were never to allow the Act to prove its usefulness, for by war's end, the policy of the Government had changed from one designed to establish floor prices to one favouring contractual arrangements.⁷⁸ The hallmark of this policy was the United Kingdom-Canada Wheat Agreement signed in the summer of 1946, and pre-saged by an official declaration of a \$1.55 export price ceiling in September, 1945. The British Wheat Agreement secured for the annual sale to the British Government of one hundred and sixty million bushels of Canadian wheat from the crop years 1946-1948, at \$1.55 a bushel, and further contracted the sale of one hundred and forty million bushels for the period 1948-1950, at a price of \$1.25 for 1948-49 and \$1.00 for the following crop year.⁷⁹ Complimenting this export arrangement was a programme of internal price stabilization which established a minimum domestic value of \$1.00 a bushel

on wheat for the first half-decade of peace. Though the Wheat Board subsequently lifted these payments to \$1.25 a bushel, the minimum price guarantees remained in effect.⁸⁰

The response of farm organizations in Western Canada to the Dominion's post-war wheat policies was chaotic. The Canadian Federation of Agriculture, representing the larger farmers and their organizations, endorsed the bilateral Wheat Agreement as a stabilizing influence and supported the domestic price restrictions levelled by the Federal Government. According to H.H. Hannam, the stabilizing policy "typifies what organized agriculture, through the Federation, has been urging upon the government for a long time," and he privately noted that the farmers "feared instability more than they feared any loss from a presently-low price level."⁸¹ The Federation's response was typical of the old progressive farm attitude that the "greatest hope for stability and security in agriculture lies ... in continuing ... the policy of systematic coordinated production and orderly, organized, nationally-directed and supervised marketing."⁸² For the large, mechanized farmer, the long-term price fixing formula was advantageous because it allowed him the security of being able to predict the value of his product for an extended period of time. In addition, by further industrialization, he could reduce his production costs, thereby enjoying a fixed return with declining overheads. The Government obtained the support of the powerful western Pools by a far less circuitous route. In fact, the Cooperative's commendations were flagrantly purchased by Gardiner's creation of a 'five

year pool' which held surplus profits in a residual fund for five times their normal period. In effect, this meant that participation certificates would not be paid annually, but would be stored by the Pool's and only interim payments of ten cents a bushel would be distributed each year. The advantage of this policy for the Government was that it further served to stabilize grain prices, while the Pools profited from not only having a five-year guarantee, but also a massive investment fund.⁸³ In fact, the only people who suffered from the policy were the poor farmers whose survival in agriculture depended upon short-term profits rather than long-term stabilizations.

In contrast to Hannam and the Federation, the leaders of the UFC(SS) were quite certain that they did "not agree with the contract our Government signed with Great Britain." The crux of the Unions' dissention was two-fold. Firstly, the \$1.55 contract price was twenty-five percent below the existing world market value of wheat, meaning that the "farmers of Canada are subsidizing the people of Great Britain to the extent of fifty cents a bushel."⁸⁴ For Bickerton, this situation "not only establishes price discrimination against ourselves as producers," but also "creates an irritant between other countries ... because Canada's low price policies can ultimately reflect in reductions in the price policies [of] other countries as well."⁸⁵ Furthermore, the UFC opposed the wheat pricing policy because it failed to meet the obligations of the Agricultural Prices' Supports

Act which promised to establish a parity relationship between farming and industry. "We are not interested in higher prices alone," argued Bickerton, "we want the price of goods the farmer has to buy set and maintained in relation to the price he receives for his product."⁸⁶ To this extent, the UFC provided the policy-makers with two options: they could either increase the price of agricultural goods to the parity level, or else they could lower the costs of the items the farmers had to buy.⁸⁷ As for the CFA and the Pools, the militants had only censure. "Personally," wrote Frank Eliason, "I am convinced that the Federation will never amount to anything." R.J. Boutillier echoed his sentiments: "the Wheat Pools take the same attitude of shielding the Government's assinine actions," as the CFA, he complained, "and instead of taking off their gloves and arriving at a definite conclusion on policy, they always suggest to wait until the situation clarifies itself."⁸⁸

For many small farmers, the economic situation was clarifying itself only too swiftly. While the sale price of their wheat was being constrained by Dominion policies, and while the value of their hogs and livestock were suffering from the reduced demand, 'decontrols' were lifting the restrictions that had been placed upon the goods which they had to buy. In the winter of 1945-46, two cents were added to the price of gasoline; farm machinery prices increased by twelve and a half percent; and there was inflation in the costs of cotton goods, lumber and furniture.⁸⁹ Suddenly,

it was becoming "quite apparent that we were drifting further away from parity instead of obtaining our objective."⁹⁰ Frank Appleby, who had succeeded Bickerton as President of the UFC(SS), despatched a series of vigorous protests to Gardiner and Finance Minister Ilesley, urging that the Government re-commit itself to a parity formula.⁹¹ According to Bickerton, who, as Research and Publicity Director, had been busying himself calculating pricing formulas, inflation had driven the parity value of wheat upward to \$1.86 a bushel.⁹² "To the ordinary, common farmer," this meant that "an adjustment of around twenty percent is necessary if they are to continue on a decent standard of living."⁹³ Not surprisingly, the Liberal Cabinet was not particularly sympathetic to the UFC's demands. As Ilesley noted, the militant's petition required that the Government sanction "inflation", and he confidently asserted that "most Canadian farmers, like most other citizens, are willing to avoid the sort of wild boom and following depression we had after the last war ... and are willing to continue to exercise the self-restraint which is essential if we are to achieve a smooth transition to satisfactory peacetime conditions."⁹⁴ In short, for the policy-makers, increases in the prices of manufactured goods were necessary to prevent a curtailment of production, but accretions in farm prices were 'inflationary'. Grimly, the militant farmers concluded that the Government was willing to "turn agriculture into a war casualty."⁹⁵

Infuriated by the Dominion's reluctance to adjust its pricing policy, the leadership of the UFC(SS) was nonetheless restrained in its response to the post-war agricultural programme. In a sense, the Union did not have much choice. Financially, the UFC had been in serious trouble since the middle thirties, and organizationally, it had never been able to develop a close relationship between the locals and the central office.⁹⁶ During the latter years of the War, membership in the UFC had increased to over thirty two thousand, "but many have not paid for two, three or four years."⁹⁷ Consequently, the organizational Secretary found himself in the paradoxical position of having inadequate finances despite the fact that the Union was "on the upswing: organizers are working in new parts of the Province, new locals are being formed and memberships are rolling in."⁹⁸ Early in 1945, the Executive decided upon a mechanism whereby it could induce members to pay their dues without expending vast sums on organizers or printed notifications. The plan sought to use the Municipality as a collecting agency, and it suggested that Union dues be paid in conjunction with local taxes. Though the Provincial Government did not provide a blanket authorization for the scheme, it did allow for its implementation on a voluntary basis.⁹⁹ Tragically, by the spring of 1946, only sixty-four of Saskatchewan's three hundred and three municipalities had enrolled, and the UFC remained immersed in its financial quagmire.¹⁰⁰

Complicating these fiscal constraints were the simple problems of senescence. By 1946, the two men who had done the most to build the UFC's support in the later thirties were no longer in their prime: Frank Eliason was sixty-nine years old and in poor health, and Bickerton was seventy-two. In December, 1945, at the height of the Union's debate with the Government, Eliason suffered a stroke and was forced to move to the B.C. coast for six months in order to convalesce. Before his return, in April, Bickerton also left Saskatchewan, returning to England for his first visit in thirty-six years, to assess the War damage and forge new links with Britain's National Farmers' Union.¹⁰¹ The man left to carry the organizational load was Frank T. Appleby, a fifty-seven year old farmer from Pinkham, who had been elected President of the UFC in 1944. Appleby, a warm, considerate man with a large ruddy face and sparkling eyes, was a marvellous conciliator, and a gracious and disarming representative of the Union. Unfortunately, he was not an effective orator, and his powers of organization and synthesis were limited.¹⁰² Seldom the scholar, he preferred to leave the problems of policy to the more academically-oriented Bickerton, and he was never comfortable with the concept of parity. "I had enough of your Euclid = Algebra stuffed into my head[in school]," he once complained, "and have never found any good for it."¹⁰³ Deprived of the guidance of its most experienced leaders, the UFC's response to the Government's post-war policies was both flat and unimaginative. Limiting itself to letters of protest, the Union

failed to make a significant impact upon the policy-makers, and was unable to motivate any adjustment in the agricultural programme. If the stimulus for change was to come from the poor farmers themselves, it would have to find another voice.

