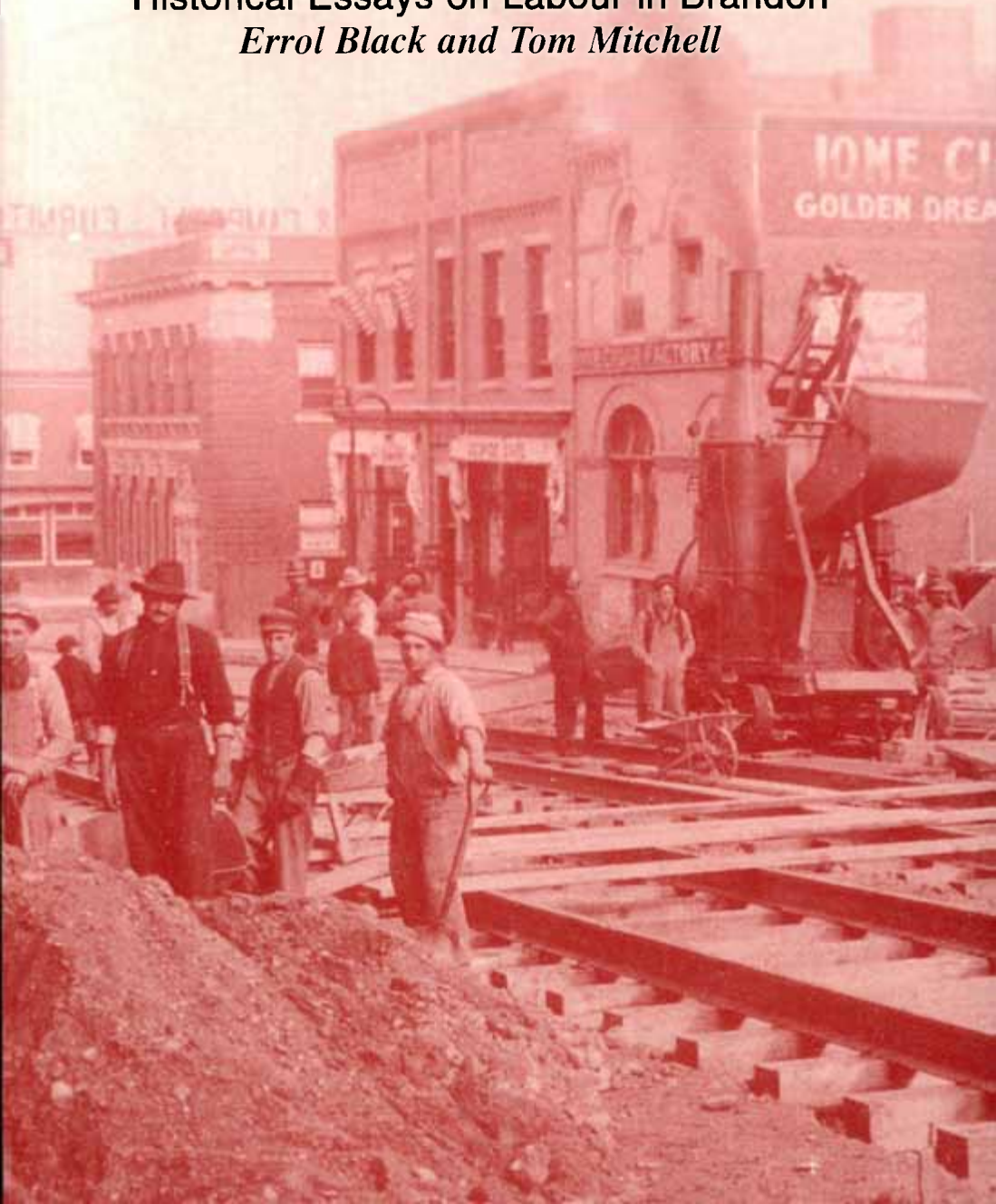


A Square Deal For All And No Railroading

Historical Essays on Labour in Brandon
Errol Black and Tom Mitchell



**A SQUARE DEAL FOR ALL:
HISTORICAL ESSAYS ON
LABOUR IN BRANDON**

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LABOUR IN BRANDON

ERROL BLACK

AND

TOM MITCHELL

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*This book is dedicated to
our parents,
Tom and Roberta Black and
Tom and Ina Mitchell,
and to the working people of Brandon
past, present, and future*

Introduction

Errol Black and Tom Mitchell

"What can an innovatory class oppose to this formidable complex of trenches and fortifications of the dominant class?"¹

Antonio Gramsci

ON A SATURDAY AFTERNOON in late June 1994, a few hundred men and women paraded behind a large labour banner hoisted aloft as the procession traveled from McTavish Avenue and Sixth Street in the center of Brandon along Victoria Avenue to Rideau Park in the city's East end. At the park, speeches given in 1919 — and recorded for posterity by agents of the Northwest Mounted Police — were delivered once again to enthusiastic applause. Hot dogs and coffee followed. The occasion was a celebration of the 75th anniversary of the 1919 labour revolt and the associated sympathetic strike in Brandon. Such celebrations are a rare thing in Brandon. Conflict, social division, struggle, and domination are not conveyed or probed readily in the vocabulary and inflection of the boosterism that dominates much of the public discourse of the city. Not surprisingly, the principal academic history of Brandon portrays the city as a centre of political conservatism and social tranquillity occupied by a largely undifferentiated populace loyal through good times and bad to a benevolent business and professional elite.² This is a history that, perhaps unconsciously, naturalizes Brandon's social order while disclosing little interest in scrutinizing "the particularity and fragility of its seemingly neutral and timeless social forms."³

Brandon was, of course, a product of the historic expansion of Europe's legacy of possessive individualism and market relations across the Canadian

¹ Derek Boothman, ed., *Antonio Gramsci - Further Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (Minneapolis 1995), 157.

² See for example W. Leland Clark, *Brandon Politics and Politician* (Brandon 1982).

³ Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford 1991), 3.

West after 1870.⁴ While this was a place of new opportunity for those with capital, it was no equalitarian frontier. Deference to authority, respect for hierarchy, and acceptance of subordination were fundamental assumptions of the new order. While such relations may have been conveyed originally in a vocabulary of paternalism, obligation, and loyalty, the existence of class and class relations was taken for granted. Class, as E.P. Thompson has argued, is not a structure but a continuing and evolving relationship: in Thompson's words "class happens when some men, as a result of common experiences (inherited or shared), feel and articulate the identity of their interests as between themselves, and as against other men whose interests are different from (and usually opposed to) theirs."⁵ Of course, the experience of class is not confined to the subjectivity of men — class is an experience and event that shapes — albeit variously — the subjectivities of men, women, and children. The papers in this collection are unabashedly about reconstructing and disclosing aspects of the history of class and class relations in Brandon. In particular, they examine the history of working-class labour and political organizations in the city. Brandon's working-class movement was fashioned in response to the boundaries and subjugation of the city's liberal capitalist order; its remarkable diversity is a testament to the rich variety of influences that mediated the experience of Brandon's workers.

* * *

Brandon was founded in 1881, a product of the expansion of industrial capitalism and commercial agriculture into the Canadian West in the wake of the construction of the Canadian Pacific Railway. It was named after Brandon House, a Hudson's Bay Company trading post established in the 1790s at the junction of the Souris and Assiniboine rivers 25 miles southwest of the city's current location. As rail lines advanced across the plains, towns like Brandon emerged as manufacturing, trading, and service centres for an expanding agricultural hinterland. From Winnipeg to the foothills of the Rockies, prairie towns and cities emerged as sites of expanding commercial and industrial capitalism capped by the social and cultural ascendancy of the region's new white, Victorian, middle-class elite.

The city's most dramatic period of economic expansion was a product of the West's unrivaled agricultural prosperity from 1901 to 1914 when surging agricultural settlement and buoyant wheat markets transformed

⁴ The reference to "possessive individualism" is from C. B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism — Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford 1962).

⁵ E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth 1968), 9-10.

the region. While workers in the transportation — in Brandon alone the monthly payroll for the CPR in 1906 was \$200,000 — and building industries dominated the city's working class employed in the city's paid economy, a growing number of workers found jobs in manufacturing. They produced building materials, flour, brewery products, binder twine, seeds, and some machinery. In 1910, 29 manufacturing plants existed in the city; they employed a work force of 830 and paid \$571,971 annually in wages and produced goods valued at \$2,330,430.⁶

The expansion of the city's economy stalled in 1912 only recovering in the last years of World War I. During the 1920s the advent of the automobile and spread of highways brought Brandon into even closer proximity with the agricultural community that surrounded it and strengthened Brandon's economic position as a trading and service center in the region. Across the West, the Great Depression marked a period of tragic crisis; in Brandon workers were denied paid employment and made wholly dependent on the city for their survival. Over 2,000 men, women, and children were relegated to relief for the better part of the decade. Unable to finance its share of relief costs, by 1935 Brandon owed the province over \$100,000 and had reached the limits of its credit with lending institutions.⁷

Brandon's population grew very gradually from 1881 to 1901 when it stood at 5,620. During the Laurier boom, it advanced to 13,893 by 1911 and reached 15,866 in 1915. Most of the new arrivals were men and women and their families driven to Canada from inhospitable homelands or drawn to the city by opportunities for employment in the expanding transportation and building industries. The predominantly British and Protestant character of the city's population was altered in the early 20th century. In 1901, 83 per cent of the population was British; in 1911, that percentage had declined to 74 per cent. Meanwhile, the proportion of the city's populace of central and eastern European origin grew from 2 per cent in 1901 to 9 per cent in 1911.⁸ After the World War I, Brandon grew slowly; its population stood at 14,421 in 1920, increased to 16,536 by 1925, and stabilized at 17,560 in 1930 where it remained throughout the "dirty thirties."

As Brandon grew, it acquired a distinctive residential pattern rooted in wealth and reflecting the existence of social class. The city's most affluent families occupied spacious residences along Princess, Louise, Lorne, and Victoria avenues to the South and West of the central business district. The

⁶ *Census of Canada*, 1911.

⁷ Donald Ian MacDonald, "A Study of the Financial Problems of an Urban Municipality in Manitoba — The City of Brandon," MA thesis, University of Toronto, 1938.

⁸ *Census of Canada*, 1911.

modest homes of workers filled the rest of the city. The expanding working-class neighbourhood to the East of First Street was a long-standing feature of the city. The area south of Victoria Avenue, termed the "English Ward," was a product of the arrival in the city of British working-class immigrants prior to the World War I. North of the Canadian Pacific Railway lines, the "North End" came to life as a distinctive social region occupied by manufacturing plants and the overcrowded homes, tenements, and boarding houses of central and eastern European working-class immigrants transplanted from the small towns and steppes of central Europe at the turn of the century.

The world of "North Enders" out on the "flats" bordering the Assiniboine River was separated from other regions of the city by an almost unbridgeable social and cultural chasm. In 1902 an intrepid *Brandon Sun* reporter investigated life on the *wrong side* of the tracks and produced an article titled "Brandon's Ghetto — Life Among the Lowly." In this feature article on the front page of the paper, readers were told that "It would hardly be imagined that in the clean, little city of Brandon there would be such a class of dwellings, but nevertheless there are many houses on the flats, the interior of which would make an uptown resident wonder for the time being if he lived in Brandon."⁹ In such ways, the North end was defined by its difference — and implicit inadequacy — from the dominant culture of Anglo-Protestant Brandon south of the tracks. Through such processes, Anglo-Canadian bourgeois standards of acceptance, suitability, and desirability were conveyed for all to understand and be measured by and shaped prejudices and stereotypes which deformed the social attitudes of English-speaking residents irrespective of class.

The origins of an industrial working class in Brandon dated from the arrival in the city of railway construction gangs on the Canadian Pacific Railway line as it passed through Brandon in September 1881. Class emerged on the terrain of production. From 1900, and particularly after the creation of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council in 1905, the language of class and class relations shaped relations of production and increasingly forged political relations in the city. Yet gender and ethnicity complicated social divisions in the city — in the early years of the city, Brandon's working-class movement was profoundly gendered. It was a men's movement concerned with advancing the rights and status of working-class men. The existence of women in the paid labour force was hardly acknowledged. Similarly, the movement was also deeply ethnocentric. Until after World War I a social gulf existed between English-speaking skilled workers who viewed themselves as socially superior to the unskilled workers in the North end.

⁹ *Brandon Weekly Sun*, 5 June 1902.

Following World War I understandings of class were broadened and the city's working class acquired an unprecedented unity. And while Brandon's workers — male and female, Anglo-Canadian, and otherwise — came to embrace notions of respectability, morality, and self-reliance, typical of middle-class Brandonites, an implicit critique of the city's liberal capitalist order existed at the heart of the collectivism of Brandon's working-class life. This critique was framed in a variety of working-class discourses from labourism to Marxist socialism, the radical social gospel, and socialist feminism. All disclosed the existence in working-class Brandon of human practice against — to use Raymond Williams' words — the dominant mode.¹⁰

Brandon's "dominant mode," rooted in a rich lineage of liberal individualism, Victorian capitalism, and evangelical Christianity, was a formidable ideological complex designed to subordinate and integrated the city's working class — English-speaking and otherwise — into a range of relations — political, social, economic, and cultural — with the city's business and professional class.¹¹ Taken together, the city's built environment — its ordered streets, Victorian nomenclature, the liminality of private and public space, physical divisions rooted in class, gender, and ethnicity — combined with the ideological power of the printed and spoken word conveyed through the city's schools, churches, and newspapers to forge a sophisticated and complex set of contingencies that contributed to the definition of social reality and the maintenance of social integration, differentiation, and exclusion.¹² Remarkably, the existence of Brandon's diverse working-class movement demonstrated the capacity of the city's working class to imagine and strive collectively for a world constructed on their own terms. Such working-class agency illustrates the perspicacity of Raymond Williams' observation that "no mode of production, and therefore no dominant society or order of society, and therefore no dominant culture, in reality exhausts human practice, human energy, human intention."¹³

¹⁰ Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory," *New Left Review*, 82 (November-December 1973), 12.

¹¹ Gramsci noted that "The printed word is the most dynamic part of this ideological structure, but not the only one. Everything that influences or may influence public opinion directly or indirectly belongs to it: libraries, schools, groups, and clubs of different kinds, right up to architecture, street lay-out and street names." Derek Boothman, ed., *Antonio Gramsci*, 155.

¹² A history disclosed only in the register of sanitized boosterism is a central feature of the continuing construction of hegemony by the town's business class.

¹³ Raymond Williams, "Base and Superstructure in Marxist Critical Theory," 12.

* * *

In recent years some historians have turned away from the use of class and the exploration of the materiality of the past as central interpretive features in their work. Lured by the logic of the “linguistic turn,” some historians have reduced class to simply another product of language.¹⁴ While the critical perspectives brought to bear through the close analysis of language in the construction of class, gender, race, and nation, have disclosed new avenues of analysis for historians, we believe that these approaches — born on the terrain of revolt against the reductionism of a simple minded historical materialism — taken to their logical conclusion conjure a simplistic determinism reducing history to a study of competing discourses.¹⁵ For our part, we have sought to explore and portray the diversity, conflict, fragmentation, individualism, and complexity of working-class life in Brandon.

Readers will find no “retreat from class” here.¹⁶ Nor will they find insensitivity to the role of discourse in shaping experience. In short, we do not embrace a simple minded understanding of the relationship between the material world and the consciousness and actions of workers. We reject reductionist approaches to history in all forms and are committed to the proposition that relations of power, class, and production are structures that shape experience, lives, and destinies just as language and culture mediate our experience. We believe that individuals make sense of, and respond to, the world they inhabit through a process mediated by material circumstances, culture (including competing social, political, and economic discourses), and human agency. This process is broadly political in nature, shaping individual and collective understandings of class and gender relations, relations of wealth and power, culture, and ideology. Marx captured the essence of the contextual and contingent nature of history when he asserted that “men make history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past.”¹⁷

¹⁴ For a thoughtful examination of these trends see Neville Kirk, “History, language, ideas, and postmodernism: a materialist view,” *Social History*, (May 1994), 221-240.

¹⁵ See David Mayfield and Susan Thorne, “Social History and its discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language,” *Social History*, 2 (May 1992), 165-188.

¹⁶ This phrase is taken from Ellen Wood, *The Retreat from Class: A New “True” Socialism* (London 1986).

¹⁷ Karl Marx, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* as quoted in David Mayfield and Susan Thorne, “Social history and its discontents: Gareth Stedman Jones and the politics of language,” 165-188.

While we acknowledge and embrace the pluralistic nature of human identity and experience, we argue that experience of class emerged as the dominant theme over gender, ethnicity, race, or other constructed social identities in the history of Brandon's workers. Class, above all, shaped how other related social identities were experienced. In 1919, the unprecedented character of this "class moment" can be seen in the way class superseded other social identities such as ethnicity and gender.¹⁸ SPC militant Henry Bartholomew's appeals for working-class unity at public rallies and through *Strike Bulletins* helped to forge unity between the workers from Brandon's North end with those in the rest of the city. 1919 also opened a broader public role for working-class women in the life of the city. While working-class women had always played a central role in the private struggle of working-class families in Brandon, in 1919 women telephone operators, civic, and sanatorium workers were on strike throughout the six-week-long Brandon Sympathetic Strike. Other women collaborated in the strike through participation in the parades and rallies of strikers and were active in the People's Church. After 1919, women were increasingly public actors in Brandon's working-class labour, political, and cultural organizations. Two noted members of Manitoba's labour political movement, Beatrice Brigden and Edith Cove, dated their involvement in the province's labour movement to the Brandon labour crisis of 1919.¹⁹

We have sought as well to place human subjectivity and human agency at the centre of our analysis of class and class relations in Brandon. In the papers that follow, readers will not discover a monolithic working class emerging in a mechanistic manner from the capitalist relations of production that shaped the political economy of Brandon. Throughout these papers we have attempted to illuminate the sources and "voluntarist" nature of the political and social practices of Brandon's working-class men and women in a variety of contexts. In doing so, we have written about how working people in Brandon struggled to understand their world and to advance themselves in it individually and collectively.

* * *

Linda Kealey begins her recent book on women, labour, and the left in Canada, with a trenchant critique of the work of historians of the Canadian working class. She asserts that "Until recently, the history of the Canadian labour and socialist movements has been gender-blind and has failed to

¹⁸ On the 1919 revolt see Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada 1917-1925* (Toronto 1998).

¹⁹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 13 August 1969.

acknowledge the roles played by women.”²⁰ While Kealey’s work and the related work of Joan Sangster, Bettina Bradbury, Joy Parr, and others has demonstrated the centrality of women to the struggle of working people, and to central themes in working-class labour and political activities, the papers below only begin to address these fundamental features of Brandon’s working-class history.²¹

It is impossible in a brief introduction to deal adequately with why historians of working people have tended to ignore gender. Still, there are a few reasons that should be noted, as they bear directly on the history of labour and the left in Brandon. From its origin in the 19th century the Canadian labour movement and related labour political bodies were constituted on the basis of a popular discourse that constructed the labour movement as a men’s movement. In addition, the dominant role of men in the paid, industrial workforce, the preoccupation among militants with class revolt, and the influence of stereotyped views of women as inherently conservative diminished the importance of issues affecting working-class women and relegated them to support roles in the movement.²² Historians, preoccupied with investigations of organized labour and labour politics, failed to appreciate the deeply gendered nature of working-class life and constructed historical narratives of labour and working-class history concerned almost exclusively with the exploits of the militant working-class men.

The papers in this collection reflect these tendencies. While women are the central actors in one of the papers in this collection, it is generally the case that the others are devoted to the study of male-dominated labour and labour political organizations replicating the marginalization that working-class women experienced historically. The virtual absence of women in the organized labour and labour political movements is not investigated. Similarly, the lives and struggles of women in the paid labour force outside organized labour are largely ignored. As well, had the struggles of Brandon’s working-class men been contextualized within the lives of the working-class families and neighbourhoods, the centrality of women to the life and struggles — public and private — of Brandon’s working class would have been disclosed.