V

He had always sensed that life was preparing him for something. Ever since that bleak morning in December when his father had died, leaving him an overweight fifteen-year old schoolboy with a widowed mother and a quarter-section farm to care for, he had known it was coming. But all he could do was wait and work and grow. And how he grew. At twenty years of age he towered at six feet four inches above his neighbours and weighed a crushing two hundred and fifty pounds. But he just kept working and it shaped his way of seeing, of acting, and of believing. He learned all the simple, yet significant things that any sensible Catholic farmboy in Egremont District knew were of lasting importance; the value of a hard day's work, of loyalty to one's friends and of trusting in God. He followed these simple rules and he worked, and then when the UFA came, he became a member. When the Coops came, he joined them all. All the talk made him angry and he started to read; to read about economics and politics and people began to ask his advice. When a local of the United Farmers' of Canada was formed in Egremont, he was there,

and he rose swiftly through its ranks. "I don't know why I got into it," he later recalled coyly. "I went to the first Convention here in Edmonton and first thing I knew they made me Chairman. They then appointed me as Director and next thing I knew, I was President."¹⁰⁴

The election of Carl Stimpfle to the Presidency of the AFU in November, 1945 was a profound blow to the leadership of the Farmers' Union. Having initiated what they believed would be an ideological reorientation through the expulsion of Bevington and the castigation of Nichols, the leaders were shocked to find that the Union's membership was unmoved by their exploits. The upsurge that had begun as a confrontation between Social Credit and Socialism now swept both before it. Henry Young, who had optimistically hoped to divert the wave of anti-Social Credit sentiment along the course to amalgamation, suddenly found his proposals for union with the UFA submerged by a chorus of negative voices. Leslie Pharis, the spokesman for the traditional Parties in the struggle against Douglasism, and R.N. Russell, the Socialist candidate were both handily defeated in their bids for the Presidency. The pattern which the membership hoped their Union to follow was set by Stimpfle himself. An unknown property outside of Egremont, he was elected after a confused speech in which he pledged to abandon all political associations for the good of the organization. His major electoral promise was, significantly enough, to dispatch a strike ballot to all AFU locals if the Government continued to refuse the farmers'

parity prices. The Socialists, like Elijah's servant, might have seen the dark clouds over the water, but it fell to others to harness the storm.¹⁰⁵

Clearly, for all their mastery of backroom politics, the leaders of the Union had proved themselves to be imperfect seers of the popular temperment. The farmers of the AFU had never displayed a particular interest in politics and their support for the Social Credit purges had arisen out of their anti-ideological, rather than their partisan bias. Now the militants were resurgent and all the Socialists could do was to quietly toe the line. As the Government's policy of de-controls and fixed agricultural prices continued to unfold itself in the winter of 1945-46, the demand for a militant response gathered momentum. At the District Conventions held in the months following Stimpfle's election, a succession of Directors who favoured strike action were voted onto the Executive Board. Their number included a bristling young Communist with auburn hair and a sharp tongue, C.D. 'Red' Fuhr; a hulking, outspoken warhorse from the Peace River District of B.C., Art Hadland and Arnie Milsap, the veteran agitator who had twice before been elected to a Central Strike Committee by the farmers of Lamont. Many of those who were opposed to direct action began to disappear from the movement. Les Pharis lost his place on the Board to Keith Long, Chester McGowan was supplanted by Milsap and even James Jackson eventually resigned because of his opposition to a withholding policy.¹⁰⁶ Of equal consequence was the forced retirement

of Nichols and his replacement by Bob Boutillier as Secretary of the AFU in December, 1945. Nichols had been a harsh critic of strike action which he regarded as "non-constructive", and he had attacked its advocates as "weeds in a fertile field [which] should not have been there."¹⁰⁷ Boutillier, in contrast, believed that a strike was "the only way a democratic, live, militant organization can be an active force in agriculture."¹⁰⁸ Lamentably, Nichols' dismissal pressed him permanently from the farmers' movement and shattered the fibre of his spirit. A somewhat pathetic man in later life, crippled by arthritis, he became editor of The Social Creditor magazine, a member of the Board of Governors of the University of Alberta, and a rabid anti-Communist. In the late forties, he devoted much of his energies to proving that the Bible condemned Socialism as "the ultimate slavery of mind and body" and he constantly chastened the farmers to renounce iniquity and return to the cause of righteousness.¹⁰⁹

Freed from constraint, the new leadership of the AFU moved promptly to fulfill its mandate. In the Spring of 1946, a series of petitions were sent to both the Provincial and Federal Governments and a warning was levelled that the farmers would withhold their produce if parity prices were not accorded.¹¹⁰ Predictably rebuffed by the legislators, the Executive of the AFU distributed a strike information bulletin to the Union locals and evangelists of farm parity canvassed the Park Belt.¹¹¹ On June 21st a one-day Farm

Holiday was sponsored by the Union; picnics and dances were organized by locals throughout Alberta and the AFU broadcast a special musical selection over CJAC radio and its affiliates.¹¹² Shrouded by pleasantries, the Farm Holiday provided local organizers with the opportunity to come into contact with the larger community and thereby publicize the strike idea. As momentum increased in Alberta, the UFC (SS) began to demonstrate its interest and support. In early July, Eliason, who had recently returned from his convalescence on the coast, bought six thousand pamphlets entitled "Organizing Strike Action for Parity Prices" from the AFU and distributed them to the Union locals. Two weeks later, Frank Appleby met with Stimpfle at Lloydminster and "went on record as cooperative" with the Albertans, "in the event that we should withhold our produce."¹¹³ The farmers had chosen their course and their leaders prepared like the great folk heroes of old, to lead them out of bondage and captivity.

On August 8, 1946 a strike ballot was distributed to the membership of the Alberta Farmers' Union. Remarkably, it contained the AFU's first complete statement of objectives, as well as three separate ballots concerning the specifications of the withholding policy. The nine-point program embraced demands related largely to the problems of ending wartime regulation of the agricultural economy. A "fact-finding board" was requested to determine and implement parity prices; a minimum fixed price of \$1.55 for both export and domestic wheat and floor prices for livestock, dairy and poultry pro-

ducts were demanded to be levelled until parity was achieved; all price increases on machinery and gasoline were to be rescinded; an adjustment of freight rates was sought and the income tax was to be reduced.¹¹⁴ The strike was to begin at midnight on the sixth day of September, 1946 and was to continue for a minimum of thirty days unless the Government acceded to the farmers' demands. A return of fifty-five percent of the ballots, with a two-thirds affirmative majority was required for the strike to be declared.¹¹⁵ Results of the voting returned to the central office within a week of distribution and they revealed a decisively affirmative margin. Of the nineteen thousand ballots distributed, thirteen thousand were completed, of which eighty-eight percent were in favour of withholding produce, though only four thousand supported continuing the strike after thirty days, even if necessary.¹¹⁶ Unfortunately, the militants exhilaration at receiving their strike mandate was soon clouded by more sombre news from the east.

Relaxed and invigorated, George Bickerton returned from England in late July, only to discover a disconcerting situation. The AFU strike ballot which Frank Eliason handed him on this bright morning in August contained several direct refutations of the UFC's most cherished policies. "We can't agree to these," he said quizzically, circling four of the proposed nine points with a soft pencil. Sadly, Frank Eliason concurred. "The UFC is out for parity," the Secretary explained to Bob Boutillier, so it could not agree to the demands

for a price level of \$1.55 on wheat or fixed dairy, poultry and livestock prices. Shrewdly, Eliason endeavored to extricate the Union from the concordat which Appleby had reached with Stimpfle three weeks earlier. "We agreed to back Alberta in her strike on a voluntary basis only," he asserted. "That is, we were not prepared to issue a strike ballot soon enough to be in time for this year's crop, but we would publish requests to our farmers and make our requests over the air in our broadcasts for our farmers to hold for their own good and also to back Alberta."¹¹⁷ With consummate dexterity, Eliason discharged the UFC from the responsibility of having to endorse a strike policy which was contrary to its program, while at the same time, offered his modest support to the protesters. Unfortunately for the Albertans, the implication of his actions was that the UFC could no longer promise to deliver its members with any degree of surety. Anxiously, the Alberta militants now realized that in striking out against authority they could count only upon themselves.

As August crept forward through the ripening fields of wheat, the AFU searched restlessly and with growing consternation for an ally to befriend in its struggles. Towards the middle of the month, A.D. Olsen, a member of the Executive Board, approached the Deputy Minister of Agriculture, O.S. Longman, and requested that the Department organize a meeting of farm representatives to discuss the AFU's demands. Condescendingly, Longman informed the Union's spokesman that the Department could not become involved in a dispute between

Ottawa and the farmers and he then promptly authorized an anti-strike speaking tour by Governmental representatives.¹¹⁸ According to Longman, "strikes, riots and panics," were all "emotional reactions" and evidenced a "fear of insecurity" which he could not condone, for as he noted gravely, "dictatorship" and not democracy, "thrives on a fearful people."¹¹⁹ Their petitions rejected by the Provincial Government, the AFU next turned to the Federation of Agriculture and the farm Cooperatives for support. The Alberta Federation was in no mood to discuss the strike, however, for the dirt farmers had voted to reap the whirlwind and their contemporaries wished only for it to be blowing over their graves. "In my opinion," pronounced Louise O'Neill, the AFA's Publicity Director, "there would be nothing accomplished by striking except the loss of time and money to the participants," and, she added quietly, "I am satisfied it is a bluff."¹²⁰ Lew Hutchison, the Chairman of the AFA, echoed her opinions, stating that the AFU's "biggest job will be backing gracefully away from it and not offending their members."¹²¹ J.R. McFall, the Federation's Provincial Secretary, immediately wired Ottawa upon receipt of the AFU's request, urging the CFA "to take no part in the controversy...or interview with the Government." The National Federation complied, and while agreeing to arrange a meeting between the AFU and the Dominion Government, it refused to accompany the delegation or to endorse its petition.¹²² Gradually, the militants were discovering how difficult it was to lead a revolution in which no one,

else believed.

However, the AFU did not back gracefully away from its strike decision. After a succession of anxious boardroom discussions, a small delegation comprised of Stimpfle, A.R. Hadland and C.D. Fuhr boarded a train bound for Ottawa.¹²³ There they discovered a Government that was both non-cooperative and patronizing. At 11:40 a.m. on August 29th, the AFU delegation met with C.D. Howe, the Minister of Reconstruction, J.A. MacKinnon, Minister of Trade and Commerce, W.A. Tucker, the Saskatchewan Liberal Leader and P. Des Johns, the acting Deputy of Agriculture, to discuss their demands. Howe, Mackenzie King's dynamic seneschal of economic engineering, chaired the Cabinet Committee and characterized the Liberal response by informing Stimpfle that, "if you go ahead with the strike you are going to find the greatest lack of interest in Ottawa. The ones starting it, will have to finish it." By 1:30 p.m., the meeting was over.¹²⁴ That night, the AFU representatives dined with J.G. Taggart, the Chairman of the politically castrated, but still extant, Agricultural Prices Supports Board. Taggart, a shrewd and energetic veteran of wheat politics, agreed that "a parity fact-finding board was a good idea," but he was skeptical concerning its political feasibility.¹²⁵ The next morning, the negotiators returned to Alberta, utterly disconcerted and convinced that "their requests were not going to be seriously considered without serious pressure."¹²⁶ Three days later, a unanimous decision was reached by the Board of the AFU to suspend all

deliveries of farm produce as of midnight, September sixth.¹²⁷

Bleak though the situation seemed, the Albertans did receive some encouragement from another front. Interest in the non-delivery proposal had been growing steadily in Saskatchewan throughout the summer and as August progressed, the UFC locals began to indicate that they would like their Union to formulate a more definite policy towards the strike.¹²⁸

On September first, the UFC's Executive apparently succumbed to the pressure and Stimpfle received a telegram from Eliason stating curtly that "the UFC will follow the lead of the Alberta strikers."¹²⁹

The next day, Frank Appleby and his Vice-President, George Wright, arranged an interview with J.A. MacKinnon and boarded a train for Ottawa, intent upon winning sufficient concessions to appease the farmers.¹³⁰

However, time was not a luxury they could enjoy, for the AFU adamantly refused to delay the strike's commencement deadline. Desparately, Appleby announced that he could remain in Ottawa only until September fifth and that he could give the Cabinet only until then to reach a compromise. Candidly, officials in the Capital agreed that his request was impossible.¹³¹

Only one question now remained unanswered on the Prairie: what grim harvest would September seventh bring?