Though gender was of central importance in the subordination of women in working-class life — a subordination that could include victimi-

²⁰ Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women For The Cause: Women, Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto 1998), 3.

²¹ Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto 1989); Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men, and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (Toronto 1990).

²² Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women For The Cause*, 149-50.

zation²³ — the marginalization of working-class women within Brandon's broader social order was principally a product of their class position not their gender. Indeed, the gender order in Brandon — as elsewhere in North America — was and remains ridden with class distinctions. The centrality of class in shaping the gender order was particularly apparent in the last decades of the 19th century when maternal feminists challenged the traditional boundaries of Canada's Anglo-Protestant gender order and embraced an expanding realm of opportunities for middle-class women to act in society outside the home in an expanded public sphere. In Brandon, the WCTU, the Brandon Council of Women, and the Brandon Red Cross offered opportunities for middle-class women to assume such public roles. The involvement of women in philanthropic organizations gave the role of social reformer and social purifier an association and legitimacy in the life of middle-class women but not those of the lower orders.

While the social terrain of upper-middle-class women in Brandon was broadening, most Brandon women remained socially and economically marginalized. Indeed participation in philanthropic work and the employment of working-class women as domestic labour to liberate middle-class women to engage in community work provided important class markers distinguishing the social preeminence and respectability of those who had the leisure to occupy such roles. While the understandings and meaning associated with gender roles held by working-class families mirrored middle-class notions of respectability and the domestic ideal, the financial realities of working-class families made the lives of working class-women different from and far more burdensome than their middle-class sisters. Working-class women had few opportunities for leisure. Many were required to work outside the home or take work into the home to contribute to the family income. Moreover, the hardships of poverty, illness, or unemployment — all common experiences of working-class families — fell harshly on working-class women.

²³ Wesley Rosebrugh was a CPR machinist prominent in union ranks and had served as the President of the Trades and Labour Council. In September 1916, Rosebrugh shot his wife in the face twice. One bullet entered the back of her head and came out through her cheek. The second struck her, damaged her tongue, and hit her upper jaw dislodging teeth upon impact. Mrs. Roseburgh, who was pregnant at the time of the assault, gave birth to a child in hospital only a day after the near fatal assault by her husband. Charged with attempted murder, Rosebrugh initially claimed that his wife had shot herself. At trial before an all male jury he plead not guilty. At the conclusion of the trial Judge Metcalfe invited the jury to consider finding Rosebrugh guilty of "grievous bodily harm" though he acknowledged that a recommendation that he be found guilty of assault only would be going too far. *Brandon Daily Sun*, 16 November 1916.

Most working-class women employed in the paid labour force — particularly in western Canada — worked as domestic servants. Across the country in 1891, 41 per cent of working women in Canada were domestics. Well into the 20th century domestic service provided the principal form of paid employment for working-class women. Domestic servants were among the most socially and economically dependent members of the community. Most worked alone within a closed and controlled environment, in the landscape of the middle-class home. Domestic servants were improbable rebels against middle-class values or capitalist relations of production. Narratives of solidarity and resistance, typically communal and shaped in response to a common foe, were alien to the solitary pursuits of the domestic servant.²⁴ Moreover, well into the 20th century, working-class activists did not regard the social and economic oppression suffered by such women workers as a matter of grave concern.

While male dominated working-class labour and political organizations tended to dismiss the problems of women workers and allowed little space for the agency of women, by the 1920s working-class women in Brandon had emerged as public actors engaged in defining issues, demanding reform, and initiating community action. In particular, the People's Forum, created at the end of World War I to provide a public forum to debate the post-war order, and the People's Church, an organization that grew out of A.E. Smith's radical social gospel and the 1919 labour revolt, provided a context for working-class women and feminists such as Beatrice Bridgen to assert an agenda rooted in working-class women's interest. They did so within the class politics of the city.

In 1923 Bridgen undertook the task of booking speakers for meetings across the West under the auspices of the "Forum Speakers Bureau." Bridgen also organized the Labour Women's Social and Economic Conference, a two day conference that was held annually for a number of years. As Joan Sangster has noted, these annual conferences provided "a valuable forum in which social democratic, and sometimes Communist, women could share ideas and work together to improve the lot of working-class women."²⁵ During the Women's Social and Economic Conference held in Brandon in March 1924, 40 women from various women's organizations across the prairies including Women's Labor Leagues, educational groups, Labour Churches, the One Big Union (OBU), the Independent Labour Party (ILP), the Workers' Party of Canada, the Socialist Party of Canada, forums, and fraternal societies convened "to discuss their present position in society,

²⁴Still, many sought escape from a life of economic and social oppression. Hilda Blake, a 21 year old Brandon domestic servant was executed for the murder of the wife of her employer in 1899.

²⁵*Worker*, 19 April 1924. Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality*, 84.

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to educate themselves to the point, to take their place in the economic and also the political struggle side by side with the men”²⁶

A central feature of the Brandon Conference was a debate on the resolution “Resolved that the Democratic Labor Government of Great Britain is superior to the proletarian Dictatorship of the Soviet Union” that pitted two members of the Winnipeg Independent Labour Party, taking the affirmative, against two Communist women affiliated with the Women’s Group of the People’s Church, who argued the negative. The Conference considered and approved a number of resolutions. The first affirmed the need for continued educational work. Others protested against military drill in the schools and the Boy Scout movement, the reduction of Mothers’ Allowance, and called for child welfare extension as well as sick and unemployment insurance “for girls.” Similarly a resolution asking the Trades and Labour Congress to allow affiliation of Women’s Labour Leagues was endorsed.²⁷

Working-class women in Brandon also engaged in less formal political struggles associated with neighbourhood life. For example, on a Wednesday afternoon in late August 1924 a reported 200 women physically assaulted city workers on Macdonald Avenue in the city’s North end in an effort to stop the city from its grading operations. City workers were engaged in putting ashes on the avenue. The North End women demanded decent roads for the taxes they paid; the ashes being spread on Macdonald Avenue were simply not good enough. City workmen were held up in their work as sticks and stones rained down upon them. Newspaper reports indicated that “although attacks were made on one member of the police force and one of the city drivers had his left hand injured by a flying rock, no charges are to be made in the police court.”²⁸ As the report explained, “had the authorities been able to single out one of the women who kept crying out during the melee ‘you English swine’ it is more likely that some action would have been taken.”²⁹ Peace was restored only after the mayor arrived and provided an explanation of what the city had planned.

During the 1930s working-class women from across the city took part in the efforts of the Unemployed Workers’ Council to lobby the city of Brandon for adequate welfare rates. Reports published in the Unemployed Council’s newsletter describe their collaboration with men and children in efforts to pressure the municipal authorities to extend humane treatment to Brandon’s dispossessed. On 28 March 1936 the *Brandon Unemployed*

²⁶*Worker*, 19 April 1924.

²⁷Irony was almost certainly at the heart of a “sketch” called “The Mock Union” performed for the conference participants.

²⁸*Brandon Sun*, 20 August 1925.

²⁹*Brandon Sun*, 20 August 1925.

Worker reported that both City Council meetings in March "were packed with men and women who tried desperately to show the Council the starving condition of their families due to the heavy relief cuts" made by the city. During the meeting of 16 March 1936 more than half of the delegation was composed of "mothers who pleaded for food for their children."³⁰

Gender, class, and ethnicity contributed centrally to the life experience of women and their capacity to affect change in their lives and the lives of their families. Class and ethnicity in particular shaped how women in Brandon conceived and expressed notions of gender interest and made plain that differentiated notions of interest based on class were central features of the history of women in Brandon. In the final analysis women did not have common interests; in Brandon, interests based on class precluded solidarity among women just as they did in the lives of men.

* * *

The papers in Part I focus on the general theme of labour and politics. In "Labour in Brandon Civic Politics: A Long View," Errol and Tom Black recall labour's involvement in Brandon politics. The focus of their commentary, which covers the period from 1900 to approximately 1980, concerns the struggle of working-class political organizations to challenge the hegemony of Brandon's business class over political life in the city. From his arrival in Brandon in the 1920s Tom Black was a participant in these struggles of the left. In "A Square Deal for All and No Railroadng': Labour and Politics in Brandon 1900-1920," Tom Mitchell explores the various currents of labour political organization and discourse from the labourism of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council to the Marxism of the Socialist Party of Canada and the reform omnibus of the Dominion Labour Party. He argues that the historic image of Brandon as a centre of political conservatism conveys an inadequate and misleading conception of the city's political life. In the third paper in this section, Mitchell describes the emergence of the principal advocate of the radical social gospel in Canada in the years immediately after World War I. In "From the Social Gospel to the Plain Bread of Leninism': A.E. Smith's Journey to the Left in the Epoch of Reaction After World War I," he explores the dynamics of A.E. Smith's transformation from the leading clerical figure in Brandon's dominant evangelical Protestant community to a self declared revolutionary who in 1925 followed his son Stewart Smith into the Canadian Communist Party. In his analysis, Mitchell rejects the simplistic idealism of the "secularization thesis" as an inadequate accounting of Smith's transformation.

³⁰*Brandon Unemployed Worker*, 28 March 1936.

The Communist movement in Brandon appears to have shared a number of the features alluded to by Raphael Samuel in his description of the British Communist party in the 1940s. As Samuel explained,

To be a communist was to have a complete social identity, one which transcended the limits of class, gender, and nationality. Like practising Catholics or Orthodox Jews, we lived in a private world of our own, or, like some of the large or extended families of the period, "a tight ... self-referential group."³¹

In the 1930s, the leading English-speaking Communist families in Brandon the Smiths, the Broadhurst, and the Mitchells, were joined in the movement by the Forkins. In "Brandon's 'Revolutionary Forkins'," Errol Black explores the careers of six members of this Irish Catholic family who became prominent in the Canadian labour and Communist movement as organizers, journalists, and politicians.

The papers included in Part II are concerned with collective bargaining and industrial relations in Brandon since 1900. In "1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike," Tom Mitchell describes the development of organized labour in Brandon from 1900 and provides a detailed account of the Brandon chapter of the 1919 labour revolt in Canada. The early organization of teachers into unions or professional associations for purposes of collective bargaining has been the focus of numerous graduate theses but few articles or monographs have appeared on the subject. In "'We Must Stand Fast for the Sake of Our Profession': Teachers, Collective Bargaining, and the Brandon Schools Controversy of 1922," Tom Mitchell surveys the origins of the Brandon Teachers Association — an organization composed of both men and women teachers — and follows the course of a crisis in labour relations in the Brandon School district in 1922. He argues that the controversy in Brandon in the spring of 1922 was the culmination of four years of determined effort on the part of the Brandon Teachers' Association to gain professional status and middle-class salaries through collective bargaining. While the city's difficult financial condition ignited the school crisis, the Board's opposition to the demands of its teachers, and its determination to address the city's financial crisis at their expense, fuelled the controversy. Women constituted a significant proportion of the teaching staff of the district. The militancy of women teachers, who did the same work as their male colleagues but were systematically paid less by the school district, was almost certainly galvanized by the school board's threat to reduce them to penury.

³¹Raphael Samuel, "Faith, Hope and Struggle — The Lost World of British Communism," *New Left Review*, 154 (November/December 1985), 11.

Finally in "25 Cents an Hour; 48 Hours a Week; More Toilets; Less Cats: The Labour Struggles of the 'Girls' at the A.E. McKenzie Company in Brandon," Errol Black presents an analysis of a remarkable and revealing series of strikes at the A.E. McKenzie Seed Company in the 1940s. By World War II women had established beach-heads in the traditionally male dominated and exclusive labour movement.³² The struggle of women at McKenzie Seeds in Brandon for union recognition and collective bargaining marked the end of a long period of quiescence on the labour relations front in Brandon and provided an illustration of the capacity of a women in Brandon's paid labour force to assert rights of industrial citizenship. This protracted conflict also illustrated the growing solidarity of men and women in Manitoba's historically male dominated and exclusive organized labour movement.

Part III, Shaping a Working-Class Culture, contains two articles premised on the notion that Brandon's working class evolved cultural and social practices beyond those associated exclusively with labour organization and labour politics. In "To Rouse the Workers from Apathy and Indifference": The Educational Dimension of Unionist and Political Practices in Brandon 1900-1920," Tom Mitchell and Rosa Bruno Jofre attempt to theorize the complex and varied education activities initiated by workers in the city through the Brandon Trades and Labour Council and various organizations including the Socialist Party of Canada, the Dominion Labour Party and the People's Church. In "The East End Community Centre," Errol and Tom Black examine the efforts by workers in Brandon's traditionally working-class "East End" to create a permanent community club during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, which would afford their children opportunities for safe and wholesome recreation. A.E. Smith had been a vigorous advocate of community clubs during his time in Brandon as minister of First Methodist Church prior to his departure from the Methodist Church in 1919.

³²Raelene Francis, Linda Kealey, and Joan Sangster, "Women and Wage Labour in Australia and Canada, 1880-1980," *Labour/Le Travail*, 38 (Fall 1996), 54-90.

Part I

Labour and Politics

1 Labour in Brandon Civic Politics: A Long View

Errol Black and Tom Black

FROM THEIR BEGINNINGS in the 1870s, the politics and institutions of prairie cities were dominated by commercial, business, and professional interests.¹ This dominance did not go uncontested, however; on the contrary, trade union organizations and political parties rooted in the working class challenged the hegemony of the ruling elites. Such challenges were episodic rather than sustained, arising usually in situations which seemed especially propitious for an assault on the power of entrenched interests. Invariably the challenges failed, leaving city elites firmly in control and with their agendas essentially intact.

There is a rich literature on the history of labour involvement in the politics of prairie cities. There are, however, some lacunae in the work done to date. Most studies have focussed on large cities — Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton. The experience of small cities has been neglected. As well, the bulk of this work deals with particular eras in civic politics, most notably, the rise — and fall — of labourism in the first two decades of the 20th century. Much less work has been done on other eras. Moreover, there are few studies which have analyzed the participation of labour over a long period of time.²

¹The main elements of these groups are the owners and/or managers of businesses; self-employed professionals; and real estate and insurance agents. In what follows, we shall refer to these groups as the ruling elites of Brandon.

²There is a substantial body of literature on labour's involvement in civic politics in the first two decades of this century. For a useful summary of this work, see Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), in particular, 157-166. See also Craig Heron's fine paper on the political culture of Canada's working class in this era: "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984). In contrast, much less work has been done on this issue for subsequent decades. This is part of a more general neglect of urban history noted by Alan Artibise in "City-Building in the Canadian West: From Boosterism to Corporatism," *Journal of Canadian Studies*,

28 A Square Deal For All



Dr. Dwight L. Johnson, CCF MLA Brandon 1943.
Photo courtesy *Brandon Sun*.

The present paper reviews the history of labour's involvement in Brandon civic politics over the long term. Its aims are modest. They are to clarify the reasons for, the form, the content, and the results of labour's involvement in civic politics. The analysis confirms that events in Brandon paralleled developments in Winnipeg and across the prairies. The similarities between developments in Brandon and in Winnipeg are especially apparent in the period before World War II. But the analysis also reveals that there are unique aspects in the Brandon experience (as there are in every city's experience) which originated in the peculiarities of local class relations and local politics.

Brandon was incorporated as a city in 1882. The city's early development was driven by business, commercial, and professional interests. These interests acquired the land, made the investments, and opened up the places of business. As well, they took control of the city's political institutions. Of the 48 individuals elected to city council from 1901 to 1913, 25 were businessmen (i.e., owners of dry goods stores, grocery stores, breweries, livery stables, hardware stores, construction firms, fuel dealerships, etc.), 6 were managers of businesses, 7 were in professional occupations (lawyers, doctors, engineers, etc.), 4 were insurance and/or real estate agents, and 1 was clerk of the land titles office.³

Both the size and the composition of the local working class were reflections of the volume and content of investment spending. Growth was relatively slow before 1900. Nevertheless, as revealed in Table 1, the character of the class was already evident by 1891. In that year, 70 per cent of the gainfully occupied were classified as wage earners, mostly in general labour, construction, and railways, though important and often forgotten fractions were engaged in local transportation (teamsters), and in hotels, restaurants, offices, and hospitals. In the boom years between 1900 and 1912, there was a significant expansion in most working-class occupations.

3 (Fall 1982). For material on cities in Manitoba, see J.E. Rea's "Political Parties in Civic Power, Winnipeg, 1919-1975," in Gilbert A. Stelter and Alan F.J. Artibise, eds., *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto 1979); and Tom Mitchell, "'A Square Deal for All and No Railroadng': Labour and Politics in Brandon, 1900-1920," *Prairie Forum*, 1 (Spring 1990).

³These data were compiled from information provided by Ian Ford, City Clerk and the staff of his office, and the occupations cited for individuals in the Henderson's Directory. We could not identify occupations for 5 of the 48 members of the council.

TABLE 1
Main Occupations of Wage Earners
in Brandon, 1891 and 1911

Occupation	1891	1911
Labourers	209	215
Carpenters	86	185
Other Skilled tradesmen	121	173
Railwayworkers	80	690
Clothing trade workers*	77	125
Store clerks	45	244

*Including women who worked as dressmakers, milliners, and tailoresses.

Sources: The data for 1891 were compiled from the raw census data from the 1891 *Census of Canada*⁴; the data for 1911, from information in the 1911 *Brandon Henderson's Directory*.⁵

Trade unions were formed initially on the railways and subsequently in the crafts. In 1902 there were but two entrenched union locals — locals of trainmen and locomotive firemen on the CPR. By 1906 a Brandon Trades and Labour Council had been formed. At that time there were 12 locals; by 1913, there were 26.⁶ While the growth of the labour movement was rapid, its base within the working class was extremely narrow. It was confined, for the most part, to workers of British origin, and concentrated amongst workers in the running and skilled trades on the railways, craft workers in the construction industry, and a few skilled tradesmen — musicians, cigar-makers, typographical workers, and barbers. All locals were aligned, both organizationally and philosophically, with international unions based in the United States.⁷

As was the case elsewhere in Canada, the creation of a Trades and Labour Council provided an impetus for labour involvement in civic politics.⁸ In Brandon this occurred in July 1906. The dominant political current in the Trades and Labour Council was what has been called "labourism," which

⁴The raw data for the 1891 *Census of Canada* are available in the Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

⁵It should be noted that the *Henderson's Directory* for 1911 reports that there were 167 civic workers, 136 metal trades workers, 130 teamsters, 199 workers in hotels and restaurants, and 167 hospital workers.

⁶These observations are based on information in Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All," and Canada, *The Labour Gazette*, various issues.

⁷*The Labour Gazette*, various issues.

⁸Heron, "Labourism." *The Labour Gazette*, various issues.

had at its core a belief that labour could advance the interests of working people through reforms to existing political and economic institutions. A minority of delegates, mainly from the carpenters' union, believed in revolutionary socialism. They made little headway against the reformist tendency of the Council, however, and in 1909 established a Brandon Chapter of the Socialist Party of Canada as a vehicle for promoting revolutionary ideas.⁹

In 1906, the Trades and Labour Council debated the possibility of forming a labour party. The idea was rejected. Then in 1911 and 1913 proposals to nominate candidates for civic elections were considered. These proposals were also defeated.¹⁰ As a consequence, the politics of labour before World War I represented essentially a politics of accommodation, which found its practical expression in petitions to civic authorities for action on projects aimed at improving the conditions of the working class — projects to improve the city's infrastructure, to improve the material conditions of working people, and to stabilize employment and wages in the local labour market:

[The Trades and Labour Council] lobbied the city's politicians in support of municipal ownership of public utilities including the city's street railway, a hospital, a public library, public baths and a municipal employment bureau. The city's skilled workers also lobbied assiduously for a fair wage clause in all municipal contracts, home postal delivery, compulsory education, Sunday street car service, paid Saturday half holidays, garden allotments and public works for the unemployed.¹¹

Apparently this form of politics was compatible with the expectations and aspirations of the unionized segment of the working class. In the context of the boom conditions prior to 1913, of what Edmund Fulcher of the Brandon Socialist Party termed "an acute attack of prosperity,"¹² bread and butter unionism along with the politics of accommodation were delivering the goods.