VI

"I never really did expect," stammered Frank Eliason,

"to see the day that the farmers would rally to any proposal for a remedy to their grievances as solidly and in such large numbers as is evidenced by the response to the farm strike."¹³²

It seemed much as though it had begun of its own accord. On the morning of September sixth, Carl Stimpfle had declared that non-delivery would commence as planned and he stoically rejected a Federal petition to delay the strike until J.G. Gardiner had returned from Europe at mid-month.¹³³ But, no one really knew what to expect. Premier Manning, who had succeeded Aberhart as leader of the Social Credit Party, spoke over CJAC radio shortly after Stimpfle issued his press announcement and in an attempt to forestall the strike, warned the farmers that non-delivery was both "ill-advised and not in the interests of the farmers themselves." Its "sole effect," he cautioned, "will be to accentuate the suffering of innocent people" for "refusal to deliver their produce by a comparatively small number of farmers in one area...cannot affect the overall picture sufficiently and will only result in unnecessary financial losses to the farmers who are induced to participate."¹³⁴ Unfortunately, Manning's appeal was somewhat belated, for within twelve hours it would begin, and even the AFU would be surprised by its extent.

From Lloydminster to Dawson Creek, from Peace River to Red Deer, swarms of picketers materialized suddenly on the highways, halting deliveries of produce, throwing logs and threshing machine belts before approaching trucks, dumping cream and grain over the roadside, blocking all shipments from

both the North and the East. In the first week, the pattern of revolt quickly asserted itself. At Stony Plain, picketers opened the tailgate of a truck and let escape a score of pigs bound for the market.¹³⁵ At Wetaskiwin, two strikers were arrested for dumping cream on the ground and for resisting Constable Bud Rose of the RCMP, who tried to stop them. Undaunted, the strikers promptly posted a notice over the spilled produce, reading: "this is what happens to Scabbers' cream".¹³⁶ The story was the same throughout the Park Belt. At Viking, two men were fined for dumping grain and outside Leduc, four more were convicted after throwing seventeen hundred pounds of a strike breaker's butter off his truck.¹³⁷ However, if there was violence, there was also colour. Posters, printed by the AFU and bearing farcical, if potent, poetical quips began to appear mysteriously throughout the non-delivery region. "Use your brain: Hold your grain," they screamed. "Parity or Poverty", "Remember the Dirty Thirties: They Must Not Happen Again", "Support the Strike: It's Your Fight."¹³⁸ By the end of the first week, the strike had virtually curtailed all deliveries of farm produce to the local points in the Park Belt and Peace River Districts, and even the major centres were feeling the shortage. Though both Edmonton and Vegreville reported satisfactory deliveries of milk, there were severe reductions in their supplies of livestock, eggs and grain. On September 12th, deliveries to the Edmonton stockyard, which exactly one week earlier had been three hundred and seventy-five cattle, ninety-four calves and four hundred

and fifty-seven hogs, had dwindled to eighty-eight cattle, ten calves and sixteen hogs.¹³⁹ Northern Alberta was steadily falling under a state of internal seige.

In Ottawa, Frank Appleby was about to lose his temper. He had arrived in the capital on September 4th and he had been meeting extensively with Government officials for the last two days. Now he had nothing but anger left as he wrote a bitter letter to Eliason on his Château Laurier notepaper. J.A. MacKinnon, he reported, with whom he had spoken the longest, "showed that he was agreeable, fully, to the fact-finding board ...however, he said both today and yesterday that one man cannot promise for the Government." Short on time and frustrated by the Government's sympathetic intransigence, Appleby decided to present the Legislators with a simple option. "When I see[sic] the papers this morning," which illustrated the Westerners' resolve to strike, "I wrote the following skeliton [sic] for a telegram and took it up and asked MacKinnon to sanction the sending of it: 'Mr. MacKinnon stated this morning that a fact-finding board for the setting up of Parity Price legislation as requested by the farm delegation brief would be set up.'" Not surprisingly, MacKinnon, who had also seen the newspapers, but gave less credence to the reports of Canadian journalists, refused to sanction the sending of the telegram. In a rage, Appleby suspended the UFC's negotiations and telephoned Eliason to declare the Saskatchewan Union's support for the strike. The next day, he boarded the train for the Maritimes, set upon convincing the CFA Convention, then meeting in Charlottetown, into supporting the farmers' non-delivery action.¹⁴⁰

Unfortunately, the Federation had already decided how it would close ranks over the issue of endorsing a withholding policy. Lew Hutch-

ison, the Chairman of the Alberta Federation, had met with the Executives of the CFA in Moncton prior to the Convention, and had substantiated their worst fears concerning the intentions of the militants.¹⁴¹ According to the AFA, the farm movement in the West was being polarized between the forces of reason and of revolution and the Canadian Federation was being compelled to take a definite stand against the AFU-UFC entente. In short, the strike was bad for business, for as Eliason noted sardonically, "it was no doubt a great surprise to them [the Federation's member organizations] that although they had told our leaders definitely that the farmers were quite satisfied...the farmers themselves, who are members of both the cooperative and our association, went out on strike in mass."¹⁴² J.R. McFall, the single-minded Secretary of the AFA, re-emphasized the point, "the publicity this strike is receiving through the press is certainly not doing the farm organizations any good and if they do gain even the smallest concessions, the strength of the AFA and the CFA will be seriously impaired."¹⁴² In short, "if these boys gain any concessions at all, there will be no holding them." George Church, the President of the UFA, concurred and though he admitted to being "itching to blast them himself", both he and McFall believed that an anti-strike statement coming from the CFA Convention "will be more effective than coming from either the AFA or the UFA."¹⁴³ On September 9th, just hours before Appleby stepped off the ferry in Charlottetown, H.H. Hannam issued a statement to the Canadian press. The Federation, he charged, "had no official connection with, nor had it endorsed in any way, the course of action of the Alberta Farmers' Union in calling for a producer's strike...although it had been requested to do so." Furthermore, to cover the potentiality of the militants winning any concessions, he explained

that the CFA had already negotiated the creation of a fact-finding board with the Government and had been assured that preliminary research work had been underway for some months, "particularly with respect to agricultural prices."¹⁴⁴ Quietly, Frank T. Appleby turned himself around and headed home.

By mid-September a steady, though discordant rhythm was pulsating through the West. Day after day, the grim knots of farmers would patrol the highways, upsetting loads of cream and grain, releasing livestock, jeering strike-breakers, shattering windows and slashing tires. Occasionally, a delivery truck would ignore the pickets, highballing through the gauntlet of farmers and hurtling obstacles thrown hastily in their path. Gradually, the strike spread outwards, moving slowly into the southern regions where AFU support had hitherto been limited. Membership in the Union spiralled from twenty thousand to thirty thousand in the space of weeks and dozens of new locals were formed across the Province.¹⁴⁵ By September 12th, egg shipments into Calgary had fallen by fifty percent and livestock sales had reached an unprecedented monthly low.¹⁴⁶ At McLeod, non-delivery was declared on the eleventh, but owing to a deficiency of sympathizers, picketters were forced to work thirty-six hour shifts.¹⁴⁷ At Olds, strikers made headlines when they high-jacked a train carrying cream into the town and turned it back to Red Deer.¹⁴⁸ Unfortunately, for all their resolution and panache, the strikers in the south were unable to maintain non-delivery for much more than a week. The vast majority of farmers in the large farm regions of the 'True Prairies' were solid UFA members who lacked the same motivation to protest as their less prosperous brethren in the north. Consequently, the strike flared up only briefly in the southern regions, though it proved sufficient cause for a signif-

icant uplifting of AFU morale.¹⁴⁹

To the east in Saskatchewan, the non-delivery crusade was spreading swiftly across the Province. On September seventh, following Appleby's telephone call from Ottawa, Eliason had "urged all UFC members and other farmers to withhold deliveries from the market" but he had not declared the strike to be an official UFC undertaking.¹⁵⁰ Despite his caution, the withholding policy was a spectacular success and within a few days, farm deliveries had ground to a halt in the Union's northern stronghold. So great was the response, that one day following Appleby's return to Saskatoon on September 15th, the decision was made to officially declare the UFC's participation in the strike and transform the Executive into a Central Strike Committee.¹⁵¹ By mid-month, the strike "was practically solid in the north." Seven hundred and fifty local points had been mobilized and Eliason estimated that over thirty-five thousand farmers were withholding their produce.¹⁵² The pattern of dissent was similar to that in Alberta; patrols would form on highways leading to towns and elevators, and all deliveries of produce would be stopped. At Hyas, strikers closed the elevators on September 13th, "causing a great deal of animosity" among both "our well-to-do farmers" and the "grain companies which threatened by telegram" to "level heavy fines and penalties if the doors remained closed."¹⁵³ The police, however, were far more lenient in Saskatchewan than they were in Alberta, and it was September 19th before they made their first arrest, charging five men at Pilger for preventing a station agent from loading two crates of chickens.¹⁵⁴ In certain areas, the strike remained peaceful and "one hundred percent solid" throughout the month of September. Kydor protestors suffered no arrests or intimidations, but let only three loads of grain through to the elevator. Apparently, they belonged to "an old

lady" who "was hard up for money".¹⁵⁵ The climax of the strike came in its second week, when word reached the UFC that shippers were moving animals at night from Biggar and Battleford through to the Saskatoon stockyards for sale. Immediately, Eliason circulated an appeal, and five hundred farmers volunteered for picket duty, forming a cordon that encircled not only the yards, but also the railway loading area.¹⁵⁶ Elated by their success, George Bickerton asserted that the "non-delivery strike is spreading across Saskatchewan like a Prairie fire," and, he added gleefully, "it cannot be stopped."¹⁵⁷

However, in Saskatchewan, there were not the same forces operating against the strike as there were in Alberta. Here, the Federation of Agriculture was weaker and more disorganized than it was in the Foothills' Province, and the Cooperatives therefore lacked the same obliquely potent voice in the Legislature. Furthermore, the CCF had triumphed in the 1944 Provincial election, and its victory had been engineered largely by the war-time defection of Liberal votes in the small farm regions of the north.¹⁵⁸ T.C. Douglas, the new Premier, was a humane and gifted man who well understood the difficult conditions under which the agricultural poor were forced to operate and he offered the UFC "every facility" for making their demands known to the Federal Government. I.C. Nollet, Saskatchewan's Minister of Agriculture, assumed an even more solicitous posture, warning Eliason that packers might attempt to force down livestock prices after the strike ended. He advised the Union that "a little resumption of picket action...might have a salutary effect."¹⁵⁹ Unfortunately, despite their quiet approbation for the strike, the leaders of the CCF sensed that an open endorsement of non-delivery would be politically unfeasible. The wealthier farmers of the southern Prairie, who had founded and who

who still formed the backbone of Saskatchewan's Socialist Party, were opposed to the strike and the CCF could not risk endangering their support.¹⁶⁰ Consequently, the Douglas Government maintained a paradoxical silence; privately it endorsed the UFC's demands and probably tempered the zeal of the RCMP, but publically, it did nothing more than dispatch a telegram favouring a fact-finding board to the Prime Minister.¹⁶¹ In contrast to the socialists, the Social Crediters of Alberta were neither sympathetic nor supportive of the striking AFU. In two radio broadcasts, one on September sixth and another three weeks later, Manning attacked the strike as being "ill-advised from the standpoint of the farmers' best interests." According to the Premier, the AFU should have sought "the Province's assistance and support" before launching upon its reckless course of action, and he noted cryptically that the Union had not done so because of the work of "certain political influences... that wanted to give the impression at a later date that the Government had not given the farmers the support they had a right to expect."¹⁶² In order to demonstrate the Government's disfavour, the Attorney-General of Alberta ordered the police to assist any farmer who wanted to deliver his produce, and to charge any individual obstructing a public highway.¹⁶³ While Manning's actions won him the plaudits of the AFA, it was a politically hazardous move, for as one journalist predicted, the Government's "opposition to the strike...can easily mean the eclipse of Social Credit at the next election."¹⁶⁴

Though the farm strike had, in many ways, achieved unexpected results, its successes were of large yet brittle construction. Unquestionably, non-delivery was most harmful to its participants, for by withholding their produce, the farmers were depriving themselves of their own much

needed income. As the strike wound its tempestuous way towards the close of its thirty day limit, enthusiasm began to wane and few farmers looked with favour upon its continuance. To the Farm Union's credit, however, the strike remained solid in the Park Belt region throughout the month of September, though economic hardship and fear wore down the farmers' will to continue. To an extent, enthusiasm was further shaken by a rapid succession of critical events in the final days of September which served to split the fabric of the farmers' confidence. On September 20th, a light snow fell over the Park Belt, and three days later a heavy rain began. Frantically, the farmers began to fear an early frost, which would decimate their crops and in large numbers, men quit the picket lines to finish their threshing before the weather broke.¹⁶⁵ With enthusiasm already dampened by gathering hardship and fear, a bloody confrontation between striking farmers and the police occurred which shook the lingering buoyancy of the rebellious producers. On September 27th, a cattle buyer named Lloyd Lybert attempted to drive a hundred head of steer through a picket line which blocked the approaches to the Beaver Siding loading point. Somehow, news reached the local strike committee, and over two hundred farmers were mobilized to prevent the cattle from crossing the small bridge over the Beaver River which lay before the railway junction. A bitter skirmish ensued, with Lybert accompanied by thirteen cowboys and an eight man police escort, using clubs and lariats to drive away the picketters from the crossing. Several farmers were trampled by the terrified animals, three were sentenced to months of hard labour and eighteen more received fines totalling thirteen hundred dollars.¹⁶⁶ It was a tragic, inglorious culmination to a month of increasing tension and resentment, and it served only to dim the fires of optimism that had

hitherto burned within the soul of the AFU.

James G. Gardiner returned from Europe on September 20th and within a week, he had invited the AFU and the UFC to send a delegation to Ottawa to discuss their demands. For the tarnished and exhausted farmers, the time had again come for discussion, and on October first, Stimpfle, Appleby, Art Hadland and Bill Logan once more embarked for the capital.¹⁶⁷ Unfortunately, it was not a propitious moment to begin negotiations. At several points in the Park Belt, the strike had weakened; in southern Alberta, it had all but ended, and the Western newspapers were filled with reports that the farmers could not long continue to withhold their produce. To complicate matters, the Beaver Crossing incident had given the AFU a reputation for violence and lawlessness that the Union's leadership was hard pressed to repair. Only from South-Central Saskatchewan did the news continue to emanate with any degree of brightness. Here, George Bickerton and Elsie Hart, by dint of a supreme organizational effort, succeeded in carrying the strike into the area west of Last Mountain Lake for the first time.¹⁶⁸ On the whole, however, it did not seem that the militants had enough left to bargain with.

Remarkably, despite their apparent weakness, the delegation did succeed in winning some notable concessions, at least on the surface. Rather than deny the farmers their cherished fact-finding board, Gardiner sought at great lengths to demonstrate that the Dominion had already established such an investigatory agency in the Agricultural Prices Support Board, though he was unable to explain why its Chairman, J.G. Taggart, had been ignorant of this dubious honour barely one month before. In compensation for not creating a new agency, the Minister agreed to expand the existing Board and he even intimated that a representative from each of the striking

Unions would be appointed. On the issues of decontrols and the British Wheat Agreement, he was suitably understanding but refused to alter the Government's policies, though he did suggest that the discrepancy between the domestic and export price of wheat would soon be eliminated. Finally, Gardiner promised to raise the 1945 participation payment on Wheat Pool certificates by ten cents, a motion of appeasement to farmers' angered by the five-year pool. He also agreed to undertake a further review of the income tax structure.¹⁶⁹ Confident that they had won a resounding victory under difficult circumstances, the farm delegation wired the Central Strike Committee to 'suspend' the non-delivery action as of midnight, October fifth.¹⁷⁰ In an instant, Western Canada's largest direct expression of agrarian unrest had become a memory.

Unbeknown to the farm delegates, however, the Government was already devising a method of abrogating the agreement it had reached with the Farmers' Unions. Adamantly, the Federation of Agriculture was pressuring the Liberals not to grant the militants any concessions, for according to the CFA, "if these people and their strike action are given any official recognition, they will attempt to dominate the whole Canadian field."¹⁷¹ Having failed to prevent the strike from taking place, the Federation was determined to at least prevent the militants from winning at the negotiating table. As C.W. Mowers of the AFA informed MacKinnon, "if the government would rather deal with the Federation of Agriculture in an atmosphere of mutual respect and negotiation than with an irresponsible organization ready to strike at a moment's notice, the government should assist the Federation of Agriculture in restoring prestige being shaken by the more irresponsible element." In short, "the Federation is in a tough spot and now more than ever before, it needs a major

accomplishment to present to the farmers as evidence of the rightness of its method of doing business."¹⁷² Never a man to miss an opportunity to incur a political debt, Gardiner swiftly delivered the much needed publicity boost to the Federation of Agriculture. By announcing that the Agricultural Prices Support Board would investigate farm parity, he was careful to give the credit for the agreement to the Federation of Agriculture, and when two new members were appointed to the Board, they came not from the AFU and the UFC, but from the AFA and its Saskatchewan counterpart.¹⁷³ In recompense, the Federation quietly suffocated the parity prices lobby and agreed not to pressure the Government to honour its pledges to review the income tax and equalize domestic and export wheat prices. "J.G. Gardiner," wrote one observer, "appears to have wooed and won the CFA successfully and it is now dutifully functioning as a part of the family compact."¹⁷⁴ The only victims were the poor farmers.

For the small producers of Western Canada and particularly for their leaders, defeat was to occupy a subsequent chapter and for the present, it was a time only for optimism and celebration. "It has been a great fight," chortled R.J. Boutillier, "from all indications we do not regret that we have taken the action we did as it has certainly built up our movement, and we had everything to gain in doing so."¹⁷⁵ George Bickerton was equally optimistic, and the grand old fighter could not resist the temptation to prepare for the future. "I don't think the farmers are going to forget this weapon," he mused, "in fact, if the price of cattle and hogs goes down after this strike is over, then we will go right back on strike again and make it one hundred percent effective."¹⁷⁶ Elated, exhilarated, bellicose and perhaps a little overconfident, the leaders

of the Farmers' Union looked back over the preceding month with a sense of true accomplishment. They had done what none had believed was possible and they had emerged, if not triumphant, then at least invigorated. History would not forsake them. "The sacrifices we have made," pronounced Stimpfle, "will not be forgotten by the coming generation. This history-making strike will be recorded and the 'Powers that Be' will not forget us in a hurry."¹⁷⁷

For the dirt farmers, however, Clio was to prove a particularly fickle mistress.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

1. Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983.
2. The Furrow, January and March, 1935.
3. SAB, United Farmers' of Canada Papers (Saskatchewan Section) Papers, B2 VIII 106, C. McGowan to F. Eliason, February 17, 1941.
4. N.F. Priestly and E.B. Swindlehurst, Furrows, Faith and Fellowship (Edmonton, 1967), pp. 165-68.
5. GIA, H.E. Nichols Papers, Box 4, file 30, F. Wagner to W.L. Shapka, June 27, 1939.
6. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 8, file 56, H.E. Nichols, "Draft of Article" (n.d.).
7. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 8, file 56, P.H. Ashby, "Efficient Production" (n.d.).
8. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 8, file 56, H.E. Nichols, "Draft of Article" (n.d.).
9. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, F. Eliason to H.E. Nichols, August 17, 1943; "Minutes of Meeting Held in the Empire Hotel", October 27-28, 1944.
10. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, F. Eliason to H.R. Boutillier, November 11, 1939.
11. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, H.R. Boutillier to F. Eliason, December 5, 1938, and February 1, 1939.
12. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, H.E. Nichols to F. Eliason, March 27, 1944.
13. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, H.R. Boutillier to F. Eliason, December 5, 1938.
14. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 4, file 29, R.J. Boutillier to L.V. Moruszeska, December 20, 1939.
15. Priestly and Swindlehurst, Furrows, Faith ..., pp. 168-70.
16. Information on the leaders of the UFC(SS) was derived from biographies in Gary Carlson, Farm Voices (Regina, 1981), pp. 95-104; for the AFU-UFC(AS), Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983.

17. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, H.R. Boutillier to F. Eliason, February 10, 1940.
18. Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983; Priestly and Swindlehurst, Furrows, Faith ..., pp. 168-70.
19. Examples of Boutilliers correspondence with UFC locals may be found interspersed throughout the Nichols Papers.
20. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 5, file 33, R.J. Boutillier to J. Bauer, April 10, 1941.
21. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 5, file 35, R.J. Boutillier to F. Eliason, April 4, 1941.
22. Priestly and Swindlehurst, Furrows, Faith ..., p. 176.
23. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 7, file 44, "Memo to Sub-Directors and Committee Men" (n.d.).
24. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, H.R. Boutillier to F. Eliason, February 16, 1940.
25. GIA, Alfred Rawlins Papers, Box 1, file 14, undated press clipping; Box 9, file 1, "Brief presented to the Turgeon Commission" (n.d.). GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 4, file 30, press clipping from Free Press Farmer, June 21, 1939.
26. GIA, Rawlins Papers, Box 1, file 14, "Manifesto of the Turin Farmers' Union" (n.d.).
27. Information on wheat production during WWII is derived from: G.E. Britnell, "The War and Canadian Wheat", in Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science, Vol. VII (August, 1941), pp. 397-413; Britnell, "Economic Effects of the War on the Prairie Economy" Ibid, Vol. XI (August, 1945), pp. 373-87; C.F. Wilson, A Century of Canadian Grain (Saskatoon, 1978), pp. 629-782; and Britnell and V. Fowke, Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace (Stanford, 1962), passim.
28. On hog production during the War, see: John Herd Thompson and Ian Macpherson, "An Orderly Reconstruction: Prairie Agriculture in World War Two", to be published in Canadian Papers in Rural History, 1983, special thanks to Professors Macpherson and Thompson for allowing me pre-publication access to this valuable work. See also,

- B.H. Kristjanson and J.L. Anderson, "Hog Production in Northeastern Alberta", in Economic Annalist (November, 1943) pp. 77-80; and K.A.H. Buckley and M.C. Urquhart, Historical Statistics of Canada (Toronto, 1971), p. 371.
29. B.A. Campbell, "The Dairy Industry in Wartime", in Economic Annalist (August, 1944), pp. 52-57.
 30. Urquhart and Buckley, Historical Statistics..., p. 359.
 31. Census of Canada for 1941 and 1946, Vol.'s VIII, Part II, and IV, Agriculture.
 32. Western Producer, April 17, 1930.
 33. GIA, Walter Norman Smith Papers, Box 2, file 26, A.H. Brinkman to J.G. Gardiner, December 7, 1939.
 34. Census of Canada for 1941 and 1946, Vol.'s VIII, Part II, and IV, Agriculture.
 35. Western Farm Leader, August 18, 1939.
 36. Western Farm Leader, August 18, 1941.
 37. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 9, file 70, H.E. Nichols, "Memo on Hog Production" (March, 1946).
 38. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, Convention Minutes, 1939 and 1945; GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 7, file 44, "Memo to Sub-Directors and Committee Men" (n.d.).
 39. Eliason referred to a widespread fear of being charged with subversion in a letter to R.J. Boutillier, December 9, 1940, in SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106.
 40. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, R.J. Boutillier to F. Eliason, January 8, 1941.
 41. Interview with Elsie Hart, January 18, 1983.
 42. Ian Macpherson, "An Authoritative Voice: The Re-orientation of the Canadian Farmers' Movement, 1935 to 1945", in Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers (1979), pp. 164-81.
 43. Western Producer, September 24, 1936.
 44. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 42, F. Eliason to F.S.N. Williams, November 30, 1946.

45. Macpherson, "An Authoritative Voice...", p. 177.
46. PAA, Hugh Allen Papers, Box 1, Item 84; "Confidential Report Submitted to the Canadian Federation of Agriculture Executive Meeting, May 7-8, 1962: Existing Conflicts in Farm Organizations".
47. Western Farm Leader, April 18, 1941; PAA, Alberta Federation of Agriculture Papers, Box 1, item 1, H.H. Hannam to Ray Garneau, n.d.; GIA, UFA Papers, Box 1, file 20, Speech by Robert Gardiner, n.d..
48. J.N. McCrorie, "The Saskatchewan Farmers' Movement: A Case of Study" (unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Illinois, 1972), p. 226.
49. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 1, file 1, H.E. Nichols to the Director of Personnel, July 13, 1956.
50. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 1, file 4, H.E. Nichols to O. Barclay-Smith, June 19, 1946.
51. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 7, file 47, H.E. Nichols, "Brief Regarding Bank Charters" (n.d.).
52. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 1, file 1, H.E. Nichols to J.S. MacLean, December 22, 1947; Box 1, file 4, Nichols to E.A. Blackburn (n.d.).
54. GIA, Alberta Cooperative Commonwealth Federation Papers, Box 24, file 277, "Biographies of CCF Candidates" (n.d.).
55. Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983.
56. Vermillion Standard, August 26, 1946.
57. Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983.
58. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, H.R. Boutillier to F. Eliason, February 1, 1939.
59. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers B2 VIII 106, F. Eliason to H.R. Boutillier, September 23, 1938.
60. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 4, file 29, R.J. Boutillier to F. Eliason, February 18, 1939.
61. The only account of the amalgamation debate is provided in Priestly and Swindlehurst, Furrows, Faith and Fellowship, Chapter VIII.

62. GIA, UFA Papers, Box 1, file 20, Speech by Robert Gardiner (n.d.).
63. Western Farm Leader, January 17, 1947.
64. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 1, file 1, H.E. Nichols to J.S. Maclean, December 22, 1947.
65. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 7, file 48, "Memo to AFU Locals" (n.d.).
66. Vegreville Observer, April 28, 1945; Calgary Albertan, August 30, 1946.
67. Edmonton Bulletin, November 27, 1945.
68. Under the regulations of the AFU Constitution, an individual could serve only three presidential terms, meaning that Jackson's office expired in November, 1945. Edmonton Journal, November 29, 1945.
69. Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983.
70. Edmonton Journal, November 27, 1945.
71. Edmonton Bulletin, November 29, 1945.
72. UC, "AFU Resolutions on the Price Ceiling Policy" (n.d.).
73. GIA, I.V. Macklin Papers, Box 2, file 7, Draft of speech (n.d.).
74. PAA, Allen Papers, Box 1, item 87, "Draft Address by Hugh Allen Before the UGG Annual Meeting, November 7-8, 1945".
75. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 116, G. Bickerton to J. Wesson, April 15, 1941.
76. Andrew Hebb, "Decontrol and the Farmer", in The Canadian Forum, Vol. XXVII (December 1947) p. 200.
77. Edmonton Bulletin, January 26, 1945.
78. Andrew Hebb, "The Frustrated Farmer", in The Canadian Forum, Vol. XXVII (July, 1947), p. 79.
79. Hazen Argue, "Canadian Wheat Policy", in The Canadian Forum, Vol. XXVI (October, 1946), p. 151.
80. C.F. Wilson, A Century of Canadian Grain, p. 857.

81. Western Farm Leader, August 2, 1946; Wilson, A Century of Canadian Grain, p. 869.
82. PAA, AFA Papers, Box 12, item 146b, H.H. Hannam, "Statement to the Annual Convention of the Canadian Manufacturers Association, June 6, 1945".
83. Western Producer, July 30, 1946; the small farmers resented having part of their profits tied up in the five-year pool. See complaint in UC, "What the Present Wheat Agreement Means to the Farmers" (n.d.).
84. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 66, "Transcript of Broadcast, October 10, 1946"; Appleby added his criticism that the provisions of the agreement began when wheat prices were high and ended at a time when world surplus would again begin to replenish themselves. "In other words, it leads us to the edge of the precipice and leaves us there." Western Producer, October 3, 1946.
85. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, G. Bickerton to Mrs. E.A. Grant, March 15, 1946.
86. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 66, "Transcript of Broadcast, October 10, 1946".
87. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, F. Eliason to H.E. Nichols, September 28, 1945.
88. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to J. Gray, February 11, 1947; B2 IX 6, R.J. Boutillier to G. Bickerton, February 18, 1948.
89. UC, "Notice to all Directors, Sub-Directors and Secretaries, AFU Locals" (June 3, 1946).
90. UC, "Transcript of Radio Address by Arnold Milsap, September 27, 1946".
91. UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 43, "Report on Non-Delivery Strike" (n.d.).
92. UFC(SS) Papers, B2 IX 208, contains Bickerton's calculations of parity price levels.
93. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 41, F. Appleby to D. Gordon, May 4, 1946.
94. UC, James L. Ilsley to Carl Stimpfle, May 4, 1946.