Conditions changed abruptly and dramatically with the onset of depression in 1913 and the advent of World War I in August 1914. The construction industry collapsed, dragging down the entire economy and driving up unemployment.¹³ Mobilization for the war eventually depleted the pool of

⁹Mitchell, "'A Square Deal for All'," 47.

¹⁰Mitchell, "'A Square Deal for All'," 47.

¹¹Mitchell, "'A Square Deal for All'," 47.

¹²Mitchell, "'A Square Deal for All'," 47.

¹³*The Labour Gazette* July 1913 (32) reported that in June conditions in Brandon were such that: "The prevailing note in ... all lines of industry was one of quietness The supply of labour in almost all branches of the building trades exceeded

surplus labour but the diversion of resources to war production also generated inflation in the prices of food, fuel, and shelter. Moreover, the War, and the conditions created by the War, exacerbated tensions and divisions within the trade union movement — especially in western Canada where there was widespread opposition to Canada's participation in an imperialist war and growing opposition to international craft unions.¹⁴

The combination of inflation and the passionate rhetoric of opposition which developed out of the antagonisms to governments, to business, and to business unionism transformed the character and the politics of the Brandon labour movement.¹⁵ By 1915, eight local unions which had been formed in 1913 or earlier had either dissolved or were dormant. Six of these locals were formed by workers in construction trades. The seventh was formed by cigarmakers and the eighth by street railway employees.¹⁶ The Trades and Labour Council and the Brandon Socialist Party also ceased to function by 1915. However, new labour institutions were created to replace them, notably, a local of the Social Democratic Party in October 1915. In March 1917, a resurgence of union activities resulted in the revival of the Trades and Labour Council.¹⁷

Inflation was the central issue for workers. The Labour Council demanded action from city council to deal with rising fuel (coal and wood) prices and short-weighting by coal dealers, as well as action to end local speculation in food stuffs. City council rejected these demands.¹⁸

The failure of civic authorities to address issues of concern to labour, combined with labour's inability to defend worker interests through traditional trade union activities, convinced members of the Trades and Labour Council that defence of working-class interests required intervention in electoral politics. Labour people should be elected on labour slates. On 1

demand; the situation is even more acute than last month's, and a great difference from last year's conditions are noted."

¹⁴For a discussion of the impact of World War I on material conditions and real wages of workers in Canada and Manitoba, see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, in particular chapter 4.

¹⁵Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, chapter 4.

¹⁶*The Labour Gazette*, various issues.

¹⁷Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All."

¹⁸The "cost of living" protests were the main manifestation of working-class discontent, but there were other manifestations as well, including a brief three-hour strike over wages of twenty outdoor employees of the Manitoba Telephone System (*Brandon Daily Sun*, May 1917); agitation from a number of employee groups for a weekly half-holiday to be moved ahead to May from July (*Brandon Daily Sun*, hereafter *Sun*, 4 May 1917); and a threatened strike of police officers in opposition to a proposed amalgamation of the police and fire departments (*Brandon Daily Sun*, 1 June 1917).



Ross Martin at public meeting on Free Trade 1988. Photo courtesy of *Brandon Sun*.

July 1917 the Trades and Labour Council convened a special meeting to define a political role for labour; the outcome was the creation of a Labour Representation League. The League subsequently intervened in both the federal and municipal elections of 1917. Both campaigns were ultimately bungled. At the local level, the League issued a reform agenda which addressed the needs of Brandon's working people. In part, the agenda called for

[a] municipal fuel depot, municipal fire insurance, a progressive system of education, an advanced policy in regard to outdoor amusement and physical development, the establishment of a ... public library, an eight hour day, a fair wage for all civic employees, a non-exemption property tax, abolition of plural voting in favor of one man one vote, and abolition of property qualifications for municipal elections.¹⁹

As well, the League nominated candidates to contest aldermanic elections in three wards. The League's election campaign fell apart before the 30 November election, however, when two of its candidates, who were in favour of conscription, bolted the slate to run as independents after an anti-conscription candidate was nominated at a 18 November meeting convened by the Trades and Labour Council. The Council subsequently pulled its candidate, but the damage had already been done. All three "labour" candidates were defeated.²⁰

In 1918, a Brandon branch of the Dominion Labour Party (DLP) was formed to pick up and extend the political work begun by the Labour Representation League. The new organization was broadly-based, involving not only union activists but also workers from non-unionized workplaces. Members of the clergy, academics, and a few professionals were also instrumental in forming the party.²¹ The DLP's platform called for a society based on "production for use instead of profit."²² This objective was to be promoted through the public ownership of railways and utilities, democratic reforms, and major changes in the regulation of labour markets, including the abolition of child labour and the establishment of equal pay for men and women.²³ In the civic elections of 1918, the "Reconstruction Election,"²⁴ the Party nominated aldermanic candidates in Wards One,

¹⁹Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All," 53-54.

²⁰*Sun*, 23 March 1917, 19 November 1917, and 1 December 1917.

²¹Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All," provides list of the individuals on the original executive of the DLP in Brandon in n.56.

²²Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All," 55.

²³Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All," 55.

²⁴This term was coined by the *Sun*.

Two, and Four, to go up against a Board of Trade Slate committed to entrenching "Boosterism" in city hall.²⁵ The DLP was severely handicapped in its campaign, partly by the restrictions on public meetings and other activities imposed in response to the influenza epidemic of 1918-19, and partly by an extremely hostile press personified by the *Brandon Sun* and its vehement propaganda against labour and its candidates.²⁶ J.A.G. Grantham, who had been elected first in 1916, retained his seat in ward one, but the other labour candidates were defeated by substantial margins.²⁷

Labour's intervention in the municipal elections of 1917 and 1918 was a manifestation of intensified class antagonisms. Prior to World War I, labour had rejected the idea of direct participation, opting instead to concentrate on extracting concessions from a city council dominated by representatives of Brandon's ruling elites. This strategy worked while the labour movement was advancing. It ceased to work, however, when the economic boom collapsed and labour was forced on the defensive during the War. In these circumstances, labour opted for direct intervention in civic politics. Labour's intervention was met with extreme hostility and a coalition of ruling class opposition. This response exacerbated local class antagonisms and increased labour's animosity toward civic authorities.

With the end of the War in 1918, labour across Canada went on the offensive in an effort both to expand the trade union movement and to recoup losses in real income. This offensive escalated in 1919, culminating in what Gregory S. Kealey has called the "Canadian Labour Revolt."²⁸ In Brandon the revolt of labour began with a strike of civic workers and teamsters which lasted from 23 April to 26 April and ended with a victory for the civic workers. Then, on 20 May, workers in Brandon called a general sympathetic strike in support of strikers in Winnipeg. This strike lasted until 25 June. There was a further call for general strike action on 26 June in response to reprisals taken against striking civic workers, but the call went

²⁵For a discussion of the phenomenon of "Boosterism," see John C. Weaver, "Elitism and the Corporate Ideal," in Michael S. Cross and Gregory S. Kealey, eds., *The Consolidation of Capitalism, 1896-1929* (Toronto 1983), 141-166.

²⁶The *Sun* editorial of 23 November 1918 is typical of its coverage of this election. The *Sun* asserted that "It is inconceivable that the electors of Wards One and Four should choose as their representatives such men as Grantham and Morris who continued to splutter about their pet socialistic theories when the nation was struggling for its very life. Their very presence in the Council Chamber would disgrace the electors of their respective wards when the boys come home."

²⁷*Sun*, 30 November 1918. Crawford and Morris were defeated by margins of 322 to 168 and 233 to 66, respectively.

²⁸Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984).

largely unheeded.²⁹ In response to the sympathetic strike, Brandon's elites organized a Citizen's Committee of 100 to coordinate efforts to smash the strike and put labour in its place. Labour had neither the resources nor the organizational capacity to sustain the strike in the face of the combined power of employers and civic authorities. In the end, labour was routed. The implications were far-reaching. Radical labour organizations, including the One Big Union, were discredited. So was the tactic of the general strike. Labour in Brandon was utterly demoralized.

In his assessment of the significance of the general strike in Winnipeg, J.E. Rea has argued that it marked a sea-change in the municipal politics of Winnipeg in that the general strike in that city led to a class polarization³⁰ which suggests, moreover, that, while the overt participation of labour parties in municipal politics was a thing of the past, the "basic cleavage in Winnipeg politics" was still class orientation.³¹ Tom Mitchell, whose research has demonstrated that developments in Brandon were strongly influenced by events in Winnipeg, has indicated that he believes Rea's "general thesis regarding Winnipeg civic politics may be applied to Brandon post-1919 as well."³² There is a problem with this argument. It does not recognize that class was already an important factor in civic politics in both Brandon and Winnipeg before the War and before the confrontations of 1919. It was the intensification of class antagonisms that produced the events of 1919, not the events of 1919 that produced the intensification of class antagonisms. The significance of 1919 was that in the aftermath of the strike, politics was the sole option open to labour.³³

The hostilities engendered in the strikes of 1919 were carried over into the 1919 civic elections. However, labour's weakness following its defeat in

²⁹See Tom Mitchell, "Brandon 1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike," *Manitoba History*, (Spring 1989).

³⁰J.E. Rea, "The Politics of Class: Winnipeg City Council, 1919-1945," in Carl Berger and Ramsey Cook, eds., *The West and The Nation* (Toronto 1976), 232-33.

³¹J.E. Rea, "The Politics of Conscience: Winnipeg After the Strike," *Canadian Historical Association, Historical Papers*, 1971, 276.

³²Personal correspondence from Tom Mitchell, December 1989.

³³This is an issue that merits much fuller discussion than we are able to give it here. We would point out, however, that labour in Winnipeg established Canada's first Independent Labour Party in 1895. See Nelson Wiseman, *Social Democracy in Manitoba* (Winnipeg 1983), 5. The process was slower in Brandon because the working class did not have the organizational capacity to establish a Trades and Labour Council until 1906. Quite apart from these considerations, we would argue that the very nature of civic government and, in particular, the fact that local resources could be used either for projects that would enhance accumulation or for projects that would improve the material conditions of the working class, gave local politics a class orientation.

the general strike was reflected in its inability to organize an effective campaign in these elections. All labour could manage were endorsements through the Trades and Labour Council of aldermanic candidates in Wards One and Five and mayoralty candidate Henry Cater. F.E. Carey, a dispatcher on the CNR, ran as an "independent" labour candidate in ward three. Carey won, but the "official" candidates were defeated.³⁴

Labour suffered the same fate in the civic elections of 1920. Labour had not recovered from the defeats it suffered in 1919 and workplace action was at a standstill. Indeed, it would take until World War II before labour organizations would again challenge employers at the point of production.³⁵ Therefore, politics was the main sphere left for labour leaders to seek to advance the interests of working people. Labour achieved a breakthrough in the provincial election of 29 June 1920, when Reverend A.E. Smith, candidate of the Brandon Labour Party, won the Brandon seat in a campaign planned and organized under the leadership of local unions.³⁶ This victory provided a boost in confidence but labour was still unable to mount an effective campaign in the fall civic elections. The Dominion Labour Party nominated three aldermanic candidates (J.A.G. Grantham, incumbent in ward one; Jas. Skene, long-time labour activist, in Ward Two, and A. Zlicz, "a storekeeper on the Flats" in Ward Three) and endorsed incumbent H.L. Patmore, a businessman, in Ward Five.³⁷ As well, the party approved a platform which included demands for municipal ownership of light and power, an eight-hour day, supervised playgrounds, a free public library, and support for reform of the civic election system. The inclusion of this latter item in labour's platform was significant as Brandon voters were being asked to vote on a bylaw instigated by labour aldermen Grantham and Carey which called for the replacement of the city's ward system with elections at large.³⁸

Abolition of the ward system was part of a coherent electoral reform initiative advanced by labour since its first entry into civic politics in 1917, an initiative which called for the abolition of plural voting, the abolition of property qualifications and election deposits for candidates, universal suffrage for individuals (both men and women) over 21 years of age, and

³⁴For a fuller discussion of these elections see Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All."

³⁵This is an era for which we need much more research to clarify what was happening in relations between workers and employers at the point of production both in Brandon and elsewhere in Canada.

³⁶This election is discussed in detail in W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians* (Brandon 1981), and in Tom Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All."

³⁷*Sun*, 12 November 1920. "Flats" was the name given to the city's North End, i.e., that part of the city bounded by the CPR tracks on the South and the Assiniboine River on the North.

³⁸*Sun*, 24 November 1920.

proportional representation. This platform was inspired, in part, by a belief that such reforms would pave the way for labour success at the polls. As an isolated reform, however, abolition of the ward system was a threat to labour's political aspirations, because labour's electoral support was concentrated in working-class neighbourhoods in the East and North ends of the city. Elections at large would dilute this working-class support.

In the 1920 elections, Grantham and Patmore were acclaimed while Skene and Zylicz lost by margins of 219 and 262 votes respectively. Abolition of the ward system was approved by "an overwhelming majority."³⁹

Labour had not done well in the four civic elections it had contested under the ward system. Labour had never been able to mount a concerted challenge for power at city hall by fielding candidates for all positions. Moreover apart from ward one where J.A.G. Grantham won as a labour candidate, and ward three where F.E. Carey won as an "independent" labour candidate in 1919, official labour candidates had never received the electoral support needed for victory. The deficiencies in the electoral system were a factor in labour's failure, but the main problem was that labour's platform failed to generate the mass support needed to succeed in wards where worker identification with the labour movement was tenuous.

Tom Mitchell ends his study of this era with the conclusion that "by 1920 the institutional power of Brandon labour was everywhere evident. The election of a labourite to the provincial legislature that year was the product of the growing sophistication and popularity of the labourite messages."⁴⁰ By the end of 1920, however, the labour solidarity Mitchell detects in the events of 1917-1920 was already beginning to unravel. The Dominion Labour Party fielded three candidates in civic elections in 1921, the Workers' Campaign Committee five — the most ever by labour — in 1922. All were defeated. Moreover, in the provincial elections of 1922, A.E. Smith was defeated easily by a Conservative-Liberal coalition candidate (a "fusion" candidate), 3,249 to 2,026.⁴¹ Following these defeats, labour abandoned direct participation in civic elections. The hiatus lasted until 1927 when the Independent Labour Party (ILP) fielded three candidates in the civic elections.

Labour's weakness after 1919 was exacerbated by the post-war economic stagnation which took hold in western Canada in 1920 and persisted through to World War II.⁴² The loss of economic vitality in the region and in the city eroded the strength of the labour movement. In Brandon, the

³⁹*Sun*, 27 November 1920.

⁴⁰Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All," 61.

⁴¹G.F. Barker, *Brandon: A City—1881-1961* (Brandon 1977), 224.

⁴²This point is made by Paul Phillips in "Spinning A Web of Rules: Labour Legislation in Manitoba," mimeo, 1989.

number of locals declined from a peak of 27 in 1918 to 24 by 1924. The number of locals stabilized at about 25 for the rest of the 1920s but declined again during the Depression, reaching a low of 21 in 1936.⁴³

The reasons for the 1927 re-entry of labour into Civic politics in the form of the Brandon branch of the ILP are obscure. Lee Clark suggests that it was a result both of an improvement in economic conditions in the mid-1920s, and an amendment to the electoral rules in 1926 which allowed labour supporters to engage in strategic voting.⁴⁴ Another reason was that the ILP defined the class struggle as a struggle for control of government including, presumably, civic government. Since the ILP was not a revolutionary party, the objective of gaining control of government could only be achieved through elections.⁴⁵

The ILP achieved some success in 1927, electing two candidates in the regular elections, and a third candidate in a subsequent by-election. In 1928, the ILP won another by-election, bringing its representation on city council to four. This was the party's high-point. After 1928 the party was marginalized and it was never able to mount a full-blown challenge for control of council.

Table 2 summarizes the main features of labour's participation in civic politics for the period 1921-1942. Three main points can be noted. First, the only time labour came close to fielding a full slate of candidates was in 1922 when the Workers' Campaign Committee nominated candidates for all five aldermanic positions. Second, after 1928 the ILP could not increase its representation beyond two seats, even during the depression years of the 1930s. And third, in those years when it seemed that conditions were favourable for gains by labour candidates, labour was countered by elite organizations running under the guise of citizens' committees (although in some cases, notably 1926 and 1931-33, the formation of these committees was a manifestation of divisions within the city's business class on the policies and role of city council).⁴⁶

⁴³These data are from: Canada, *Labour Gazette*; and *Labour Organizations in Canada*, various issues.

⁴⁴Clark, *Brandon Politics*, 111. Prior to 1926 voters were required to cast votes for five candidates in aldermanic elections. Ballots that did not designate five candidates were declared spoiled. In 1926, the rule was changed to allow voters to vote for up to five aldermanic candidates.

⁴⁵See Wiseman, *Social Democracy in Manitoba*, 12.

⁴⁶For additional detail on this era, see Clark, *Brandon Politics*, 111-120. In both 1926 and 1931 the objective of the Citizens' Committees (fronts for the Board of Trade) were to displace incumbent mayor Harry Cater, owner of the Brandon Pump and Windmill Works. Their platforms were similar. Thus, in 1926, the Citizens' Campaign Committee called for "co-operative effort, business-like government, and progressive policies" (*Sun*, 19 November 1926). In 1931, at the bottom of the

TABLE 2
Participation of Labour Parties in Brandon
Civic Elections, 1921-1942

Year	Number of Vacancies		Labour Organizations	Number of Labour Candidates		Labour Candidates Elected		Opposing Organizations*
	Aldermen	Mayor	Contesting Elections	Aldermen	Mayor	Aldermen	Mayor	
1921	5	1	Dominion Labour Party	3	0	0	0	—
1922	5	1	Workers' Campaign Cmte.	5	0	0	0	CC
1923	5 ¹	1	(All vacancies filled by acclamation/no labour candidates.					
1924	6 ²	1 ¹	—	0	0	0	0	—
1925	5	1 ¹	—	0	0	0	0	—
1926	5	1	—	0	0	0	0	CCCOH
1927 ³	1	0	Independent Labour Party	1	0	1	0	—
1927	5	1	Independent Labour Party	2	0	2	0	—
1928 ³	1	0	Independent Labour Party	1	0	1	0	YCL.
1928	6 ²	1	Independent Labour Party	3	0	1	0	YCL.
1929	5	1 ¹	Independent Labour Party	3	0	2	0	YCL.
1930	5	1 ¹	Independent Labour Party	1	0	1	0	—
1931	5	1	Independent Labour Party	4	0	1	0	BPA
1932 ⁴	5 ¹	1 ¹	Independent Labour Party	1	—	1	0	BPA.
1933	6 ²	1	Independent Labour Party	3	0	1	0	BPA
1934	5	1 ¹	Independent Labour Party	2	0	1	0	—
1935	5	1	Independent Labour Party	2	0	1	0	—
1936	5	—	Independent Labour Party	1	0	1	0	—
1937 ⁵	6	1	Independent Labour Party	2	0	1	0	—
1938	5	—	Independent Labour Party	2	0	1	0	CEC
1939	5	1	Independent Labour Party	3	0	1	—	—
1940	5	—	(Acclamation for all candidates including W.R. Webb of the ILP)	W.R. Webb of the ILP				
1941	5	1 ¹	Independent Labour Party	1	0	1	0	—
1942	6 ²	—	(Acclamation for all candidates including W.R. Webb of the ILP)					

¹Office filled by Acclamation.

²One of the aldermanic seats for one-year term.

³By-election.

⁴In 1932 nine candidates for aldermanic positions and two for the office of mayor filed to seek office. Subsequently, however, the new candidates withdrew and allowed the incumbents to return by acclamation. This was done to save the costs of an election.

⁵Local elections were complicated in 1937 and 1938 by the participation of the Civic Unity Committee (a front for the Communist Party in Civic (and school board elections). The Committee endorsed a number of candidates, some of who were bona fide Communist Party members, others who were candidates running under the auspices of either the Independent Labour Party or, as in 1938, the Citizens' Election Committee.

*The full-titles of the organizations for which abbreviations are used in the Table are as follows:

Opposing Organizations

CC	Citizens' Committee
CCCOH.	Citizens' Campaign Committee of One Hundred
YCL	Young Citizens' League
BPA	Brandon Progress Association
CEC	Citizens' Election Committee

Sources: *Brandon Daily Sun*, various issues; Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians (Brandon 1981)*; and G.F. Barker, *Brandon: A City — 1881-1961*, (Altona 1977).

Why did labour parties fare so poorly in civic elections after 1920? The simple answer is that Brandon's working people were not sufficiently politicized to concentrate their vote behind labour candidates. Indeed, the evidence suggests that, apart from the East and North ends of the city where the city's manual workers were concentrated and labour candidates did consistently well, workers in service and white-collar occupations believed candidates from the business and professional elites were better able to provide the leadership and good government necessary for growth and prosperity than candidates from the working class. Moreover, after the successes of the ILP in 1927 and 1928 — successes which gave the party four of the ten seats on council — the Young Citizens' League, a body formed by prominent Conservatives in 1927, fragmented the working-class vote by running its own "working-class" candidates to oppose ILP candidates. The League was successful in getting two "philosophically conservative railway-men" from the CPR elected to council in 1928 and 1929.⁴⁷

In the 1930s, other factors became important. The collapse of local revenues — the result of both the rise in unemployment and the desperate state of the farm economy — ushered in an era of retrenchment and consolidation.⁴⁸ The ILP could offer no alternative to this agenda except to argue for more humane relief programs. The formation of the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in Manitoba and in Brandon through an affiliation with the ILP in 1933 also undermined the ILP's role in civic politics. The CCF was preoccupied with building support in provincial and federal elections and, as a party, was not much interested in local politics. Nor did the CCF have the same identification with labour as the ILP; the CCF was a party of all classes except industrial and finance capitalists. As well, the Communist Party, through organizations such as the Brandon Unemployed Council, replaced the ILP as the defender of the interest of the unemployed and the poor. The ILP was a spent force in Brandon civic politics by the beginning of the 1930s,⁴⁹ and the Depression and the

Depression, the platform of the Brandon Progress Association included "Effective co-operation with the provincial government, efficient and business-like methods of conducting municipal affairs and securing of new industries to create more employment...." (*Sun*, 23 October 1931).

⁴⁷ Namely, B.L. Patterson, a ticket agent with the CPR, and A.B. Patterson, a locomotive engineer with the CPR.

⁴⁸ There is a useful discussion of the general state of the local economy in Clark, *Brandon Politics*. See also, Donald I. MacDonald, "A Study of the Financial Problems of An Urban Municipality in Manitoba — The City of Brandon," MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 1938.

⁴⁹ After its spate of victories in 1927 and 1928, the ILP was unable to sustain its challenge, because of the failure to develop a coherent policy platform and its

formation of the CCF prevented its rejuvenation. ILP candidates continued to be elected until 1942, but this was attributable primarily to the personal popularity of its candidates, in particular of Harry Spafford, a locomotive engineer on the CNR, who held a Council seat from 1927 to 1945.⁵⁰

With the advent of World War II in 1939, conditions in Brandon's economy improved dramatically. Unemployment declined, as did the civic burden of relief payments. Census data for the years 1931, 1936, and 1941 do not report the number of unemployed; these data do, however, reveal the improvement in the local economy in the early 1940s relative to the 1930s.

The improvement in 1941 which is indicated in Table 3 was a result both of the absorption of people into the armed forces (705 men and 5 women were reported on active service in the 1941 census) and of an increase in jobs. There was little change in the underlying structure of the Brandon work force.

Across the country, the economic effects of World War II contributed to a resurgence in trade union organization and a rapid growth in support for the CCF at both the provincial and federal levels. In 1941, the CCF became the official opposition in British Columbia. In 1943, the party not only increased its popular vote four-fold in Ontario and elected 34 members to the legislature, but also topped the national polls for a brief spell. Moreover, in 1944 the CCF formed a government in Saskatchewan.⁵¹

Not surprisingly, in many Canadian cities including Brandon, developments at the national and regional levels spilled over into local politics. In the fall of 1943, two elections were held in Brandon; they were an 18 November by-election to fill a seat in the provincial legislature, and a 30 November civic election. Table 4 reveals that leftist candidates had not fared well in provincial or federal elections in Brandon since the provincial victory of A.E. Smith in 1920. Despite this record, the CCF was confident that it could win the 1943 by-election. The Party nominated Dr. Dwight L. Johnson to contest the seat against coalition candidate and Brandon Mayor F.H. Young. Following his nomination Johnson told delegates to the CCF Party Convention in Winnipeg that: "I don't like to appear over confident

inability to recruit sufficient first-rate candidates from the ranks of labour for civic elections.

⁵⁰ Harry Spafford was widely recognized as a competent and compassionate member of city council. This reputation even gained him a spot on the slate of the Citizen's Election Committee in 1938, when propertied interests organized to prevent the election of Communist candidates.

⁵¹ For a discussion of these developments and their implications, see Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*, 285-288.

but as far as the city of Brandon is concerned, the by-election is in the bag."⁵²

The CCF campaign was aimed at drawing a clear demarcation line between itself and the entrenched political parties. To this end the CCF invoked the spectre of a return to depression at the end of the War.⁵³ For its part, the Coalition Committee attempted to counter CCF popularity by invoking its own spectre, namely, the spectre of Bolshevism.⁵⁴ The coalition was aided in its efforts by the *Brandon Sun*, which as usual used its editorial columns to vilify the CCF and to promote the Committee's candidate. For example, on 11 November 1943, a *Sun* editorial charged that

[should the CCF] ever attain the right to totalitarian dictatorship ... [it] would as the state, "run everything." Practically all private enterprise would be killed, ... including, of course, farming.⁵⁵

The CCF prevailed on election day. Johnson piled up decisive margins in working-class polls in the East, South, and North ends of the city, and won the election by an overall margin of 3,722 to 3,204.⁵⁶

While the CCF had already made the decision to contest civic elections prior to 18 November, the victory in the provincial by-election gave the local campaign a decided impetus. Brandon's CCF membership doubled during the provincial election campaign. As well, the vote had shown a clearcut surge in support for the party in some polls outside the traditional labour party strongholds in the city's East and North ends. Now the machines that were put into place for the by-election could be used in civic elections. There was some confidence, therefore, that the provincial victory could be translated into major gains at the local level. Nevertheless, the objectives in the civic elections were modest — namely, to gain enough seats on council to become an effective opposition force and therefore break the virtual monopolization of council seats by candidates who had Conservative and Liberal ties and the backing of the Board of Trade.

⁵²*Sun*, "Brandon Byelection in Bag, he says," 23 October 1943.

⁵³*Sun*, ad published by the CCF, 17 November 1943.

⁵⁴*Sun*, ad published by the Coalition Committee, 11 November 1943.

⁵⁵*Sun*, "Continued Bureaucracy," 11 November 1943.

⁵⁶*Sun*, 19 November 1943.

TABLE 3
Number of Wage-Earners Not at Work
in Specified Age-groups, 1931, 1936, and 1941

Year	Age Group	No. of Wage Earners		No. Not At Work		No. Not At Work as Per- cent of Total	
		Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1931	20 years & over	3571	973	869	71	24.3	7.3
1936	14 years & over	3360	1167	818	106	24.3	9.1
1941	14 years & over	3610	1417	147	56	4.1	4.0

Source: *Census of Canada*, 1931, 1936, and 1941.

In the civic elections of 1943, five two-year aldermanic seats, two one-year aldermanic seats, and the Office of Mayor were up for grabs. The CCF could not field a full slate, but it nominated three candidates for the two-year aldermanic terms, and two candidates for the one-year terms.⁵⁷

In response to the formal entry of the CCF into municipal elections, the old-line parties created a Brandon Citizen's Committee to promote their candidates. The Committee described itself as consisting of "Every citizen of Brandon who is interested in the progress and prosperity of Brandon." As well it claimed it was "Absolutely Non-Partisan [with] No Membership Fees or Pledges."⁵⁸ The Brandon Citizen's Committee endorsed a full slate of candidates, most of whom were drawn from the managerial and commercial classes.⁵⁹ The Brandon Women's Civic Association, which was

⁵⁷One of the candidates, Fred J. Darvill, a cartage operator, was forced to withdraw because he did not satisfy the property qualifications. He was replaced at the last minute by Thomas Black, a carman with the CNR. The other CCF candidates were Harry Spafford, an ILP council member since 1928, William Patrick Kearns, switchman on the CNR, William Marsh Smith, electrician, and William Stibbons, cereal plotsman at the Brandon Experimental Farm. *Sun*, various issues, 12-20 November 1943, and notes compiled by Tom Black.

⁵⁸*Sun*, "Who is the Brandon Citizen's Committee?" ad published by the BCC, 24 November 1943.

⁵⁹For mayor, Leslie H. McDorman, manufacturer; for two-year terms, William H. Boreskie, secretary to the locomotive foreman, CPR, Norman A. McDowell, partner in a tinsmith firm, Lenton James Rust, manager, John Popkin, manager, and Dr.

TABLE 4

**Record of Left-Party Candidates in Provincial and
Federal Elections, 1920-1942**

Year	Election	Number of Candidates	Left Party Candidate	Placing	Percent of Popular Vote
1920	Provincial	3	DLP A.E. Smith	1st	43.1
1921	Federal	3	No Left Party Candidate		
1922	Provincial	2	DLP A.E. Smith	2nd	38.5
1925	Federal	2	No Left Party Candidate		
1926	Federal	2	No Left Party Candidate		
1927--	Provincial	3	ILP W. Hill	2nd	24.3
1930 (by- Federal election)		1	No Left Party Candidate		
1930	Federal	3	ILP B. Brigden	3rd	8.1
1932	Provincial	4	ILP H. Spafford	2nd	24.1
1935	Federal	4	CCF H. Wood	3rd	20.1
1936	Provincial	3	CCF H. Spafford	3rd	21.7
1938 (by- Federal election)		3	CCF H. Wood	3rd	22.7
1940	Federal	3	CCF H. Wood	3rd	14.2
1941	Provincial	2	No Left Party Candidate		

¹In the provincial elections of 1932 and 1936 the system of preferential voting was used. The calculation of the popular vote for these years is based on first place votes only.

Source: W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians* (Brandon 1981), 246-250.

formed for the express purpose of influencing the outcome of the elections, endorsed the Citizens' Committee slate.⁶⁰

In contrast to the 1943 provincial by-election campaign, the CCF's campaign in the civic election was subdued. The party had a platform, but it was modest in both its scope and implications. The platform rather meekly called for the establishment of a public library, the creation of public housing, better housing and accommodation for the aged, and an end to contracting out by the Civic Works Department.⁶¹ This platform was presented at public meetings, but it was not vigorously promoted either in these forums or in the party's election advertising. Advertisements in the *Sun*

Stuart Schultz, physician; and, for one-year terms, Robert B. Alexander, manager, Anthony D. Burneskie, proprietor. *Sun*, various issues, 12-20 November 1943.

⁶⁰Barker, *Brandon*, 317.

⁶¹From notes compiled by Tom Black.

emphasized the campaign slogan "Vote C.C.F. for Progress"⁶² and stressed the quality of the party's candidates.⁶³

The character of the CCF's local campaign was, in part, a result of the fact that CCFers were sensitive to the accusation that they were bringing partisan party politics into civic affairs. In one editorial, under the caption "Politics and Civics," the *Brandon Sun* spelled out its views on the consequences of party politics in civic elections:

In some parts of Canada, ... in the present temporary spasm of socialism, the C.C.F. are attempting to get control in municipal elections....

Political leanings can have nothing to do with the fitness for office in a town or city in municipal issues. Any community is the better for local government without partisan prejudices The influence and strength of municipal government has always rested on its complete detachment from party politics. The people need to be free to choose the best men available in the primary field of government. This condition cannot continue if the C.C.F. persists in bringing socialism as such into municipal affairs.⁶⁴

The CCF could have met the challenge head-on and argued the benefits of partisan politics at the local level. Instead, the party's response to such criticism was defensive, half-hearted, and ineffective. At a City Hall meeting on 26 November, D.L. Johnson, MLA, told the audience that the CCF owed no apologies for contesting civic elections. According to the *Sun* report, Johnson justified his position on the grounds that "the CCF attitude in the municipal election is not one of a political nature, but rather to secure council representation 'for the majority of the citizens'."⁶⁵ This uninspired defence may have allayed the concerns of some voters, but it most certainly did not shift the momentum of the campaign in favour of the CCF.⁶⁶

⁶²This was the central slogan adopted by the CCF for the 1943 Civic elections.

⁶³For example, in one ad the CCF described its candidates as follows: W.P. Kearns, "has been a resident of the city for many years and is a keen student of social affairs;" Thomas A. Black, "C.N.R. employee, a young man making his first bid for public office, is well versed in Labour and Municipal affairs;" W.M. Smith, "Electrician ... of high integrity and progressive thought;" William Stibbon, "Devoted to the cause of humanity ... and with a wide knowledge of progressive and social legislation;" and H. Spafford, "has now completed 16 years as alderman, and needs no further introduction." *Sun*, 27 November 1943.

⁶⁴*Sun*, 16 November 1943.

⁶⁵*Sun*, 27 November 1943.

⁶⁶Individual candidates attempted to make this point in public forums and in their own campaigning, but their views on this issue were ignored by the local media. From notes compiled by Tom Black.

The CCF won two seats in the election: Harry Spafford won a two-year seat and William Smith a one-year seat. Citizens' Committee candidates won the mayoralty and the other three aldermanic seats.⁶⁷

Following the elections the CCF reviewed the results. In general, the members felt that the party had done alright. They were especially pleased with the victory of Smith. However, there was no consensus on how the party should approach future civic elections. Some members argued that they should concentrate on fielding candidates for one-year terms in by-elections. Others argued that the party should back off from municipal politics because it was apparent that voters in Brandon were not ready for party politics at the civic level. A minority — a small minority — insisted that involvement be sustained with a view to building toward power. The matter was left hanging. When elections rolled around again in 1944, the party decided to restrict its efforts to finding people who were sympathetic to CCF philosophy and policies to run as "independent" candidates.⁶⁸ W.R. Webb, long-time incumbent, and Fred Darvill, who was originally on the slate in 1943, were candidates for two of the five aldermanic positions. Webb finished fifth, Darvill seventh, out of eight candidates.⁶⁹

The election of 1943 was an important turning point in Brandon civic politics, because after it the CCF decided to abandon municipal politics. This was a triumph for both the ideology and the practice of the politics of Brandon's ruling elites. Moreover, the CCF's abandonment of civic politics marked a return to the situation that prevailed prior to World War I, namely, monopolization of civic politics by the ruling elites. There was, however, an important difference between the pre-World War I situation and the post-1943 situation. The monopoly prior to World War I was a result of the fact that labour had never contested civic politics as well as of the biased electoral procedures which hindered participation. The monopoly after 1943 stemmed from the fact that the CCF had allowed itself to be chased out of municipal politics by the ruling elites.

With its decision to retreat from direct involvement in civic politics in 1944, the CCF left the field to the very forces whose control of city life had been the rationale for intervention in 1943. These groups — the city's ruling elites — monopolized power at city hall for the entire period 1944 to 1970. Along with monopoly control came civic apathy, an outcome anticipated in a *Brandon Sun* editorial prior to the 1945 elections. This editorial, under the caption "Civic Apathy," warned the electorate that

⁶⁷*Sun*, 1 December 1943.

⁶⁸In fact, there was little effort to find candidates and the few people who were approached declined. From notes compiled by Tom Black.

⁶⁹*Sun*, 29 November 1944.

Public apathy at civic elections invites all the subservient and selfish groups to invade the councils for their own ends and against the welfare of all the citizens.... A small vote and a clique vote lowers the dignity and prestige of a city and keeps the community at a low level....⁷⁰

As well as being prophetic, the editorial was also somewhat ironic, since the result that the *Sun* was concerned about was precisely the result it had promoted for decades through its editorial pages. Be that as it may, the most noteworthy outcome of the 1945 elections was the defeat of Harry Spafford for the first time since 1928.⁷¹

In the immediate post-war period a number of candidates from labour organizations contested local elections. They had little success. In the 1950 election, for example, three activists in the labour movement sought election to a two-year term on council.⁷² All three went down to defeat. After these elections, letter carrier Walter Green was the only labour person on council.⁷³ Similarly, in 1960, the Brandon Labour Council intervened in civic elections as a result of actions taken by city hall during a bitter six month strike at the Brandon Packers in 1960, and because city council seemed deliberately to be ignoring the plight of working people in Brandon. Herb Baker, secretary-treasurer of the Council, and Neil McGugan, a delegate to the Council, were nominated to contest the 1960 aldermanic elections. Like most of their predecessors, however, they were unsuccessful, Baker finishing eighth and McGugan tenth in a field of eleven.⁷⁴

The extent of the control exercised over city council by business and professional interests during this era is indicated by the data in Table 5.

⁷⁰*Sun*, 6 November 1945.

⁷¹*Sun*, 28 November 1945.

⁷²W.R. Webb, incumbent, first elected to council under the ILP banner in 1934, and secretary of the CPR Local of the Boilermakers Union; Bryce Constable, president of the Brandon Labour Council (CCL) and former president of a CPR Local of the Brotherhood of Express Employees; and John Shorten, secretary of the Brandon Labour Council (CCL), and secretary of the Canadian Bakery Workers Union, McGavin's Bakery local. *Sun*, 23 October 1950.

⁷³Walter Green was a letter carrier and president of the Brandon local of the Amalgamated Civil Servants of Canada. He was also a member of the CCF but his involvement in the party was relatively passive and, therefore, publicly inconspicuous.

⁷⁴*Sun*, 26 October 1960. For a discussion of the Brandon Packers strike and city council's role in it, see George F. MacDowell. *The Brandon Packers Strike: A Tragedy of Errors* (Toronto 1971). See Also, Gene Jamieson, "The Brandon Packer's Strike of 1960: A Study in the Changing Nature of Class Relations," mimeo, 1980. Some important information on 1960 has been obtained from notes kept by Tom Black, who was a delegate to the Labour Council at this time.

The demise of labour in civic politics can be explained as a consequence of changes in the objective conditions confronting both the working class and other Brandonites during the post-war period. First, in contrast to the period 1917 to 1943, attempts by workers to make gains through traditional trade union activities were more successful after 1943. At the tail end of World War II, trade union activity in Brandon revived as a result of federal Order-in-Council P.C. 1003 (1944), an order which eliminated some of the impediments to trade union organization. Improved conditions in the local labour market also strengthened the position of labour. Labour's regeneration had tangible results; by 1945, Brandon had two labour councils affiliated with the two main trade union centrals in Canada — the Trades Union Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour. As well, new unions were organized in local firms which had historically resisted unionization. Brandon's McKenzie Seeds was one such enterprise to be unionized. Moreover, workers were more militant and more combative. The "girls" at McKenzie Seeds organized a "spontaneous" strike in 1944, and, after unionization, struck again in 1947 and 1948. There were, as well, strikes at the Rumford Laundry in 1945, at the Brandon Woolen Mills in 1947, and at Western Motors in 1950.⁷⁵

Second, rising standards of living in the post-war period created the basis for workers to improve their personal situation through the acquisition of goods and services. The emphasis shifted away from the acquisition of collective goods and services, for example public transit, to private goods and services, for example, automobiles. Moreover, in those situations where there was still a desire to have services provided on a collective rather than a private basis, for example health care, it was clear that action to achieve this result would have to come from a senior level of government. This accentuated the shift in focus from the local level of government to the provincial and federal levels which had been underway since the 1930s.