95. UC, "Report of the Inter-provincial Farmers' Union Council" (July 27, 1947).
96. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 106, F. Eliason to R.J. Boutillier, June 19, 1941; B2 XIII 94, F. Eliason to W. Mysak, September 19, 1946.
97. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, F. Eliason to S. Sokolotaski, February 21, 1944.
98. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, F. Eliason to H.E. Nichols, January 20, 1944.
99. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, R.J. Boutillier to F. Eliason, January 10, 1946.
100. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, George Bickerton to R.J. Boutillier, January 17, 1946.
101. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, F. Appleby to R.J. Boutillier, May 11, 1946; B2 VIII 1, G. Bickerton to Sir C. Trebalyon, March 29, 1946; Interview with Elsie Hart, January 18, 1983.
102. Interview with J.L. Phelps, January 16, 1983.
103. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 XII B, F. Appleby to UFC Central Office, January 28, 1942.
104. Interview with Carl Stimpfle, January 8, 1983; Edmonton Bulletin, January 25, 1947.
105. Edmonton Journal, November 27 and 29, 1945; GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 7, file 48, "Minutes of the Third Annual Convention of the AFU, November 27-29, 1945".
106. Interview with Carl Stimpfle, January 8, 1983; Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983; _____, "The AFU Tries a Minority Strike" in Western Business and Industry, Vol. 20 (October, 1946), p. 64.
107. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 8, file 54, H.E. Nichols, "The Farm Strike" (n.d.).
108. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, R.J. Boutillier to F. Eliason, January 10, 1946.
109. GIA, Nichols Papers, Box 1, file 4, H.E. Nichols to G. Hudson, May 31, 1946.

110. Copies of AFU ~~positions~~ ^{positions} may be found in the Uniform collection, dated March 10 and April 14, 1946.
111. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, F. Eliason to G. Hudson, May 31, 1946.
112. Edmonton Bulletin, June 23, 1946.
113. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, F. Appleby to R.J. Boutillier, May 11 and July 4, 1946.
114. UC, Copy of Strike Ballot, August 8, 1946.
115. UC, "Instructions and Guidelines on Organizing Strike Action for Parity Prices" (n.d.).
116. UC, "Results from AFU Balloting" (n.d.).
117. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, F. Eliason to R.J. Boutillier, August 5, 1946.
118. The Albertan, August 30, 1946; Edmonton Journal, September 1, 1946.
119. PAA, O.S. Longman Papers, Box 1, file 7, "In the World of Agriculture: An Address Delivered to the District Agricultural Convention by O.S. Longman; August 29, 1946".
120. UC, "Observations by Louise O'Neill on the proposed Farm Strike" (August 14, 1946).
121. PAA, AFA Papers, Box 3, item 44, L. Hutchison to C. Groff, August 24, 1946.
122. PAA, AFA Papers, Box 3, item 44, Telegram: J.R. McFall to C. Groff, August 22, 1946; C. Groff to J.R. McFall, August 24, 1946.
123. Edmonton Journal, August 23, 1946.
124. UC, "Radio Address by Carl Stimpfle, September 5, 1946".
125. AFU Bulletin, September, 1946.
126. UC, "Reply to a Brief Presented by the Special Cooperative Committee, September 18, 1946".
127. UC, "Official Strike Notice to Directors, Sub-Directors, Presidents and Secretaries and Strike Committees, September 5, 1946".

128. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 IX 42, F. Eliason to UFC Secretaries, September 6, 1946.
129. The Albertan, September 3, 1946.
130. Edmonton Journal and Bulletin, September 4, 1946.
131. The Albertan, September 5, 1946.
132. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 89, F. Eliason to I.C. Nollet, October 2, 1946.
133. Edmonton Journal and Bulletin, September 6, 1946.
134. UC, "Transcript of Radio Address by Premier Manning, September 6, 1946".
135. The Albertan, September 9, 1946.
136. Edmonton Journal and Bulletin, September 9, 1946.
137. Edmonton Journal and Bulletin, September 11 and 13, 1946.
138. Copies of posters may be found in the Uniform Collection.
139. Edmonton Journal and Bulletin, September 12, 1946.
140. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 42, F. Appleby to F. Eliason, September 6, 1946.
141. PAA, AFA Papers, Box 3, item 41, J.R. McFall to L. Hutchison, September 5, 1946.
142. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 42, Frank Eliason to F.S.N. Williams, November 30, 1946.
143. PAA, AFA Papers, Box 3, item 41, J.R. McFall to L. Hutchison, September 5, 1946.
144. UC, "Transcript of CFA Press Release (Charlottetown), September 9, 1946".
145. UC, "Radio Address by Carl Stimpfle, November 18, 1946".
146. The Albertan, September 12, 1946.
147. The Albertan, September 11, 1946.
148. The Albertan, September 17, 1946.

149. Edmonton Bulletin, September 27, 1946.
150. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 X 42, F. Eliason to UFC Secretaries, September 6, 1946.
151. UC, "Strike Bulletin Number 4" (September 18, 1946).
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160. Lipset, Agrarian Socialism, p. 278.
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CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LAST DAYS

The aging agitator, in his wrinkled grey suit and checkered shirt, moved quietly through the darkness towards his desk. The day was just breaking and the city lay cold and dark beneath the sullen sky. He switched on a lamp and blinked fitfully in the pale yellow light. It was quiet, and his knees creaked loudly as he sat down and fumbled through the pile of unanswered letters that lay upon his desk. "Here's another one," he thought, nursing his solitude in the soft glow of the lamp. "Dear Mr. Bickerton," he read, "as far as I am concerned I still think a strike will do best. It will cause quite a bit of hardship to the small farmers, but I think we can take it." He rubbed his eyes. It was already too late; they had tried their best, and they had failed. Now all they could do was accept defeat. The thought struck at him painfully. Thirty years in the farmers' movement and they were still fighting for the right to survive. Resolutely he silenced his doubts and began to write a letter to his old friend, C.G. Smith. He scratched a few words across the paper and then faltered. "Oh Charlie," he sighed, "you and I and others our age are finally passing out of the picture."¹

George Bickerton slumped back in his chair. All in all it had been a grim winter. In December, Frank Appleby had retired from the Presidency of the UFC and had returned to his farm at Pinkham.¹ No one could blame him. He had simply had enough, and now he needed time to rest and put his business back in order. The problem was that his successor, George Wright, was not the sort of man Bickerton liked to see in charge of the Farmers' Union.² A strong cooperator, Wright was the President of the Saskatchewan Federation of Agriculture, and the old guard could not help but regard him with suspicion. Elected back in the early days of the War when the Union was manoeuvring to expropriate control of the SFA from the Wheat Pool, Wright had been a suitably inconsequential Vice-President. As its leader, however, he was a living danger within the UFC's ranks.³ Unquestionably, Bickerton and Eliason would have found it easy to exclude him from the Union's business, but they too were beginning to feel the weight of the years of toil. Eliason's health was failing; in a few months he would be in the hospital again, and by years' end he would be dead. Bickerton himself was reeling under the burden of the years; he might linger on through to the summer of 1948, but then he would also be compelled to retire. The UFC would survive their departure by less than six months.⁴

What had happened to drive the Union so suddenly into desolation and ruin? Bill Berezowski, the inflammatory young

President of the Junior Section had the answer, or at least he thought he did. "The condition of the organization," he would say, "is but the logical sequence [sic] of our lack of militant approach to the problems facing agriculture."⁵ But Bickerton knew that there was more to it; he had been there when the UFC Annual Convention had rejected strike action, not once but twice. The first time was in 1946, just three months after the strike had ended. Everyone had assumed that it had simply been a case of exhaustion; of 'let's wait and see', but then it had happened again at the following years' Convention.⁶ It was not that the Executive was unwilling to fight, the caution came from below. The fact of the matter was that the spirit had gone. There was no militancy left, the enthusiasm had fled, and with it the money. By mid-summer, 1947, Eliason had only \$800 remaining with which to carry on; barely enough to pay for one-half the Union's monthly cost of operations. At years' end the UFC was completely bankrupt.⁷

To an extent the leaders of the UFC could blame the Government and the CFA for their misfortunes. Gardiner had been quick to undermine the success which the Union had achieved by advocating non-delivery and the Federation had worked frantically to strip away "the last shreds of prestige gained by the strike."⁸ Decontrols continued to exert an upward price pressure on the goods which the farmers had to buy and price ceilings maintained strict limits on the

values of agricultural produce. By March, 1948, farm machinery prices had increased by twenty-seven percent above 1945 levels and motor fuels had risen by fifty percent. In addition, there had been sharp rises in the costs of lumber, clothing and freight.⁹ In short, the "lifting of price controls on prices of goods that enter into the cost of farm production as well as consumer goods which the farmer has to buy ... [have] nullified any gains made [in the strike] and have caused a greater disparity" than had previously existed. "In the matter of concessions to agriculture it seems to be invariably a policy of 'too little too late'."¹⁰

"Too little too late." The words gripped George Bickerton's thoughts in a vise. The farmers understood it too; perhaps they saw the truth even better than he did. Without parity they were finished; they had survived for as long as was humanly possible, they had done all that they could. For years they had stoically accepted their declining standard of living, and they hoped for better times. Then in desperation they had fought back; slowly at first, a battle here, a localized confrontation there. And then they had struck en masse, with all the resolve they could muster. But it was all "too little too late." Now it was time to surrender, for they had nothing more to lose.

Sadly, the aging agitator turned towards the window and stared out onto the grey pallor of 29th Street. The shopkeepers were just opening their stores for business,

and a tramcar was rumbling past. The sun was pressing its way out from behind the clouds. It was going to be a fine day.

II

For a time, things went well for the Alberta Farmers' Union. Its Fifth Annual Convention held in Edmonton in January, 1947, was a magnificent affair; seven hundred accredited delegates were present, and a further four hundred attended in a visiting capacity. By a three to one majority the Convention rejected merger with the UFA, attacked the AFA as an organization of "moneyed interests", pledged themselves to a continuance of their direct action policies and voted to form a National Union of Farmers.¹¹ Proudly, R.J. Boutillier announced that membership in the AFU exceeded thirty thousand, but he warned the delegates not to rely too heavily on their past accomplishments. A government promise to investigate agricultural prices was insufficient, he stated. What the farmers needed was parity's actual legislation.¹² "We must continue ... consolidating our efforts," Boutillier urged, "in view of another non-delivery [sic] strike being staged in the not too distant future."¹³ A shrewd observer of social realities, the young Secretary sensed that the Union's leadership could become easily appeased by limited concessions and

he emphasized the superficiality of compromises and promises. Unfortunately, Boutillier understood the needs of the poor farmers better than he understood his colleagues. Ultimately it was to cost him his job.