Third, dramatic shifts in the composition of the workforce in the post-war period left the working class less monolithic and more fragmented than was the case through World War II. Employment in service industries and the

⁷⁵The McKenzie Seed strike in 1944 was the first strike by Brandon workers since 1919. Teachers were locked out and replaced in Brandon in 1922 when they refused to accept a pay cut. See Margaret Mann, *The Strike That Wasn't* (Winnipeg 1972). As well, there were at least five strikes by relief workers in the 1930s — September 1933, June 1934, September 1934, May 1936, and July 1937. For details on these strikes see *Sun*, specified years and months. The strikes at McKenzie Seeds in 1944 and the Rumford Laundry in 1945 were spontaneous (or wildcat) strikes by unorganized women workers. They subsequently unionized. Data on these strikes were provided by John Smart of the Public Archives of Canada from the files on strikes and lockouts compiled by the Canada Department of Labour.

public sector increased in comparison to traditional industries — manufacturing, transportation and construction — and employment in white-collar occupations increased relative to blue-collar occupations.⁷⁶ As well, there were persistent and pervasive increases in the participation in paid labour market activities by women from all segments of the female population.⁷⁷ Combined with the suburbanization of the city — the creation of new neighbourhoods on the city's periphery — these shifts served to undermine the cohesiveness of working-class neighborhoods.

Fourth, in the pre-1945 era, the intervention of working-class organizations into civic politics was a response either to serious defects in services and the conditions of working-class life, or to widespread social problems. Thus, during World War I and for much of the 1920s the issues at the local level centered on the provision of adequate civic services, among them streetlighting, public transit, libraries, water and sewer, and public health. In the 1930s, the preoccupation was with relief services and the needs of the unemployed and the destitute. During the 1940s, the central issue was housing. In the post-war era, however, civic issues changed. The city had created a basic infrastructure which provided for public needs; the problem of poverty was alleviated by economic growth; and deficiencies in the housing stock were partially corrected by federal government programs. There were new demands on city council, but these demands were for services which benefitted specific groups as distinct from the general public.

Moreover, with the growth in population and incomes, the city was able to generate revenues to pay for both an improvement in existing services and the addition of new ones. Some indication of the growth of the city in the post-war era is provided by the population data in Table 6. Clearly, growth in the city's population all but stopped from 1931 to 1946; indeed, the growth over this entire fifteen year period was a mere 2.7 per cent. In the 1940s and 1950s, in contrast, the population grew substantially — by

⁷⁶Some indication of the extent of the changes in the structure of the working class in Brandon is provided by the trend in jobs in the railway industry. In 1941, the railways in Brandon absorbed 12.5 per cent of the gainfully occupied. By 1971, the proportion of total jobs provided by railway transportation in Brandon was down to 3.0 per cent. See *Census of Canada*, 1941 and 1971.

⁷⁷Women represented 27.9 per cent of the gainfully occupied population in Brandon in 1941. In 1951, women accounted for 26.8 per cent of the labour force. This proportion had increased to 38.9 per cent by 1971. These proportions are calculated from data in *Census of Canada*, 1941, 1951, and 1971. The influx of women into the workforce in Brandon — as elsewhere — was a direct response to the expansion of jobs traditionally filled by women in the retail trade and service (both private and public) industries.

60 per cent between 1946 and 1961. Moreover, the people were better off than ever before.⁷⁸

TABLE 5
Brandon City Council Members by Occupation 1950-70

Occupation	Number	Per cent
Owners and/or managers	18	32.1
Realtors	5	8.9
Salesmen (Insurance & heavy equipment)	4	7.1
Own-account professionals	3	5.4
Salaried professionals	2	3.6
Corporation executives	1	1.8
Teachers	3	5.4
Employees (CPR; Assiniboine Hospital; and government)	7	12.5
Farmers	1	1.8
Housewives	1	1.8
Other (Dean of Women, Brandon University; President, Canadian Red Cross)	2	3.6
Retired persons ¹	9	16.1
Totals ²	56	100.0

¹Three of the nine were clearly aligned with business and property interests, and a further three — a former brigadier-general, a former chief of police, and a former business manager — had an ideological affinity with the ruling elites in Brandon.

²Four of the 56 people elected over this period were women.

Source: Calculated from data provided by the office City Clerk, City of Brandon.

It was not just the working class that was transformed in the post-war era. There were also a number of developments in the 1960s which arguably eroded the power of the local elites. Many of the new industrial and retail trade firms established in the city were branches of national and interna-

⁷⁸Average weekly wages in Manitoba increased from \$48.37 in 1951 to \$123.84 in 1971, an increase of 156 per cent. For the same period, the Consumer Price Index (Winnipeg) increased from 69.8 to 100.0, an increase of 43 per cent. The net result was a substantial increase in real wages. Comparable data are not available for Brandon, but the evidence available indicates that wage and price movements in Brandon parallel those for the province as a whole. These data are from F.H. Leacy, M.C. Urquhart, and K.A.H. Buckley, eds., *Historical Statistics of Canada*, 2nd ed. (Ottawa 1982).

tional firms. The managers of these establishments did not always fit readily into the local elites. Moreover, there were conflicts in objectives and values over such things as peripheral development versus the preservation of the city centre. Similarly, the growth in the public sector, and, in particular, health care and education, including the conversion of Brandon College into a university in 1967 and the addition of Assiniboine Community College in 1969, brought in professionals, academics, and intellectuals from outside who sometimes opposed the values and objectives of the traditional elites. Nevertheless on most issues, and particularly on the question of the role of business and civic government in the local economy, the views of these groups coincided.⁷⁹

TABLE 6
Population of the City of Brandon 1931-1971

Year	Population	Per cent change
1931	17,082	—
1936	16,461	-3.6
1941	17,383	5.6
1946	17,551	1.0
1951	20,598	17.4
1956	24,796	20.4
1961	28,166	13.6
1966	29,981	6.4
1971	31,150	3.9

Source: *Census of Canada*, specified years.

The significance of these changes became evident in June 1969 when Manitoba elected a New Democratic Party (NDP) government for the first time. In that election, the NDP captured Brandon East, the first time a left candidate had won in Brandon since D. Johnson's win for the CCF in 1943, and almost won Brandon West.⁸⁰ With the election of a NDP government many of the positions on boards of public-sector institutions, which had been the exclusive preserve of Conservative and Liberal members of the

⁷⁹We had long discussions with the late George MacDowell on the changes taking place in Brandon. Macdowell provided a brief outline of these changes in a letter to the *Sun* published 30 December 1981 under the caption, "City's business elite lost power in 60s." These issues are also discussed in some detail in Alan Artibise, "City-Building."

⁸⁰Len Evans, a Professor of Economics at Brandon University, was elected in Brandon East. The candidate in Brandon West was Jim Skinner, a Professor of History at Brandon University.

city's elites, were opened up to members of the working class, to members of ethnic groups who had previously been locked out of positions of power and influence, and to women.⁸¹ The 1969 election results, combined with the sudden accessibility to positions of power, provided a significant boost to the confidence and assertiveness of Brandon's NDP constituency associations.⁸²

In December 1970, the Manitoba government appointed a one-man Royal Commission, in the person of A.L. Dulmage, president of Brandon University, to prepare recommendations for the government "concerning the future boundaries and municipal structure of the City of Brandon and [surrounding] rural municipalities" During the course of his hearings Dr. Dulmage received a written brief from NDP members John Stonehouse and Jim McAllister presenting evidence that city council was dominated by people from a comparatively small socioeconomic group who lived in a relatively small area of the city. The authors of the brief, who were influenced by discussions which had taken place amongst NDP members, proposed that the city be divided into wards for civic elections. Dulmage was persuaded by the arguments in the brief, and included in his recommendations a proposal "that for electoral purposes a ward system with approximately equal numbers of people in each ward be introduced in the city of Brandon." Dulmage claimed that a ward system would both enhance "communication between the electorate and its representatives," and produce a council more representative of all "sectors of the community."⁸³ The government implemented most of Dulmage's recommendations, including the creation of a new electoral system based on the election of a mayor at large and the election of ten aldermen on the basis of wards.⁸⁴

⁸¹The key boards were those of Brandon University, McKenzie Seeds, and the Centennial Auditorium.

⁸²This section of the paper is based, in part, on material previously published in Errol Black, "Small City Politics: The Brandon Experience," *City Magazine*, 4 (Summer 1984).

⁸³Royal Commission on Brandon Boundaries, *Report*, April 1971, x, 78, 79. Dr. Dulmage told Errol Black in private conversations prior to the preparation of his report that he believed that city councils should be representative of the entire population if they were to address problems in a fair and equitable manner. The evidence submitted by John Stonehouse and Jim McAllister in their brief convinced him that representative councils could not be achieved with elections-at-large, because such elections were biased in favour of high-profile members of the community, specifically, businessmen and professionals.

⁸⁴The original legislation stipulated that candidates for council had to be resident in the wards where they were seeking election. The residence requirement was dropped prior to the 1980 elections as a result of a request by city council to the Manitoba Conservative government.

With the reintroduction of the ward system Brandon's NDP constituency associations concluded that they could win those wards which had gone heavily NDP in the 1969 provincial elections. Therefore, they decided to field a slate of candidates in the 27 October 1971 civic elections.

The rationale for NDP involvement in local elections was set out by Jim McAllister, a political science lecturer and NDP activist, in an article published in the *Brandon Sun* on 11 September.⁸⁵ McAllister identified as key considerations the need for coherent policies to guide local government activities, the need for greater accountability on the part of council members, and the need for a progressive alternative in local politics. A convention was held on 16 September to debate and approve policy resolutions. An indication of the content of this debate was provided in a discussion paper authored by Ken Hanly, a philosophy professor at Brandon University, which was published in the 22 September 1971 *Brandon Sun* under the title, "The Socialist Development of Brandon." Hanly characterized the existing philosophy underlying local politics as "welfare capitalism." According to Hanly, the main tenet of this view was the idea that the state "should provide necessary but unprofitable services; whereas if profit can be made in a given area it should be left to private capital." Hanly argued that this philosophy produced contradictory consequences which generated fiscal crises at all levels of the state, including the local level. Governments responded to such crises by cutting back on services that served social needs, and by holding down the wages of state-sector workers. As an alternative Hanly proposed a process of "democratic socialist development" based on the social ownership of services under public and democratic control. He cited natural gas distribution, taxi services, radio and TV, and the recreational facilities operated by organizations such as the YMCA, as activities or entities which could be brought under city ownership and control.⁸⁶

The 40 people attending the policy convention debated some 40 policy resolutions. The resulting platform covered virtually every aspect of city life: the take-over of the local gas utility, the creation of a corporation to apply for a radio and TV license, the abolition of elections for the office of mayor, the establishment of a Brandon Housing Corporation to oversee housing development in the city, hostels for native people moving into the city, and much more.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Jim McAllister in *Sun*, 11 September 1971. The title of the paper which McAllister subsequently presented to the policy convention was: "The New Democratic Party in Municipal Politics." See also the report of the NDP news conference in *Sun*, 8 September 1971.

⁸⁶ Ken Hanly, "The Development of Brandon: Free Enterprise, Welfare Capitalism or Socialism?" 22 September 1971. Paper in possession of Ken Hanly.

⁸⁷ Andy Moir, "N.D.P. adopts most city government resolutions," *Sun*, 17 September 1971. The document which served as the basis for this policy convention ("Brandon

Then, at a nominating convention on 27 September, some 250 supporters nominated Murray Tufford, a stationary engineer at the Simplot Plant, to run for mayor, and nominated 6 aldermanic candidates as well.⁸⁸

As soon as the NDP announced its intentions to intervene in the election, opposition forces mobilized. On 8 September, the day after the NDP announcement, Bill Wilton, the incumbent mayor and influential member of the Conservative party, said he was disappointed "that the time has come in the city of Brandon when politics becomes a part of municipal government. I believe, over the past years, the mayor and aldermen have done their very best to keep party politics out of municipal affairs."

Wilton's views were echoed by other incumbents. In addition, spokesmen for the local Conservative and Liberal organizations expressed opposition to "party involvement in local politics," and said it was unlikely their parties would follow suit.⁸⁹

Then, on 17 September, two former aldermen (C.E. Webb, a chiropractor, and Arnold Cook, owner of Cook Lumber and Supply) and James Peter Jones, minister of the First Presbyterian Church, called a public meeting "to provide a forum for those who are concerned at the entry of party politics in Brandon's civic affairs." A *Sun* reporter, Haroon Siddiqui, reported that Webb, Cook, and Jones had met the previous morning with a group that included William Pearson, lawyer and first vice-president of the provincial Conservative party, A.A. Hirschfield, lawyer and president of the Brandon West Conservative Association, and Terry Penton, insurance agent and first vice-president of the provincial Liberal party. The next day Pearson confirmed his involvement with the group and explained his opposition to the NDP intervention:

Aldermen are accountable to the electors, and that's fine. That's a good system. But when you bring party politics into it, they are accountable to their party as well. The party can remove them at the next election whether the people want it or not. If

NDP Policy Convention Papers") included, in addition to the pieces by McAllister and Hanly, detailed papers on Transportation, Finance, Urban Development, Housing, and Native People. The paper on native people dealt with problems which have still not been adequately addressed by city councils in Brandon.

⁸⁸Candidates for council positions were Ron Hlady, a part-time university student and an employee in the university print shop; Kathleen Morrison, a part-time nurse and university student; Joan Weiner, a homemaker; Peter Martin, a Simplot employee; Steni Syndal, a trade union activist; and Bill Moore, production manager at McKenzie Seeds, *Sun*, 28 September 1971. Mike Dechka, an employee of a drive-in theatre, joined the slate on 4 October. *Sun*, 5 October 1971.

⁸⁹"Mayor, aldermen, disappointed NDP to run candidates," *Sun*, 8 September 1971.

aldermanic candidates have to enjoy the confidence of the electors and a party, then there may be a conflict of interest.

Pearson predicted that party politics would lead to one of two extremes: either a minority government — “and our system never works under minority government” — or a “rubber-stamp council.”⁹⁰ At the public meeting on the 22 September, 350 people endorsed the creation of a Citizen’s Independent Voters Election Committee (CIVEC) and elected a 7 member executive to “seek out, encourage and support candidates for mayor, aldermen and school trustees—independent of party politics.” All seven of the people elected to the executive were active in the Conservative or Liberal parties.⁹¹

In a news release issued in anticipation of the formation of CIVEC, Joe Slomiany, President of the Brandon East NDP, stated that:

the city has been and is governed by a Liberal-Conservative coalition ... which is representative of only the professional and business members of these two parties.

What Mr. Pearson and others dislike [about NDP involvement] is the fact that people in every walk of life, and not just from the upper socio-economic strata, will now be able to exercise some decision-making power ... membership in the business community or a willingness to look after its needs above all else is not an implicit requirement of potential NDP candidates as it is of Liberal and Conservative supporters in Brandon municipal elections.⁹²

A total of 28 individuals sought election in 1971. CIVEC had eleven aldermanic candidates in the ten wards, the NDP seven. There were also seven “independent” candidates. One ward, Victoria, went by acclamation to CIVEC candidate Jack Brockest. In addition, three candidates contested the mayoralty election: one NDP, one CIVEC, and an independent.

Approximately 55 per cent of the electorate turned out to vote on 27 October, the largest turnout since World War II. The results of the election are summarized in Table 7. The NDP suffered a significant defeat. The ideology of the ruling elites, and, in particular, the notion that there was

⁹⁰M. Haroon Siddiqui, “Group opposes NDP participation in civic election,” *Sun*, 17 September 1971; Dave Campbell, “Local NDP asked to oppose city party politics,” *Sun*, 18 September 1971.

⁹¹The seven picked for the executive were Lois Osudar, a homemaker and activist in the Conservative Party; Harvey Tolton, retired farmer; A.C. Hamilton, lawyer and former Liberal Party first vice-president; Don Martin, realtor and Brandon East Liberal candidate in 1969 provincial election; George Murray, Brandon Chamber of Commerce secretary manager; Herman Nikkel, former alderman; and Glenn Murray, manager of Northern Auto Parts.

⁹²“NDP to run candidates for council,” *Sun*, 7 September 1971.

no place for partisan politics in civic affairs, prevailed once again. The CIVEC victory meant that it would be business as usual at Brandon city hall.

For the NDP, the overwhelming defeat was totally unexpected and utterly demoralizing. In the soul-searching that took place after the election, party members identified a number of factors which contributed to the defeat: the haste with which preparations were made for entry into the election; the overly detailed and comprehensive nature of the election platform (a platform which a *Sun* editorial noted contained "something to anger or impress just about everyone in town")⁹³ the failure of the election platform to address issues of immediate concern in a detailed and coherent manner; the failure to attract candidates with "credibility"; and, above all, the effectiveness of CIVEC's campaign to keep party politics out of city hall. The latter factor was decisive. NDP canvassers were consistently confronted on this issue by voters, some of them NDP members, who were suspicious of the party's motives in entering civic politics. Candidates and workers alike were shocked at the animosity and resentment unleashed by the NDP's intervention. After this experience, they had no desire to engage in the kind of personalized, confrontational, and sustained politics required to alter the perception of the electorate.

Little has changed at city hall since 1971. The city's elites have continued to control the activities of Council, although this control has become more problematic under the ward system, which has enhanced possibilities for individuals from groups and organizations other than the dominant ones to gain seats on city council.⁹⁴ In general, however, representatives to

⁹³"Excess baggage" *Sun*, 4 September 1971.

⁹⁴It is for this reason that the city's elites have been campaigning for a return to elections at large ever since the ward system was introduced in 1971. Thus, since 1971, three labour activists have been elected to council: the late Pat Eagan, a former President of the Brandon and District Labour Council for Richmond Ward in 1977; Ross Martin, current president of the Brandon and District Labour Council, for Riverview Ward in 1980, 1983, 1986, and 1989; and Wayne Smith, union representative for CUPE, for Richmond Ward in 1986. As well, NDP activist Arnold Grambo was elected for Green Acres Ward in 1983, 1986, and 1989. Moreover, other candidates, mainly women, have been elected who have no immediate connection with the establishment. The 1986-89 council was probably the most representative council in Brandon since World War II. In addition to Arnold Grambo, Wayne Smith, and Ross Martin, it included Mike Melnyk, a convenience store owner who also owns a rug-cleaning business and works part-time at the Brandon General Hospital; Dan Munroe, a supervisory employee with a provincial work activities project; Jeff Harwood, a teacher; Ron Cayer, manager of the local Greyhound terminal; Jim Reid, a psychologist with the Brandon school system; and Lynne Little, general manager of a local Ford dealership. Ken Burgess, owner of a Solo Store, was mayor.

council have continued to be drawn from the local elites, or from segments of the population who accept the idea that the main role of council is to serve the interests of these groups. Moreover, candidates elected from the working class who have been elected as "independents" actually have functioned as "independents" because they have not been accountable to any organization. This is especially true of individuals from the working class who have not been active in the city's labour movement.

TABLE 7
Results of 1971 Municipal Election in Brandon

Election	Proportion of Vote Received by			
	Total Vote¹	CIVEC	N.D.P.	Independent
Assiniboine	594	44.3	32.0	23.7
Rosser	1,169	41.7	21.9	36.4
University	1,274	76.1	23.9	—
West Centre	1,297	52.1	14.6	23.2
East Centre	1,362	73.0	12.8	14.2
Linden Lanes	1,068	67.0	14.0	19.0
Richmond	1,000	64.4	—	36.6 ²
Riverview	1,321	76.7	23.3	—
Green Acres	1,053	100.0 ³	—	—
Mayoralty	11,540	69.3	8.3	22.4

¹Excludes rejected ballots.

²There were two independent candidates in Richmond Ward.

³CIVEC endorsed both candidates in Green Acres Ward. The winning candidate obtained 70.5 per cent of the vote. Paradoxically, the losing candidate was a member of the CIVEC executive.

Source: Election results provided by City of Brandon.

The NDP has considered the possibility of fielding candidates since 1971. The loss in 1971, however, has had a profound and lasting effect on the psyches of most activists in the NDP, and the loss is invariably invoked to justify the more "pragmatic" course of seeking to sneak progressive people into council without direct party involvement. The last major debate on this issue within the NDP took place in June 1983. The main opponents to the idea of fielding a slate were Ross Martin and Arnold Grambo. They had managed to get elected as "independents," and they argued that if they were part of a slate they would lose and the NDP would again have no representation on council.

The history of labour and social democratic party involvement in civic elections in Brandon suggests that the political culture of the working class

in Brandon was never sufficiently developed to generate the sustained efforts required to wrest control of city hall away from the city's ruling elites. The early labour parties were not able to field a full slate of candidates, and, after 1928, the ILP was reduced to supporting incumbent ILP council members. The social democratic challenges of 1943 and 1971 were decidedly opportunistic, motivated by the expectation that the party would be able to capitalize on the victory of Dr. Johnson in 1943 and the Manitoba NDP in 1969, to establish a significant presence on city council. When these efforts were defeated at the polls, party activists immediately abandoned formal involvement in municipal politics.

Future intervention by either social democratic or labour parties in civic elections seem unlikely in the present circumstances. However, history is replete with developments and events which create direct threats to the material conditions of working people both in their places of work and in the neighborhoods where they live. Current concerns about health, safety, and the environment, or the notion of sustainable cities with a greater sharing of income, wealth, and power could create new, organized challenges for control of city hall. The NDP might be the vehicle through which such efforts are channeled. Alternatively, it is possible that we will see new party formations that recognize and reflect the diversity and complex interests of the contemporary working class. If political challenges materialize, however, they will be successful only if they are able to develop an ideology which convinces working people that their interests would best be served by the election of candidates committed to a common platform.

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2 “A Square Deal for All and No Railroading:” Labour and Politics in Brandon 1900-1920

Tom Mitchell

PRIOR TO WORLD WAR I, the political life of western Canadian communities was dominated by men drawn predominantly from the region's business and professional elite. Still, beginning early in the 20th century, the growing numerical importance of working-class voters and a widening ideological commitment among the region's workers to direct participation in politics resulted in the emergence of working-class political activities in various centres across western Canada. In Brandon, from 1900 to 1920, the workers in the city — almost invariably Anglo-Canadian men employed in the city's paid labour force — played an increasingly important role in Brandon's politics, thus contradicting the image of the city as a centre of political conservatism, its politically homogeneous populace loyal to a benevolent business and professional elite. This influence was exercised through the Brandon Trades and Labour Council (TLC), the Labour Representation League, the Brandon People's Church, and locals of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), the Social Democratic Party, the Dominion Labour Party, and the Brandon Labour Party.

While the organizations, ideologies, and styles which collectively shaped and informed the evolution of Brandon's labour political movement were unabashedly British in character, its vitality derived from the commitment of workers in Brandon to traditional notions of popular justice and liberty.² The movement's ideological roots were principally those of the labourism; the evanescent character of many of its organizational structures reflected the rapidity of its evolution, and the pervasive influence of developments in Winnipeg on the evolving character of Brandon's labour political move-

¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 April 1917.

²See “Labour Traditions,” in E.J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London 1964), 371-387, for a discussion of the British antecedents of many of the broad features of the labour political movement in Brandon.

ment. In the last years of World War I, a class conscious labourite ideology leavened by ethical and Marxist socialism attracted wide support among Brandon's working class. In 1920, the growing sophistication and popularity of this labourite ideology contributed to the election of Reverend A.E. Smith to the provincial legislature as the candidate of the Brandon Labour Party, a party conceived and controlled by the city's organized labour movement.

From 1900 to World War I, Brandon's population grew from 5,620 to 13,890.³ As the expansion of the working-class-residential areas in the city made clear, the principal reason for the more than doubling of the city's population prior to World War I was the arrival of new workers. Just as the growth and transformation of the city's working class added new dimensions to the city's social and economic character, the growing electoral significance of Brandon's workers changed the city's political life. Increasingly, the traditional political ascendancy of the city's business and professional elite depended on the effectiveness of patronage, electoral manipulation, and explicit appeals for working-class support in securing the votes of the city's workers. This growing reliance of the city's elite on working-class men was acknowledged as early as 1902, when newly elected Mayor J.W. Fleming, a prominent Liberal in the Brandon business community, observed that "his election was due largely to the working men who had given him their support."⁴ In 1903, Robert Hall, a Brandon area farmer and, like Fleming, a Liberal, ran against Conservative John Hanbury, the owner of a large lumber mill, for the Mayor's office. During the election, the Liberal *Brandon Sun* appealed directly and repeatedly to Brandon's workers to vote for Hall, contending that in the past the representatives of the city

had been chosen from the wealthier classes — from the ranks of the merchants, the manufacturers, and the professions — the working man has a right to expect that his interests, equally with those of wealthier citizens, should be represented.⁵

Though neither Hanbury nor Hall could claim to be "workingmen," Hanbury's reputation as the largest employer in Brandon — other than the CPR — certainly identified him as a representative of Brandon's wealthy, and therefore incapable of representing the interests of the workingman in the Mayor's office. With the help of the city's workers, Hall won the election.

While working-class voters could shape the outcome of elections in the city, any challenge to the political ascendancy of the city's business and

³*Census of Canada*, 1911.

⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 17 December 1902.

⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 February 1903.

professional elite required the emergence of a unified, class conscious political movement and the elaboration of a program and strategy which would attract the enthusiastic support of the city's workers. Prior to World War I, the development of such an inclusive political movement was undermined when two competing political orientations emerged among Brandon's workers. The first and most pervasive was the labourism of the city's organized skilled workers. The second was the revolutionary socialism of Brandon's Socialist Party of Canada local.

Labourism emerged in Brandon following the creation of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council in July 1906 as a result of the visit to Brandon of W.R. Trotter, the western organizer for the Trades and Labour Congress.⁶ The original Council contained thirteen locals, including those of railway workers, sheet metal workers, plumbers and steam fitters, bricklayers, carpenters and joiners, cigar makers, printers, and barbers. By 1912, there were 24 locals in Brandon.⁷ The newly established Trades and Labour Council — an unabashedly male preserve like its counterparts across the country — provided a vehicle for organized skilled workers to initiate the first deliberate, organized working-class political action in Brandon.

Consistent with traditional British and Canadian labourism, the Brandon Trades Council functioned as both the central union and political organization for the city's organized workers. Only one public reference to the short lived and inactive Brandon Labour Party of the pre-World War I era (almost certainly created by the Trades and Labour Council in response to the decision of the 1906 TLC's convention to create reformist labour political parties) appears in the Brandon press.⁸ In the years before World War I, the Trades Council, as the principal focus of labourite activity, exercised political influence in a nonpartisan fashion, choosing not to participate directly in the city's politics by nominating or endorsing candidates for election to public office. Rather, the Council lobbied the city's politicians in support of municipal ownership of public utilities including the city's street railway, a hospital, a public library, public baths, and a municipal employment bureau. The city's skilled workers also lobbied assiduously for a fair wage clause in all municipal contracts, home postal delivery, compulsory education, Sunday street car service, paid Saturday half-holidays, garden allotments, and public works for the unemployed.⁹

⁶*The Voice*, 27 July 1906.

⁷*Labour Organizations in Canada*, 1912, 85.

⁸Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 46 on labourism and the political role of labour councils. On the Brandon Labour Party see the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 17 April 1908.

⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 25 January 1907; 23 April 1907, 11 December 1907, 12 February 1908, 17 April 1908, 20 June 1908, 6 April 1909, 9 December 1909, 20 January

The moderate and practical character of the reforms they sought were squarely within the ideological tradition of "labourism," the term which some authors have used to differentiate reformist labour-initiated political action from both socialism and syndicalism, two ideologies competing with reformism in this period in western Canada.¹⁰

Like their counterparts in other communities, Brandon's labourites were almost invariably skilled, male craft workers with a history of autonomy on the job, and success as unionists in imposing their will on employers. In Brandon from 1907 to 1914, five of the eight strikes reported in the city erupted over issues related to the control of the work process or the work site and in every case the workers prevailed.¹¹ This experience in the labour process shaped a class pride, side by side with a general acceptance of capitalist economic relations. Accordingly, the political demands of Brandon's labourites reflected their perceived interests as respectable workers within an economic system with which they were in general agreement. Moreover, Brandon's labourites had no ideological commitment to a proletarian dominance over the city's political life, or the creation of absolute social equality.

The social and political moderation of the city's labourites was reflected, as well, in a determined self-reliance which was a badge of the skilled workers' respectability and his economic and social independence. As the independence and respectability of Brandon's skilled workers was insured through craft and class solidarity, not individual accumulation, the labourite ideology of the city's skilled workers held within it the potential for trade union solidarity, political militancy, and class antagonism when the perceived interests of the city's skilled workers were threatened or traditional notions of economic justice or liberty were challenged. In the absence of such provocation, the commitment of the city's skilled workers to class solidarity was evident in the presence of a vigorous organized labour movement in the city and in the widespread existence of fraternal organizations in Brandon supported by the city's workers. The popularity of fraternal organizations was acknowledged in 1913 when Brandon's Frater-

1911, 5 April 1911, 6 October 1911, 16 October 1911, 22 December 1911, 11 January 1912, 25 January 1912, 3 May 1912, 8 May 1911, 7 June 1912, 12 December 1913, 24 January 1913, 28 February 1913, 11 April 1913, 18 April 1913, 9 May 1913, 13 June 1913, 26 September 1913, 14 November 1913, 28 November 1913, 23 January 1914, 25 April 1914.

¹⁰A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977), 77-98.

¹¹On strikes in Brandon from 1907 to 1914 see Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Records of the Department of Labour (hereafter RDL), RG27, Vol. 295, no. 2936; Vol. 297, no. 3214; Vol. 298, no. 3366; Vol. 299, no. 3405, 3432, and 3458; Vol. 300, no. 3571; and Vol. 301, no. 7.

nal Hall, which had been constructed through the co-operative efforts of the city's fraternal organizations, was opened.¹²

Brandon's labourites were typically ethnocentric and exclusive in their preoccupation with defending and advancing the interests of Brandon's British and Canadian skilled workers, viewing themselves as a social class of higher standing and worth than unskilled workers, especially those of non-British background. This social and ethnic exclusivity — which also denied women the status of workers — precluded any concerted action on the part of Brandon's labourites to extend organized labour to the ranks of the unskilled or to women in the paid labour force. Similarly, Brandon's labourites failed to elaborate a political program or strategy designed to incorporate the interests and attract the support of the city's unskilled and non-Anglo-Canadian working class. Rather, in their attack on the city's employment practises, for example, members of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council blamed low wages as much on the victims of these wages as on the setters of the wages. As one member of the Trades Council asserted in disputing the value of a fair wage clause in all civic contracts:

no white man needed apply for a job under the city officials. Mayor Fleming had secured his position through the vote of the Galicians and their employment was the natural sequel.¹³

The second orientation in the city's emergent labour political movement was the revolutionary socialism advanced by the Brandon local of the Socialist Party of Canada which, from 1909 to the outbreak of World War I, sought to advance a doctrine calling for the destruction of capitalism. While the SPC local was composed almost exclusively of skilled British workingmen involved in the city's building trades, Brandon's SPC activists were determined to speak for the entire working class of the city and to communicate their revolutionary message broadly to the city's working class regardless of trade or ethnic background. At a time when the Winnipeg Socialist Party of Canada was in a state of dissolution, Brandon's local was engaged in a vigorous program of socialist evangelism. In May 1909,

¹²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 5 April 1913. For a list of fraternal organizations in the city see *Henderson's Directory* (Brandon 1911), 28-29.

¹³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 April 1913. The centrality of ethnicity to the activities of labourites is discussed in Ross McCormack, "Cloth Caps and Jobs: The Ethnicity of English Immigrants in Canada 1900-1914" in Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada* (Toronto 1981) 38-55. An excellent discussion of the importance of fraternal organizations in the lives of British skilled workers is contained in Geoffrey Crossick, "The Labour Aristocracy and its Values: A Study of Mid-Victorian Kentish London," *Victorian Studies*, 3 (March 1976), 301-328.

representatives of the local appeared before City Council to assert their right to hold rallies on the streets of Brandon.¹⁴ In September 1910, Wilf Gribble, a Lancashire-born SPC organizer, spent a week in Brandon directing the organization and propaganda work of the local.¹⁵ In October 1910, the Brandon local continued its propaganda work by publishing a leaflet outlining the party's aims. A copy of the leaflet was delivered to the door of "every wage plug" in the city. The leaflet summed up the party's goal as the "transformation ... of capitalist property ... into the collective property of the working class."¹⁶

By January 1911, the local had a headquarters and reading room in operation, held regular economic and "speaker's" classes, and had initiated a variety of activities to spread the party's propaganda. In April 1911, the Brandon local distributed a special Brandon edition of the *Western Clarion* to the homes of Brandon's "wage slaves."¹⁷ Members of the SPC, including the local's moving spirit, Edmund Fulcher, were active if occasionally quarrelsome members of the city's Trades and Labour Council.¹⁸ Paradoxi-

¹⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 May 1909. In the article reporting the request to Council, the SPC was referred to as the "Secret Seven." The fact that it was the SPC making the request is confirmed by correspondence to Brandon City Council from Edmund Fulcher on behalf of the SPC. Edmund Fulcher was a native of Longstratton, Norfolk, England. He came to Brandon with his brother Harry in 1903. Fulcher had learned the bricklaying and carpentry trades in England and had clearly been influenced by the growing radicalism of the British labour movement in the years around the turn of the century. The Fulchers were drawn to Brandon by the construction boom prior to World War I. Fulcher was involved in the Brandon Trades and Labour Council from its earliest years and was an unsuccessful candidate for the SPC in Winnipeg in the 1910 provincial election, and in Macleod, Alberta, during the 1911 federal election. See *Brandon Weekly Sun*, 7 September 1911; *Brandon Times*, 7 September 1911. Also, Ernie Chisick, "The Development of Winnipeg's Socialist Movement," MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1972, 78. Fulcher was appointed the Brandon correspondent for the *Labour Gazette* in 1908. Following the demise of the Brandon local of the Socialist Party of Canada, Fulcher associated himself with the Labour Representation League and the Dominion Labour Party. *Our Past and the Future: Rapid City and District*, 1978, 235.

¹⁵Letter from Edmund Fulcher to *Western Clarion*, 24 September 1910. See A. Ross McCormack, "British Working-Class Immigrants and Canadian Radicalism: The Case of Arthur Puttee," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 2 (1978), 27 for biographical reference to Wilf Gribble.

¹⁶Letter from Edmund Fulcher to the *Western Clarion*, 22 October 1910.

¹⁷See A.T. Higgins letter to the *Western Clarion*, 21 January 1911. The Brandon edition of the *Western Clarion* was published on 1 April 1911.

¹⁸See, for example, the debate in the Trades Council reported in the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 February 1913 regarding the provincial Liberal Party, Fred Dixon, and direct legislation.

cally, SPC militants who would applaud Fulcher's assertion that "nothing short of socialism can benefit the workers," also joined Fulcher in extolling the accomplishments of the manifestly reform-oriented Trades and Labour Council.¹⁹ For example, when the Amalgamated Carpenters and Joiners — a hotbed of SPC activists — held a banquet on 28 December 1912, SPC activist T. Mellalieu toasted the Trades and Labour Council, asserting that it was from trade unionism that the idea of the modern municipality had emerged, and declaring that trade unionism was essential in maintaining the market price of labour. Edmund Fulcher responded to Mellalieu's toast, saluting the vigorous efforts that had been made by the Trades and Labour Council to secure a public library and public baths for the city.²⁰ Such ideological inconsistency was not untypical of SPC militants in other communities in the West.

Predictably, the fundamental antipathy of the labourism of the city's skilled workers to the radicalism of the SPC combined with the "impossibilism" of the SPC to undermined the local's vigorous and novel efforts to convert Brandon's working class to its revolutionary cause and rendered the SPC a marginal influence among the city's workers. At the same time, the ideological chauvinism of the SPC members of the Trades and Labour Council occasionally rented the unity of the Council and undermined the development of a unified, inclusive labour political movement in the city. Still, the presence of revolutionary socialists in Brandon's house of labour leavened the moderate labourism of the majority of the city's skilled workers and contributed to the growing radicalism of Brandon's labourites during the last years of World War I.

By 1915, high pre-war unemployment and the departure of workingmen to the trenches resulted in the dissolution of both the Trades Council and the SPC local in Brandon. The reconstitution of the Trades Council in April 1917 and the rapid expansion of locals affiliated with the Council confirmed the resurgence of organized labour in the city. The economic and political crisis which confronted Brandon's workers in the last years of World War I triggered the growth of unprecedented trade union and labour political militancy among the city's workers. In July 1917, the Council's creation of the Brandon Labour Representation League marked a radical departure from the pre-war non-partisanship of the city's labourites, and signalled the commitment of skilled workers in Brandon to the creation of a political organization designed to forge an alliance with progressives and socialists in the elaboration of a political program and strategy for the direct participation of labour in Brandon's electoral politics.

¹⁹Letters to *Western Clarion* from Edmund Fulcher dated 23 March 1912 and 30 March 1912.

²⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 December 1912.

The tendency of Brandon's labour political movement to become an inclusive political movement composed of labourites, progressives, and socialists, was evident as early as 1913 when Reverend A.E. Smith, the recently appointed Minister of Brandon's First Methodist Church, was named to the Trades and Labour Council as the first delegate to the Council from the Brandon Ministerial Association.²¹ Smith was a vigorous advocate of the social gospel and an active supporter of working-class interests. Though he had come to Methodism through a personal experience of conversion, his theology had been conditioned by progressive thinkers including J.S. Woodsworth and Salem Bland during his training for the ministry.²²

Like many other reform minded Canadians, Smith viewed World War I as an opportunity to reform Canadian society; in an address to the Western Manitoba Teachers' Association in the fall of 1915, Smith asserted with unconcealed pleasure that Canadian "society was in the grip of a mighty revolution."²³ While Smith's language was characteristically apocalyptic, there was some evidence to support his contention that change was in the air. In August 1915, the Norris government had been elected on a platform of broad social reform. In the same election, F.J. Dixon and R.A. Rigg had been returned in Winnipeg as "Labour" representatives. In October 1915, a local of the Social Democratic Party, a party created in Winnipeg in 1910, was organized in Brandon.

The Social Democratic Party combined a pragmatic commitment to electoral success and immediate reform, with the revolutionary vision of

²¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 24 October 1913. The idea of such an affiliation probably derived from Smith who, because of his association with J.S. Woodsworth, would have known that the Winnipeg Ministerial Association had affiliated with the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council. On this point see McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 87. The Rev. A.E. Smith had a lengthy career in the Methodist Church beginning in the last years of the century. In 1912, he became Minister of First Methodist, one of Brandon's wealthiest churches. As an active supporter of church union, Smith was chosen President of the Manitoba Conference in 1916 and 1917. Smith recalled his varied career in his autobiography *All My Life* (Toronto 1949). In his article on Smith, "From Clergyman to Communist: The Radicalization of A.E. Smith," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 4 (Winter, 1978-79), J. Petryshyn ignores the central importance to Smith's radicalization of his involvement in the Brandon labour movement and the Brandon labour strife of 1919 discussed below. See also Tom Mitchell, "From the Social Gospel to the 'Plain Bread of Leninism': A.E. Smith's Journey to the Left in the Epoch of Reaction After World War I," *Labour/Le Travail*, 33, (Spring 1994), 125-153.