The Farm Union succumbed to atrophy soon after the Fifth Annual Convention. With the Government overturning the strike's limited accomplishments, and with no movement in the direction of parity pricing, the poor farmers realized that their self-imposed suffering had been in vain and that they were no closer to achieving economic redress than they had been a year earlier. Membership in the Union immediately began to decline; by December, 1947, it was down to only sixteen hundred, a reduction of almost fifty percent.¹⁴ In April, Boutillier, Stimpfle, Henry Young, Bickerton and Wright had travelled to Ottawa in a desperate effort to gain some concessions which could be used to counterbalance the downward drift. The meetings had been a disaster, the Cabinet had refused to even consider the farmers' petitions and Gardiner had salted the wound by stating that no move could be made in the direction of legislating parity without the support of the CFA.¹⁵ Stimpfle then tried to revive the non-delivery idea, but to no avail. The farmers had had enough of striking. Two preliminary ballots were distributed, one in Red Deer, and another in the AFU's old Vegreville-Vermillion stronghold, but both were resoundingly rejected. The small farmers' revolt in Alberta had ended.¹⁶

Carl Stimpfle watched the Union's spiralling decline with a deep sense of trepidation. He had become the organization's alter ego, he portrayed himself as its reflector, its symbol. From the beginning his authority had stemmed not from his own powers, but from outside, from what others had made him, and from the image which they had fashioned. He had always followed the trend, explaining and magnifying the popular sentiment almost without thinking. His philosophy was to work diligently and wait for the answers to come to him; to do nothing exceptional until others had requested it. But now the answers were not coming. The poor farmers were rejecting his policies and were leaving the Union; he could not have known that they were also leaving the land. Gradually, as support for the withholding policy evaporated, a renewal of the pressure for amalgamation with the UFA inexorably arose. Intellectually, many farmers turned to the concept of political lobbying out of the conviction that direct action had proved an ineffective mechanism of protest. Others simply felt that the AFU was a spent force and they recognized the successes which the older agrarian organization had gained at the Union's expense. Furthermore, there was the simple issue of finances; the AFU had expended all of its reserves in popularizing the strike and in providing legal council to its victims, while the UFA was prosperous and growing stronger. Finally, the logic of numbers was operating against the militants. The most desperate farmers,

the men who had been at the heart of the AFU's militancy, were leaving the land and as they did so, the influence of the amalgamationists grew in both magnitude and intensity. Perhaps inevitably, it was Carl Stimpfle who now determined that he must lead them.¹⁷

Discussions between the UFA and the AFU concerning amalgamation resumed in July, 1947, but they soon collapsed. The chief issue of contention was the Union's insistence that the amalgamated organization be national in scope rather than provincial, while the UFA's representatives asserted that they saw no reason why the functions of the CFA should be duplicated.¹⁸ The remaining militants, men like Garneau, Fuhr and Boutillier, vigorously resisted the drive towards amalgamation, but their support was rapidly dwindling. Their basic objection to a union was that "the dirt farmers, who have been the body and soul of the Alberta Farmers' Union" would be submerged by the UFA "which represents the wealthy farmers who own large tracts of land. Conservative and reactionary, they neither fight with nor support the small farmers."¹⁹ Unquestionably, they were correct. However, the world in which they grounded their opinions was rapidly disappearing and their voices were ringing increasingly hollow and unsteady. In February, 1948, a vote on amalgamation was held within the AFU. Less than half the circulated ballots were returned, but of these, three quarters favoured fusion with the UFA.²⁰ Discussions now

began in earnest, with Stimpfle and Henry Young blazing the amalgamationist trail within the Union. In January, 1949, an agreement was reached and a new provincial organization, named the Farmers' Union of Alberta, was created. It was a 'bona fide' agricultural body and, in principle, the UFA agreed to disaffiliate its cooperatives. In recompense, however, the AFU delegates sanctioned membership in the Federation of Agriculture and relinquished their policy favouring an alliance with labour. After a three day debate, delegates to the Joint-Convention rejected a pro-strike resolution proposed by Boutillier and replaced it with a clause favouring "direct action but only as a last resort."²¹ The fate of the militants was thus sealed. Within six months, Bob Boutillier had been fired from his post as Secretary and the radical Directors, Ray Garneau, Art Hadland, 'Red' Fuhr and Arnie Milsap, had been replaced. Stimpfle remained as President of the Farmers' Union of Alberta, George Church was its Vice-President, and Henry Young and Norman Priestly became its chief spokesmen. An era had ended.²²

III

Disheartened by the long years of war and depression and defeated in their struggles against the industrial world, the marginal farmers, early in 1947, were confronted

with a bleak and ominous prospect. All of their devices had failed to ameliorate their increasingly tenuous position and now they were bankrupt, not only of funds, but also of ideas. The farmers had attempted to diversify their production, but had met only with continued hardship. They had achieved unity in an effort to modify the existing agricultural order, but they had received only ridicule. Oppressed by rising costs and impoverished by inadequate prices, the small unit farmer was facing the fact of his own inadequacy. Industrialization had destroyed him. Because of higher labour costs, he could not compete with the mechanized farmer without machinery and he could not utilize technology because his smaller plot still meant a higher production cost per bushel. For many, there was no option left but to leave the land.

During the first half decade of peace, a series of radical changes shook the structure of the agrarian community. The total number of farms in Alberta and Saskatchewan decreased by almost nineteen thousand, falling to an aggregate of 196,333. Both numerically and proportionately the greatest reductions occurred in the marginal farm category of units comprising 160 acres or less. Between 1946 and 1951, the number of small farms in Saskatchewan fell by one third and in Alberta the decline was of twenty-five percent. In the small farm regions of the Park Belt these changes were even more pronounced, for in the area between Edmonton and Saskatchewan's border, there was a twenty-eight percent reduction

in the number of 160 acre farms and in the region between Lloydminster and Prince Albert, the decrease exceeded thirty percent. By 1961, the decline in marginal production units had reached spectacular proportions. In Alberta, the number of quarter section farms had decreased by forty percent since 1946 and in Saskatchewan, the diminution was of over seventy percent. As the number of smaller farms decreased, there was a predictable acceleration in the growth of the remaining farms. In 1946, the average unit size in Saskatchewan was 473 acres, by 1951 it was 550 acres and one decade later it was 686 acres. Accompanying these changes was a steady concentration of farm land into fewer and fewer hands. In 1941, one third of the farms on the Prairies exceeded three quarter sections and they occupied fifty-nine percent of the total agricultural land. Twenty years later, approximately one half of the farms exceeded 480 acres and they comprised seventy-seven percent of the acreage.

In many ways, however, measurements of acreage are not entirely satisfactory indices of agrarian change. In this respect, a consideration of the proportionate value of farm sales is a useful measure of rural wealth. However, since these figures are not available for the period prior to 1951, it is only possible to illustrate the fruition of tendencies in the decade following the scope of this study. In 1951, the upper one third of the farming community, when measured in terms of annual sales, accounted for a sixty-nine percent share of the total production in the Prairie

Provinces; by 1961 that share had increased to over seventy percent. Clearly, in the years immediately following the farm strike there was a precipitous decline in the number of small farms and an equally rapid concentration of rural wealth into the hands of the larger commercial farmers.

Not surprisingly, the keynotes of this transformation were an increase in rural mechanization and capitalization and a decrease in the extent of farm diversification. In Saskatchewan, the number of tractors rose by over half in the five years between 1946 and 1951, and the number of combines more than doubled. To the west, in Alberta, there was a three fold increase in the number of combines and the number of tractors more than doubled. Furthermore, the extent of mechanization was growing, for as the small farmers disappeared, the proportion of industrial farms automatically grew. In 1941, only thirty-eight percent of farmers in the West owned tractors, but within a decade almost eighty percent of them did. Similarly, the dispersion of combines increased from one on every seventeenth farm to one on every third between 1941 and 1951, and one on every second by 1961. Faced with higher machinery costs and larger overheads, farm capitalization, as measured in terms of total operating expenses, rose by sixty percent in the latter half of the 1940s, despite the actual decline in the number of production units. Accompanying this trend towards industrial farming was a decline in the numbers of livestock on farms. Between

1946 and 1951, the number of milch cows in Alberta fell from 51,607 to 38,550 and the number of hogs decreased by ten percent. In Saskatchewan, where there had been a milch cow on every 111 acres in 1946, there was, within five years, only one on every quarter section, and by 1961, there was but one for every two hundred acres.

Within a decade of the delivery strike, the marginal producer was all but gone and the southern wheat magnate and the northern mixed farmer had been unified in commercialism; owning large industrial enterprises and commanding significant blocks of capital. Pockets of rural backwardness, of poverty and self-sufficiency persisted, but the progressive society soon transferred most of its social problems, its culture and its value system to the more expansive urban environment. Unfortunately, in so doing, it destroyed itself as a distinctive social entity.²³

IV

Industrial capitalism had finally triumphed over Western agriculture. But there had been nothing inevitable about its accession. Indeed, the development of successful commercial agriculture did not arise directly out of the experience of pioneer settlement, for just as the yeoman farm clans of the Appalachian uplands attest to the non-competitive potential of frontier agriculture, so too did the

dirt farmers of the Park Belt represent an independent economic reality on the Western plains. Here, among the dense pine forests, the rolling hills, the isolated lakes and surging rivers, a distinct mentalité had been grounded; clannish, conservative, independent, non-competitive and religious. Theirs was not, however, a simple transfiguration of the cultural realities of the Russian serf, French paysan or Irish sharecropper, for the frontier experience shattered the central pillar of European social coordination - the village community. Separated by extensive holdings - at least by Old World standards - the Canadian small farmer had lost the propinquity of village life which had previously engendered his strong community consciousness. In Europe, the small size of most villages had provided the settlement with an automatic familial unity which had only been intensified by inter-marriage and the common utilization of meadows, pastures and wastes. Together the peasants worshipped, worked, rejoiced and struggled, and together they had a common adversary in the person of the seignior and his officials, against whom they as a village presented a united front.