²²Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto 1985), 223-227, for a discussion of this point and Smith's career.

²³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 October 1915.

Marxist socialism. The Brandon local of the SDP, which appears to have been organized by James Skene, a Brandon teacher who played a key organizational role in the creation of a number of labour political organizations following his arrival in the city in 1912, did not find broad support among the city's workers.²⁴ Brandon's public press contains only one reference to a meeting of the local. In November 1915, R.A. Rigg addressed the city's putative Social Democrats, attacking the existing social system, pleading for a more equal distribution of wealth and the public ownership of the means of production and distribution.²⁵ In a letter to the *Brandon Sun* following Rigg's appearance in the city, Skene revealed the tepid response to Rigg's radical anthem when he lamented the absence of labour radicalism in the city, noting that the workers held the great preponderance of votes, yet they were ignorant of or indifferent to their "own class interests."²⁶

This indifference waned early in 1916, when a civic controversy involving the Brandon YMCA incited deep and lasting class antagonism in the city. In February 1916, a delegation representing the YMCA, headed by C.S. Maharg, Superintendent of CPR operations, appeared before City Council. The delegation requested that Council issue debentures in the name of the city in the amount of \$33,000 to provide funds to cover the remaining debt incurred by the YMCA in constructing a new building prior to World War I. Maharg explained the origin of the organization's financial crisis in the following way:

They had enough subscriptions to cover all the debts, but it was ... felt that it was a most inappropriate time to force realization on the subscription list ... the bank, which had been very patient, was now pressing for payment, and unless the Council came to their assistance, the institution was doomed.²⁷

²⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 25 October 1915. James Skene came to Brandon in 1911 to become the Director of Manual Training in the Brandon School Division and the Brandon Normal School. Skene was a principal figure in the organization of the Brandon Social Democratic Party, the People's Forum, the Labour Representation League, the Dominion Labour Party, and the People's Church. Skene was also instrumental in the creation of the Brandon Teachers' Association, a teachers' union, in Brandon in 1918. In 1922, Skene left the employ of the School Division, as did the entire teaching staff, over a wage dispute with the School Board.

²⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 8 November 1915.

²⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 10 November 1915.

²⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 February 1916.

The Brandon YMCA had been established in 1886 by leading young businessmen in the city, including James Smart and Clifford Sifton.²⁸ During its years of operation, it had evolved into a service organization like that of YMCA organizations across North America. In Brandon, however, the perception of the YMCA as an exclusive organization serving the city's Protestant business and professional elite persisted. The YMCA had appealed to the City Council for assistance in 1914, and the city's ratepayers had agreed to issue \$20,000 in debentures in the name of the city to raise funds for the YMCA building. Its new appeal for an additional \$33,000 provoked angry opposition from representatives of the city's workers, who viewed the YMCA as an elitist and exclusive institution controlled by individuals in the city well able to afford all they received from the YMCA for their physical well-being. Opposition to the YMCA's request was manifest in delegations before City Council and in letters to the *Brandon Sun*.²⁹ The YMCA's opponents argued that the YMCA proposal was designed to shift the financial problems of the YMCA from its business and professional patrons to the city's hard pressed taxpayers. Such an arrangement would remove the financial obligations of those who had pledged financial support to the YMCA and than renege on their commitment.

Another important focus of resistance to the YMCA proposal was the Brandon People's Forum. The Brandon Forum was modeled after the People's Forum established in Winnipeg by J.S. Woodsworth in 1912.³⁰ As the Brandon Forum appeared shortly after the unsuccessful effort to establish a local of the Social Democratic Party in Brandon, it appears that the Forum was viewed by James Skene and others involved in its creation as a necessary step in the organization of an inclusive socialist party in Brandon. Beginning early in 1916, Brandon's Forum, which met at King George School in the city's predominantly working-class East end, provided a focus for Brandon's labourites, and socialists to make common cause on the issues of the day. Labourites and socialists such as James Skene and J.A.G. Grantham used the Forum to attack the YMCA's request for financial help. The YMCA's request for financial aid, argued Brandon's radicals, provided a compelling illustration of the need for the city's workers to defend themselves against exploitation by the city's predatory elite. During a meeting of the Forum on 15 February 1916, the proposal to bail out the YMCA was denounced, its critics contending that whatever the pretensions

²⁸Tom Mitchell, "Forging a New Protestant Ontario on the Agricultural Frontier: Public Schools in Brandon and the Origins of the Manitoba School Question, 1881-1890," *Prairie Forum*, 1 (Spring 1986), 34.

²⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 February 1916; 21 February 1916.

³⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 16 February 1916. McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 90.

of the organization, it had failed to justify its claim for community support and had no right to describe itself as a Christian organization.³¹

A civic bylaw calling for the issue of the debentures as requested by the YMCA required the support of two thirds of the ratepayers who chose to vote on the matter. Though the City Council agreed to submit the matter to a vote, none was held as public opposition to the proposal expressed through the press and the People's Forum led the YMCA to withdraw its request. The YMCA controversy was one manifestation in Brandon of a deepening economic crisis resulting from spiralling war-induced inflation which was spreading economic distress among workers unable to achieve wage increases during a period of war-time austerity. The tumultuous civic discord of the YMCA controversy illustrated how the economic distress could ignite deep class antagonism and political crisis in communities such as Brandon. More immediately, the YMCA controversy stirred a renewed interest in civic affairs. In the fall of 1915, community solidarity in support of the war effort had resulted in the filling of all aldermanic posts by acclamations; in 1916, elections occurred in three of the four city wards. Labourite J.A.G. Grantham, one of the most vigorous opponents of the YMCA proposal, was elected to City Council as the Alderman for Ward One in the city's East end.³²

Civic controversy became a pervasive theme of public affairs in Brandon in 1917. Early in January 1917, the Grain Growers' annual meeting in Brandon was convulsed with conflict over whether to withdraw an invitation to Fred Dixon, an avowed pacifist and opponent of conscription, to address the Grain Growers.³³ Though a motion to withdraw the invitation was defeated, Brandon's newly organized Army and Navy Veterans took advantage of the incident to denounce Dixon publicly. The Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council protested this action, and on 23 January 1917, the Brandon veterans responded with the following motion:

That inasmuch as the Brandon Trades and Labour Council has been disbanded owing to the absence of its members at the front, we do express our utter contempt for the treacherous utterances of men who falsely claim to represent the working classes, and urge that the government take action to have them interned as enemies of the Empire, as being suspect of being on German pay for the duration of the war.³⁴

Evidence presented below indicates that the city's working class was divided deeply on the issue of conscription. Nevertheless, the Dixon episode almost certainly prompted calls from the provincial labour movement

³¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 16 February 1916.

³²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 20 December 1916.

³³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 11 January 1917.

³⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 24 January 1917.

for the reconstitution of the Brandon Trades Council to allow the city's workers to speak for themselves on conscription and the economic and political crisis which was emerging in the last years of World War I. For Brandon's workers, the experience of this crisis radicalized their understanding of the Canadian economic and political system and incited broad based support for direct political action.

In the spring of 1917, wartime inflation and deepening concern over the cost and the availability of essential commodities provoked vigorous working-class protest. By late 1916, the price of fuel in Brandon had risen to record levels owing to a scarcity of coal and to congestion in transportation arteries.³⁵ The price of wood rose with the dearth of coal. Early in January 1917, City Council approved a by-law for the regulation of the sale of wood in the city. The by-law provoked protests from fuel dealers who sought to have it amended or withdrawn.³⁶ In April 1917, in response to the mounting civic controversy over the price and marketing of fuel, the city's organized labour movement, including 12 union locals and 1500 skilled workers, reconstituted the Brandon Trades and Labour Council. In true labourite fashion, the Council's first public utterance was to demand "a square deal for all classes and no railroading."³⁷

The Council turned its attention immediately to the rising cost of fuel. In May 1917, Canadian Pacific Railway locals in the city informed City Council that they were prepared to assist the City in the enforcement of the fuel bylaw. Signalling the growing militancy of the city's working class, the railway workers asserted that they were "prepared to take drastic action ... to bring about more equitable dealing with regard to fuel or other commodities."³⁸ The Trades and Labour Council, in concert with the railway workers, sponsored mass meetings in May and June to protest City Council's refusal to create a municipal fuel yard.³⁹ The Trades Council was responding to, not inciting, the growing militancy of the city's workers. This militancy was principally a product of the deepening economic crisis confronting the city's workers arising from war-time inflation and the inability of workers to secure better wages.⁴⁰ This distress was aggravated by the apparent indifference of government at every level to profiteering at the expense of working people. Frustrated with the failure of government to protect the interests of workers, the Council quickly abandoned its

³⁵ *The Labour Gazette*, Vol. XVII, 1917, 51.

³⁶ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 April 1917.

³⁷ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 April 1917. See also *The Voice*, 4 May 1917 for comment on the demise and reconstitution of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council.

³⁸ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 May 1917.

³⁹ *The Voice*, 15 June 1917.

⁴⁰ *The Labour Gazette*, Vol. XVII, 1917, 54; *The Labour Gazette*, Vol. XVIII, 1918, 1012.

pre-war strategy of nonpartisan political activity. On 1 July 1917, the Council sponsored a meeting to establish the Brandon Labour Representation League, an organization modelled after the League created in Winnipeg in 1912. The Brandon Labour Representation League, like its Winnipeg counterpart, was labourite in its ideological orientation. While it remained the political arm of the city's organized labour movement, the separation of the League from the Trades and Labour Council provided for the participation in the League's activities of radicals who were not formally affiliated with the city's organized labour movement and signalled the commitment of the city's organized labour movement to an inclusive broadly based political party of labour.⁴¹

The League's first political initiative was a cooperative one with the farmers' movement. On 19 July 1917, representatives of the League and Grain Growers in the city met and agreed to nominate a joint candidate to run in the federal election expected in the fall. On 30 July, Rev. A.E. Smith, former SPC activist Edmund Fulcher, and CPR conductor R.T. Smith were nominated by the League as labour candidates for the joint convention scheduled for 1 August 1917.⁴² In the end, labour's experience in this venture was disappointing. At the convention

the views of the Labour Representation League respecting a minimum wage were deliberately ignored, their nominees were, in turn, rejected, and with the exception of a noncommittal resolution calling for the mobilization of men and resources, their resolutions were kept in the background and not submitted to the convention.⁴³

Roderick McKenzie, a Brandon area farmer and former Liberal stalwart, was elected.⁴⁴

In October 1917, the Labour Representation League published its platform for the November civic elections. The program, resolutely labourite in character, was a comprehensive statement of organized labour's aims at the municipal level, including a municipal fuel depot, municipal fire insurance, a progressive system of education, an advanced policy in regard to outdoor amusement and physical development, the establishment of a well-equipped public library, an eight-hour day, a fair wage for all civic employees, a non-exemption property tax, abolition of plural voting in favour of one man, one vote, and abolition of property qualifications for municipal elections.⁴⁵ On 13 November 1917, over 150 supporters of the

⁴¹*The Voice*, 6 July 1917; McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionists*, 94.

⁴²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 30 July 1917. *Henderson's Directory* (Brandon 1917).

⁴³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 August 1917.

⁴⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 August 1917.

⁴⁵*The Voice*, 17 October 1917.

Labour Representation League attended a meeting at which R.B. Ferguson, a painter resident in the City's East end, CPR engineer Robert Crawford, and CPR dispatcher George Morris announced their candidacy in the municipal elections. They would be joined in the election by incumbent J.A.G. Grantham as an aldermanic candidate in Ward One.⁴⁶ Efforts to convince former SPC activist, Edmund Fulcher, to run for Mayor were unsuccessful.

The League's municipal campaign, however, was derailed when conflict over conscription within the city's labour movement erupted. Unhappy with the choice of the Grain Grower's candidate during the joint convention in August, anti-conscriptionists among the city's labour movement determined to nominate a candidate for the December election. On Sunday, 18 November 1917, during a tumultuous meeting called under the auspices of the Trades and Labour Council and presided over by the Council's President, CNR shopworker Fred Baker, E.J.L. Brisson, a young Englishman studying at Brandon College, was nominated as an anti-conscriptionist labour candidate in the federal election.⁴⁷ In reaction to Brisson's nomination, which they considered unpatriotic, Robert Crawford and R.B. Ferguson severed their association with the Labour Representation League, and announced that they would run as independent labour candidates. The *Brandon Sun*, a vigorous advocate of conscription, explained that the

socialist element in the body (the Labour Representation League), together with their anti-conscriptionist campaign have brought the organization into disrepute and antagonized a major portion of the labour party in the city.⁴⁸

The almost immediate decision of the Trades and Labour Council executive to withdraw Brisson from the election because, the *Sun* reported, there was "no chance to win, and it was necessary to raise additional money, which they had no desire to do," underscored the relative weakness of the anti-conscription cause in the city.⁴⁹

In addition to the failure of the anti-conscription initiative, the remaining candidates nominated by the Labour Representation League for the municipal elections were defeated, with the exception of J.A.G. Grantham, who was reelected in the city's East end.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, by the end of 1917, it was clear that the leadership of the city's labour movement was deter-

⁴⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 November 1917. *Henderson's Directory* (Brandon 1917).

⁴⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 19 November 1917; *The Voice*, 23 November 1917. In January, 1918, the students at Brandon College voted to expel Brisson from the College. *Brandon Daily Sun*, 4 January 1918.

⁴⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 22 November 1917.

⁴⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 November 1917; *The Voice*, 11 January 1918.

⁵⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 1 December 1917.

mined to provide an organizational focus for the growing anger among the city's workers against inflation, wartime profiteering, and the increasingly oppressive labour policies of the Union government. Their determination was rendered more impassioned in late 1917 as news of the Russian Revolution reached the city. A.E. Smith's personal reaction to the news of the Revolution suggests the impact it had on the city's radicals

the shock of the Russian Revolution was powerful enough to be felt even in Brandon.... I was aroused. I began to seek information. I sent away for a number of books dealing with the teachings of communism. I got the Manifesto. I remember the first time I read it through. It was like a revelation of a new world into which I felt I must enter and to which I seemed to belong.⁵¹

In the spring of 1918, the city's Labour Representation League was replaced when a Brandon local of the Dominion Labour Party was created. The Dominion Labour Party had been formed in Winnipeg in March 1918 by individuals associated with the Winnipeg Labour Representation Committee and the Winnipeg Social Democratic Party. Immediately following the creation of the party in Winnipeg, William Ivens was dispatched to Brandon to promote the creation of a branch in the city. In early May 1918, he reported to the Winnipeg executive that the creation of a Brandon branch was imminent.⁵² The creation of the Brandon branch exemplified the responsiveness of Brandon's labour political movement to developments in Winnipeg. Indeed, the evanescent character of Brandon's labour political organizations prior to 1920 was due to the influence in Brandon of the rapidly evolving Winnipeg labour movement which, by 1919, constituted the vanguard of working-class militancy in Canada.

The creation of the Brandon local of the Dominion Labour Party signalled the transformation of the city's labour political movement from that of a predominantly proletarian one to one which was an alliance of labourites, progressive liberals, and socialists. Among the original executive of the Dominion Labour Party in Brandon were a teacher, a Presbyterian minister, a section foreman, two school janitors, a shoe store clerk, three CPR shopworkers, a railway conductor, a realtor, a school attendance officer, two railway machinists, a letter carrier, a hardware merchant, and the Rev. A.E. Smith.⁵³ In 1918, Smith played a central role in the historic quadren-

⁵¹A.E. Smith, *All My Life*, 43.

⁵²Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), Dominion Labour Party Winnipeg and District Minutes, MG10A, 14-2, Box 2, F5, 2 May 1918.

⁵³The original executive of the Dominion Labour Party in Brandon included Jas. H. Skene, a teacher; Rev. Jas. Savage, a Presbyterian minister; George Ayers, a section foreman; Wesley Rosebrugh, a railway machinist; W.H. Stringer, a retired carpenter; J.A.G. Grantham, a realtor; W.G. Darvill, a school janitor; Robert

nial conference of the Methodist Church which adopted a report committing the Church "to nothing less than a complete social reconstruction" of Canadian society.⁵⁴

The intent of the Party's leadership, which included leading figures in the revitalized Trades and Labour Council, was to elaborate a political program and strategy which could draw broad support from the city's working class and other progressive elements in the city. To this end, the party's constitution included provision for a press committee, an education and propaganda committee, a membership committee, and an organization committee. Moreover, the party's aims reflect the influence of labourism, the social gospel, and Marxist socialism. These aims included "public ownership of railways, telephones, and other public utilities, free public education, the abolition of property qualifications and election deposits for public office, the abolition of child labour, the establishment of equal pay for men and women, and equal suffrage for men and women over twenty-one years of age," and "the transformation of capitalist property into social property with production for use instead of for profit."⁵⁵ Craig Heron's observation concerning Canadian working-class politics in this era aptly describes the Brandon situation in the spring of 1918:

For the first time ..., working class liberalism had linked up with elements of Marxist and ethical socialism in a dynamic alliance, which, under the old label of labourism, provided the ideological dimension of the unprecedented postwar upsurge of the Canadian working class.⁵⁶

The epidemic of Spanish influenza which swept across the country in the fall of 1918 prevented the holding of any public meetings in the city during the November 1918 civic elections. In the election, labourite J.A.G. Grantham was re-elected. Two other labour candidates endorsed by the Trades and Labour Council and the Dominion Labour Party were defeated.⁵⁷

Bullard, a CPR shopworker; Tom Mellor, the Brandon School Board attendance officer; J. Coplestone, CNR shopworker; Herb Ingham, a letter carrier; J.H. Hines, manager of the Hanbury Hardware Company; David Baker, a machinist; R.T. Smith, a CPR conductor; Sid Broomhall, a shoe store clerk; Charles Page, a CPR shopworker; D. Wood, a school janitor; and CPR employee W.B. Parkes. PAM, Salton Collection, MG7, F8, Dominion Labour Party Constitution, Brandon and District Branch. *Henderson's Directory* (Brandon 1919).

⁵⁴J.M. Bliss, "The Methodist Church and World War I," *Canadian Historical Review*, 3 (September 1968), 229.

⁵⁵PAM, Salton Collection, MG7, F8, Dominion Labour Constitution, Brandon and District Branch.

⁵⁶Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," 67.

⁵⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 30 November 1918.

Clearly, the impact of the Spanish influenza on the election process undermined any electoral advantage the creation of the Dominion Labour Party had given labour. Nevertheless, the limited success of labour's candidates suggested that a means of communicating the political program of the city's labour political movement to Brandon's workers was essential if electoral success was to be achieved. Accordingly, in January 1919, the Brandon Trades and Labour Council, in conjunction with the Dominion Labour Party, began the publication of a labour newspaper, the *Confederate*, characterized by the newspaper's editorial committee as labour's "first considerable undertaking in public propaganda."⁵⁸

In the spring of 1919 a series of dramatic strikes including a civic employees' strike in April 1919, a sympathetic strike in conjunction with the Winnipeg General Strike during May and June, and an abortive general strike at the end of June provoked unprecedented class antagonism in Brandon. Though the civic employees' strike in April was a dramatic success, a determined coalition of forces including the hastily formed Brandon Law and Order League composed of Brandon's business and professional elite, City Council, a special detachment of the Northwest Mounted Police, and provincial and federal authorities defeated the latter two strikes. In the aftermath of the strikes, which apparently ruptured the unity of the Dominion Labour Party, Brandon's workers sought to protect their class interests through direct political action under the auspices of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council and in 1920, the Brandon Labour Party.⁵⁹

1919 was thus a seminal year in the evolution of the city's working-class movement. In engendering a greater working-class solidarity among the city's workers, the spring strikes diminished the social and political isolation of Brandon's workers of central and eastern European origin. Before the war, these workers had remained largely unorganized and outside the city's labour political activities. Their isolation was exacerbated by the hysteria generated by the war. In Brandon, an Alien Detention Centre which contained nearly one thousand "enemy aliens" at the end of 1916 gave Brandon's "alien" population a unique sense of their isolation. It took the dramatic events of the spring of 1919 to cause a reassessment by the city's British and Canadian workers of their relations with the city's "foreign" workers. While evidence exists to suggest that animosity towards "alien" workmen continued to exist among segments of the city's English-speaking working class, the cause of working-class solidarity in the city was

⁵⁸*The Confederate*, 9 January 1919.