All of this was missing from the North American context. Instead, the small farmer adopted the traditional frontier network of social relationships, the rural neighbourhood, whose parameters extended for a few dozen miles around the homestead. Neighbours joined in those pioneering tasks which required mass labour: log rolling, fence building, harvesting and the informal sharing of teams or equipment. As the

surplus of the region began to increase, labour too acquired a specific value, exchanges might first be made and eventually a money wage paid. However, unlike the large farm areas of the South where workers were in greater demand and were imported from the outside, the small scale of farm businesses in the Park Belt and the proximity of neighbours, served to prevent the development of a complete wage-labour system. In this sense, the small farm region underwent only a partial drift from primitive gift-giving between families, to barter and then to hourly and daily hire. Since the extra-familial demand for labour was at best seasonal, the dirt farmers employed workers for only short periods and more often than not, the local community structure itself was able to satisfy their needs. Many farmers adopted part-time work themselves as a means of augmenting their incomes. In short, the hallmark of marginal production was local self-sufficiency in which the rural community served to counteract the pressure of the surrounding commercial milieu. Reinforcing this economic introspection was a cultural exclusiveness engendered by the group settlement pattern peculiar to Western Canada. Here ethnic pockets were massed together, preserving their autonomy, maintaining their religion and language and reinforcing their economic uniqueness.

In contrast to the non-commercial agrarian society that had developed in the North, the Southern Prairie nurtured its agro-business culture at least from the close of the First

World War. Here land was less productive and farms tended to be larger, thereby restricting the contiguity of the rural community. Rather than group settlement, land on the true prairie was occupied by individuals with few similarities besides the fact that they had generally originated in the liberal democracies: Britain, America and Canada itself. In the South, natural hazards, plagues of grasshoppers, droughts and black swirling clouds of dust, were more common adversaries than they were to the north, and they served to undermine the farmers almost intrinsic sense of occupational permanence. Here the railway first blazed its silver swathe across the landscape, drawing the vision of the pioneer outward, imposing upon them the values and standards of the small town business culture whose existence preceded their settlement of the countryside. Vulnerable, geographically dispersed and socially isolated, the southern prairie settlers had no innate defence against the infiltrations of the cultural standards of the capitalist world. Their lives came eventually to look outwards as if by instinct; the Government for land and local improvements, to the law for the protection of property and the advancement of development schemes, to the speculators, bankers, lawyers and businessmen for the literate élite who could advance their wealth. Ultimately, they turned to science and technology as a means of organizing their production and arranging their integration into the rational patterns of the developing capitalist order. This

culture did not seek protection from industrialization, and it soon came to share that incurable North American optimism that what is new is necessarily better. Long before they embraced industry, long before they purchased their tractors and combines and threshers and binders, long before they expanded their holdings, the farmers of the Southern Prairie had accepted the ethics of the agro-business culture. In effect, their object almost from the start had not been subsistence, it had been progress.

Once started, the drive to industrial agriculture proved inexorable. The small farmers who resisted the press of capitalism were simply forced from the land and the cycles of industry spun ahead. Though perhaps inevitable, the marginal farmers demise nonetheless filled a quarter century of Western history and provided vibrancy and animation to the Prairie farm movement. At times their protest assumed a heroic quality, often it seemed near epic in its scope and intensity. But the men and women who fought to preserve their lifestyles were not driven by any exalted motive. They never could lay claim to a consistent ideology or a distinct goal and none of their leaders possessed the depth or charisma necessary for historical immortality. The basis of their struggle was fear; it was fear which pressed them to resist the banker and the sheriff and it was fear alone which drove them to belated unity in the strike of 1946. Twenty-five years of sacrifice and protest had taught the poor farmers

how to fight, but it also guided them in how to accept defeat. When it was over, they quietly slipped away, forsaking their homes and businesses, submerging their memories and drowning their dreams. For those who remained, there was only reflection and recrimination; painful recognitions of the fact that their expectations had been shattered. Perhaps they would have had too many memories to acquiesce quietly to the progressive culture even if they had had the option. Clearly the vast majority of them did not. Soon no one would remember them; no one except a few old agitators who would emerge periodically from retirement to chastize the progressives on their lack of militancy. "If only we could get the late lamented Emily Pankhurst and Eugene V. Debs back on the job", muttered a grizzled old man named Louis P. McNamee in 1952, "I think we could still win."²⁴

For the dispossessed dirt farmers of Western Canada, as for their historians, there remain only the memories. Their spirit and their energy possess meaning only in and through these remembrances, for collectively they constitute all that remains of a lifestyle that failed to survive. They are grand memories, bold memories: memories of farmers gathering on a cold winter night at a tiny town hall in Ituna; of the great wheat pool campaigns of 1923 and 1924 and of the wizard of cooperation, Aaron Sapiro; of penny auctions with men sporting rings of binder twine like carnations for a Ball; of the Myrnam strike and its successor which paralyzed the north-east; of Lenin's lieutenants speaking quietly

and earnestly at meetings across the piney woods of Saskatchewan; of the sprawling dissonant UFC which somehow gave substance to the strange, inspiring visions of George Bickerton; of the outspoken AFU and its incessant struggles against the Social Crediters, against the Socialists, and ultimately, against itself; and, perhaps most of all, of the thousands of men and women who gathered faithfully on the silent highways of the Mid-West, living out the dying vision of a dim reality for a society which could not tolerate them. It was their spirit - their collective hope - which animated the farmers' revolt, and it was in their vibrant moments that the movement evidenced its vitality, its aspiration, and finally, its irrevocable defeat.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SEVEN

1. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 83, H.J. Froese to G. Bickerton, January 10, 1947; G. Bickerton to C.G. Smith, January 20, 1947.
2. Interview with Elsie Hart, January 18, 1983.
3. Significantly, when Wright was named as the Saskatchewan representative to the Agricultural Prices Support Board, the other UFC executives interpreted it as a victory for the Federation and requested that Appleby be appointed in his stead. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 41, F. Appleby to F. Eliason, April 5, 1947 and F. Eliason to F. Appleby, April 6, 1947.
4. J.N. McCrorie, In Union in Strength, (Saskatoon, 1964), pp. 35-36.
5. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 42, B. Berezowski to F. Eliason, August 12, 1947, B. Berezowski to G. Bickerton, September 13, 1947.
6. Western Producer, December 19, 1966 and November 27, 1947.
7. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 1, G. Lebeau to B. Berezowski, January 23, 1948; B2 VIII 42, F. Eliason to B. Berezowski, August 6, 1947.
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11. Pacific Tribune, January 31, 1947.
12. Edmonton Bulletin, January 29, 1947.
13. SAB, UFC(SS) Papers, B2 VIII 7, R.J. Boutillier to F. Eliason, October 26, 1947.
14. Edmonton Bulletin, December 12, 1947.

15. Edmonton Bulletin, April 18 and March 5, 1947;
Regina Leader-Post, March 10, 1947.
16. Calgary Albertan, July 2, 1947; Edmonton Bulletin,
August 14, 1947.
17. Interview with Carl Stimpfle, January 8, 1983;
Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983.
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21. Edmonton Journal, January 12, 1949; UC, "Resolu-
tions of the Joint Convention" (1949).
22. Interview with R.J. Boutillier, February 8, 1983.
23. Census of Canada, Agriculture, Vol. VIII Part II,
1941; Vol. IV, 1946; Vol. VI Part II, 1951;
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APPENDIX

Membership in Farm Organizations, 1918-1948

<u>Year</u>	<u>SGGA</u>	<u>UFC (SS)</u>	<u>FUC</u>	<u>UFA</u>	<u>UFC (AS)- AFU</u>
1918	-			18,335	
1919	36,000			29,000	
1920	36,000			33,312	
1921	-		-	37,721	
1922	16,110		700	19,918	
1923	15,661		2,000	18,829	
1924	14,000		10,000	14,466	
1925	-		-	15,552	
1926		25,000		14,905	
1927		27,817		11,589	
1928		26,046		12,574	
1929		29,500		13,580	
1930		45,000		18,105	
1931		28,549		14,486	
1932		27,142		-	
1933		27,357		-	
1934		25,529		14,862	
1935		27,001		9,838	
1936		-		5,822	
1937		14,500		-	1,800
1938		-		-	1,800
1939		-		-	1,800
1940		-		-	3,000
1941		-		7,000	8,800
1942		-		-	-
1943		-		-	-
1944		8,620		-	-
1945		25,000		-	20,000

Membership in Farm Organizations, cont.

<u>Year</u>	<u>UFC(SS)</u>	<u>UFA</u>	<u>AFU</u>
1946	30,000	-	31,000
1947	21,000	-	16,000
1948	-	-	-

Sources: On the UFC(SS)-SGGA-UFA, the Canadian Annual Review and Minutes of Annual Conventions; for the UFC(AS)-AFU, information is derived from letters in the Nichols Papers (GIA), and the UFC(SS) Papers (SAB); For the FUG, various issues of The Progressive, 1922-1925, as well as letters and Minutes in the FUC Papers (SAB).

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J.R. McFall Papers

Premiers of Alberta Papers

Social Credit Papers

Public Archives of Canada

Communist Party of Canada Papers

Public Archives of Manitoba

W. Sanford Evans Papers

Public Archives of Ontario

Communist Party of Canada Papers (Attorney Generals Records)

Queens University Archives

Thomas Alexander Crerar Papers

Saskatchewan Archives Board (Saskatoon)

Charles Avery Dunning Papers

George Edwards Papers

Farmers' Educational League Papers

Farmers' Union of Canada Papers

Farmers' Unity League Papers

Louis Philip McNamee Papers

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