⁵⁹For a detailed discussion of these strikes, see Tom Mitchell, "Brandon 1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike," *Manitoba History*, 17 (Spring 1989).

advanced by the determined efforts of the strike leadership to foster labour solidarity through the publication of strike bulletins and the organization of strike rallies and parades in which a significant portion of the participants were Brandon workers of "alien" origin. In the 1920 provincial election, workers voting at the Ukrainian Home in the city's North end cast their ballots almost unanimously for Brandon's first provincial Labour candidate.⁶⁰

The strikes also helped to integrate women into Brandon's labour political movement. Female telephone operators and civic employees were among the city's striking workers during the spring strikes. In 1969, Beatrice Brigden and Edith Cove, two long standing members of Manitoba's labour political movement, recalled that their association with the labour movement dated from their involvement in the Brandon labour crisis of 1919 and the provincial election of 1920.⁶¹

The solidarity of the Brandon's working class was also advanced by the creation of a labour church in Brandon under the leadership of Rev. A.E. Smith. The People's Church, organized on 8 June 1919, was designed to provide a forum "where the gospel of social Christianity could be fearlessly propounded."⁶² The idea of creating the Church had originated with the organizing committee of the Brandon People's Forum which, through the winter of 1918-1919, had sponsored addresses from Smith, William Ivens, Salem Bland, and others. The Brandon Sympathetic Strike was, accordingly, "the occasion, not the cause ... for the organization of the church."⁶³

Predictably, the congregation was predominantly working class with a heavy representation of East end railway workers. Still, the ethnic and

⁶⁰PAC, Sympathetic Brandon, June 1919, RG 27, Vol. 3133, file 150. Constable J.T. McGregor to Inspt. F.W. French, 7 June 1919.

⁶¹*Winnipeg Tribune*, 13 August 1969.

⁶²*The People's Church, Brandon, Manitoba, (A Tentative Proposal)*. United Church Archives (Toronto), Notes on the Labour Churches, File 22, Box 7, Evangelism and Social Service Branch. The People's Church was also the base for the organization of the Brandon Defense Committee. *One Big Union Bulletin*, 20 September 1919.

⁶³PAM, Brigden Collection, MG14, C1 4, Brigden to T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919. Beatrice Brigden was born in Ontario and grew up on the family homestead near Deloraine, Manitoba after January 1888. She was educated at Albert College in Ontario, Brandon College, and the School of Expression in Toronto. In 1913, Brigden was recruited to work for the Evangelism and Social Service branch of the Methodist Church by T.A. Moore. She returned to Brandon in 1919 and quickly became involved in the activities of the People's Church and the political career of A.E. Smith. Brigden continued throughout her life to be involved politically in the Independent Labour Party, the CCF, and the New Democratic Party. Brigden was also active in support of a variety of other progressive causes. See PAM, Brigden Collection, MG 14, C19.

congregational origins of the new church's membership were diverse. In celebrating this diversity, Beatrice Brigden observed concerning an early meeting of the Church that

in one sweep of the eye, I saw three men — one who had served time for attempting to murder his wife — second, an influential Jew — third, an Austrian Greek Catholic who bears the nickname of "King of the Austrians," on the flats he holds the key to every Austrian home — and all three men were eager and susceptible.⁶⁴

Brigden was associated with the People's Church throughout its existence, and was second only to A.E. Smith in its leadership. Early in her involvement in the People's Church, she wrote a letter to T.A. Moore of the Methodist Church — the contents of which Moore reported to the Royal Northwest Mounted Police — expressing her commitment to the work of the Church. In her remarks, Brigden reflected the Church's broad spiritual and political focus:

The dialect of the common people is in my speech and the burden of their ignorance and helplessness, their worth and their aspirations, is on my heart and I never expect to forsake them — so, such time as I am in Brandon, I shall work in the People's Church.⁶⁵

In the first year of the Church's existence Rev. A.E. Smith, William Ivens, J.S. Woodsworth, and others addressed the congregation on topics including the Winnipeg General Strike, economic democracy, proportional representation, production and hours of labour, Jesus the Communist, and Leon Trotsky and his theories.⁶⁶ Yet, the Church was not an exclusively political organization. Smith also dealt with religious issues. Richard Allan has concluded that

in the place of redemption of sinful man by Christ's sacrifice, ... [Smith] preached a social redemption whereby man's ills would be overcome by fruitful work and equitable distribution.⁶⁷

⁶⁴PAM, Brigden Collection, MG14, C14, Brigden to T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919.

⁶⁵PAM, Brigden Collection, MG14, C14, Brigden to T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919.

⁶⁶Notes on the Labour Churches. United Church Archives (Toronto), File 122, Box 7, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Methodist Church. See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1918* (Toronto 1973), 170-171, for a discussion of the duplicity of T.A. Moore, head of Evangelism and Social Service for the Methodist Church, in collecting information for the RNWMP concerning the labour church in Brandon and other points in western Canada.

⁶⁷Richard Allen, *The Social Passion*, 166.

Arguably, the principal significance of the People's Church to its adherents was not the promise of individual salvation, but rather the centrality of social justice to the core of Christ's teachings. Through this commitment to social justice, the People's Church provided "an extraordinary example of utilizing spiritual support for political purposes."⁶⁸ Its central impact was to bind working-class Brandonites together irrespective of their ethnic or congregational origins; its principal creed was "the justice of labour's cause...."⁶⁹

In the wake of the 1919 labour confrontation in Brandon class became a palpable feature of elections in the city.⁷⁰ The defining feature of the municipal elections of 1919 was class antagonism. The *Brandon Sun*, one of the most vigorous opponents of labour in the spring of 1919, supported the mayoralty candidacy of George Dinsdale, the owner of a Brandon cartage operation, and a self-declared "labour" man. The *Sun* skilfully presented Dinsdale as the man capable of representing the interests of both business and labour asserting editorially that:

One of the weaknesses in Dinsdale's candidature is the fact that he, a labour man, is supported by businessmen. Some labour men regard this as impossible. They have set themselves apart as a class, when there should be no such and is no such distinction. A businessman may be and often is, as anxious to see justice done to so-called labour men as they are themselves....⁷¹

Dinsdale explained his decision to run for Mayor by noting that he had been asked to do so by "representative men" and that he was not backed by any "league or party."⁷²

Dinsdale's opponent, Henry Cater, who was endorsed by the *Confederate*, was attacked by the *Sun* as the one person responsible for the conflicts involving civic employees which had resulted in the civic employees' strike of 1919. Even though Cater had ceased to hold public office in 1918, a year prior to the confrontation with civic workers, the *Sun* asserted that during Cater's time as Mayor, Brandon seethed with discontent and "civic staffs and workmen were treated without consideration for their rights or feelings."⁷³

⁶⁸K.O. Wormsbecker, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Political Movement in Manitoba, 1919-1927," MA thesis, Queen's University, 1977, 40.

⁶⁹K.O. Wormsbecker, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Political Movement in Manitoba," 39.

⁷⁰W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians* (Brandon 1982), 235.

⁷¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 21 November 1919.

⁷²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 5 November 1919.

⁷³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 5 November 1919. Harry Cater was a native of Whittingdon, Norfolk, England. Born 4 December 1869, Cater had only three years of formal

A central issue of contention during the election concerned the treatment of civic employees at the conclusion of the Sympathetic Strike, when returning employees were stripped of seniority. Just prior to the election, G.B. Coleman, a city lawyer and alderman for ward one, and one of the most determined opponents of the Civic Employees' Federal Union, persuaded Council to restore the seniority and pay differentials lost by civic employees at the conclusion of the Sympathetic Strike.⁷⁴ In the election, Dinsdale prevailed in a very close contest with Cater, who received the majority of votes in the predominantly working-class wards one and five. In the aldermanic elections, G.B. Coleman was re-elected in ward one by 37 votes, defeating Trades and Labour candidate Charles Durrant. F.E. Carey, a CNR dispatcher and self-declared labour candidate, was elected in Ward Three. The other candidate endorsed by the Trades and Labour Council, Walter Stone, was defeated in ward five by B.J. Hales, Principal of the Brandon Normal School. The Trades and Labour Council had endorsed two candidates for the School Board: William Marlatt won his seat on the Board in ward one by acclamation; George Ayers was defeated in the contest in Ward Five.⁷⁵ The verdict of the *Confederate* on the municipal elections of 1919 was that, though labour's candidates had not all been successful, the workers had won an important victory, for

without wealth, without influence, with only nominal leaders in many instances, with a minimum of support from the printed page; with ranks filled with many wounded and fearful ones, the workers gave battle to the entrenched followers of tradition, special privilege, and wealth.⁷⁶

In the spring of 1920, labour's preparation for the provincial election began on 13 April, when a meeting of representatives from every union organization in the city was held to arrange for the nomination of labour's first candidate for a provincial election. A committee of fifteen members was given the responsibility of drafting a platform to submit to a meeting scheduled for 28 April when a "labour" candidate was to be selected.⁷⁷ On 28 April, ten candidates sought the nomination to run for the Brandon

education. He arrived in Brandon in 1899 after immigrating to St. Thomas, Ontario, in 1887. Cater established a pump manufacturing business which he operated until his death. While Cater was labour's candidate for Mayor in 1919, he lost to A.E. Smith in the contest to run as the candidate for the Brandon Labour Party. For a discussion of Cater's remarkable career in municipal politics, see W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians*, 121-144.

⁷⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 25 November 1919.

⁷⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 November 1919.

⁷⁶*The Confederate*, 5 December 1919.

⁷⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 April 1920; *The Confederate*, 16 April 1920.

Labour Party, it being agreed that the labour candidate in Brandon would not be affiliated with any provincial organization. This approach eliminated past organizational and ideological divisions which might have diminished political solidarity among Brandon's workers in 1920. The candidates who sought the nomination of the Brandon Labour Party represented every tendency in the historical evolution of the Brandon labour political movement including labourites R.T. Smith, R. Crawford, F.E. Carey, and W. Webb, middle class socialists and reformers A.E. Smith, J.A.G. Grantham, J.H. Skene, and Harry Cater, and a Marxist socialist, Henry Bartholomew. The range of candidates signalled the unprecedented degree of labour solidarity in Brandon in the year following the tumult of 1919. After two ballots, A.E. Smith was nominated to run. The meeting also adopted a platform including the introduction of vocational training in secondary schools; support for the principle of collective bargaining; the enforcement of a minimum national standard of living; the extension of hydro-electric power lines to Brandon and western Manitoba; and the socialization of industry.⁷⁸ Lastly, a campaign committee composed of one member from each Union local in the city was appointed with George Ayers as Chairman to supervise the election campaign.⁷⁹

The *Brandon Sun*, reflecting the Brandon business community's entrenched hostility to labour's direct participation in the provincial election, condemned Smith's nomination asserting that the Red element among labour had managed to impose Smith on the convention. Further, the *Sun* postulated that the election of Smith would mean

⁷⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 April 1920. *The Confederate*, 30 April 1920. Smith represented the moderate center of the city's labour political movement. H.M. Bartholomew, who had emerged as a leading figure in the spring strikes was an advocate of the One Big Union, and a radical politically. Following 1920, he moved to Winnipeg and became active in the Socialist Party of Canada. In 1922, he joined the Worker's Party of Canada and remained an active Communist until his death in 1931. See Ivan Avakamoic, *The Communist Party: A History* (Toronto 1974), 24; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal 1981), 97.

⁷⁹George Artimus Ayers was a British immigrant who came to Brandon in 1911 to work as a section foreman on the CNR. Ayers became active in the reconstituted Trades and Labour Council in 1917. He was the President of the Council during the spring 1919 strikes. In July 1920, following Smith's victory, Ayers became the President of a reorganized Dominion Labour Party. *The Confederate*, 16 July 1920. See also, *Henderson's Directory* (Brandon 1911-1920); obituary, George Artimus Ayers, *Brandon Sun*, 11 September 1965; obituary, Mrs. G.A. Ayers, *Brandon Daily Sun*, 2 January 1958.

the bonusing of a Red, a means of livelihood, and a continuance of the discord and strife that, while assisting towards bringing about revolution, is not improving the condition of the working man.⁸⁰

Moreover, the election of Smith would mean four years of Brandon being the centre "for the dissemination of anti-Christian, anti-British teaching."⁸¹

Smith's campaign involved every labour organization in the city, including locals affiliated with the One Big Union. The People's Church also provided vital support to Smith, including resources, workers, and organization. As the election campaign progressed, meetings of the Church were transformed into political rallies, with Smith addressing the congregation on themes such as "Direct Action Through Parliament" and "The Political Power of the Returned Soldier."⁸² Beatrice Brigden and Elizabeth Cove organized the Church's young people in delivering campaign literature and in singing labour songs during election rallies. One student of Manitoba's labour political movement has noted that the labour political movement was "the key to the millennialist goals of the labour church."⁸³

A vital aspect of the election was the fact that, for the first time, three candidates sought the office of Brandon MLA. The incumbent, Liberal Stephen E. Clement, who had played a central role in Smith's fall from grace at First Methodist, had had a disappointing career as Brandon's MLA, never being invited to join the provincial cabinet. Brandon's pride and interests had been offended. The Conservative, Brigadier-General James Kirkcaldy, was prepared to withdraw if Clement would step aside for a Liberal of cabinet stature. Aside from the issue of Clement's stubborn determination to run, the most important issue in the campaign was the question of Smith's suitability for office.⁸⁴

On 29 June 1920, within a few days of the first anniversary of the collapse of the spring strikes of 1919, Smith won the election, polling 1,912 of the 4,655 ballots cast. The Liberal incumbent, Clement, with 1,511 votes and the Conservative Kirkcaldy, with 1,232, had divided the majority between them. Nevertheless, Smith won 10 of 21 polls. He received especially strong support in the East and North ends of the city. At the poll in the North end's Ukrainian Hall, Smith received 88 of the 104 ballots cast.⁸⁵ The

⁸⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 21 June 1920.

⁸¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 June 1920.

⁸²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 May 1920; 19 June 1920.

⁸³K.O. Wormsbecker, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Political Movement in Manitoba," 39. For a discussion of Mrs. Cove's subsequent involvement in the CCF in Winnipeg, see Lloyd Stinson, *Political Warriors: Recollections of a Social Democrat* (Winnipeg 1975), 123-124.

⁸⁴W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians*, 98.

⁸⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 June 1920; *Ibid.*, 6 July 1920.

success of labour's provincial election campaign of 1920 illustrated both the unity of Brandon's working-class population and the mature commitment of working people in the city to independent political action.

Between 1900 and 1920, then, a class conscious labourite ideology had spread to a large portion of Brandon's working class. Skilled workers of English-speaking background had been the first to recognize the need for independent labour action; initially, however, their elitism, based on craft traditions and ethnocentricity, did not allow them to elaborate a program or a strategy of political action that would incorporate the interests of unskilled and non-Anglophone workers. Socialist parties did make efforts to unite the entire working class but their message was not well received by the skilled workers. Wartime and post-war experiences, however, radicalized the labourites' understanding of the political and economic system, and while they remained non-revolutionary, Brandon's labourites and their middle-class allies were increasingly able to speak to the interests of all elements of Brandon's working class. The result was that by 1920 the institutional power of Brandon labour was everywhere evident. The election of a labourite to the provincial legislature that year was the product of the growing sophistication and popularity of the labourite message.

The author wishes to acknowledge the useful comments made on an earlier draft of this paper by Meir Serfaty and Drew Caldwell.

3 From the Social Gospel to “the Plain Bread of Leninism”^{*}: A.E. Smith’s Journey to the Left in the Epoch of Reaction After World War I

Tom Mitchell

JOAN SANGSTER HAS SUGGESTED that one of the principal themes to be addressed in the rewriting of the history of Canadian Communism concerns “why many men and women devoted their lives to the Party.”¹ The following examines this question in relation to the life of the Reverend A.E. Smith. Smith was a central figure in the Communist Party from the mid-1920s through to the time of his death in 1947. He joined the Party in 1925 at the age of 54 after a long career as a Methodist minister and, from 1919 to 1923, as the “missionary of the Labour Church movement in the West.”² Jaroslav Petryshyn has explained Smith’s transformation from clergyman to Communist in apocalyptic terms. He asserts that “after 32 years within the Methodist Church he renounced his position as a high-ranking minister to become a leading member of the communist movement in Canada.”³ In a similar vein, Ramsay Cook has concluded that Smith’s commitment to Communism was the product of an almost inevitable transition from Biblical liberalism, to moralism, to Marxism which “required no great intellectual effort for Smith, once he recovered from the shock of the higher

¹Joan Sangster, “Rewriting the History of Canadian Communism,” *Canadian Dimension*, (January/February 1990), 11-13.

²Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1918* (Toronto 1973), 162-163. Smith recalled his varied career in his autobiography *All My Life* (Toronto 1949). For a discussion of Smith’s career as a Communist see William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International* (Toronto 1968) and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada* (Toronto 1975).

³J. Petryshyn, “From Clergyman to Communist: The Radicalization of A.E. Smith,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 4 (Winter, 1978-79), 67.



Rev. A.E. Smith. Photo courtesy *Provincial Archives of Manitoba*.

criticism."⁴ Neither explanation does justice to the complexity of Smith's journey to the left in the epoch of reaction after World War I.⁵

An examination of Smith's career from 1919 to 1925 suggests that Smith remained a firm and articulate advocate of the radical Social Gospel until at least 1923. Following his departure from Brandon and arrival in Toronto in the summer of 1923, Smith's contact and collaboration with members of the Communist movement in Toronto gave him a new and more compelling vision of social change. While he retained his basic epistemological perspective, Smith exchanged the metaphysical verities of the radical Social Gospel for the apocalyptic vision of the Communist International. Smith's growing association with members of the Communist movement also resulted in his estrangement from the non-Communist left leaving him to choose between the gradualism of the social democratic movement or the insurgency of the Communist Party. His eventual decision to join the Communist Party, though not inevitable, is not surprising. Throughout his career, Smith was incapable of embracing a world view that did not promise an end to history and the triumph of the oppressed. Moreover, his commitment to the working class as the subject of history and to the transformation of capitalist society demanded a form of personal agency which went beyond the predictable war of position of electoral politics. Early in 1925, Smith's journey to the left ended with his embrace of what he termed "the plain bread of Leninism" and his entry into the Communist Party.⁶

From the beginning of his career as a Methodist minister in the West, Smith had been an unrelenting critic of the established order. As early as 1903, he had urged his congregation to take a role in the reform of society, characterizing some churchgoers as "moral cowards" who avoided the fight against "wickedness and vice." As a youthful Methodist minister, Smith was convinced that Christ regarded the Kingdom of God as a "social entity" and had called for the reconstruction of "society on the principles of Brother-

⁴Ramsay Cook, "Ambiguous Heritage: Wesley College and the Social Gospel Re-Considered," *Manitoba History*, 19 (Spring, 1990), 2-11. See also Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto 1985), 223-227.

⁵On this general theme see John Herd Thompson with Allan Seager, *Canada 1922-1939 Decades of Discord* (Toronto) 58-65.

⁶RCMP Report, 23 June 1925. Access to Information File 117-92-049, Canadian Security Intelligence Service (hereafter Access/CSIS), 396. This file consists of approximately 180 pages of Royal Canadian Mounted Police reports for the years 1923 to 1930 dealing principally with Smith's entry into the Communist Party of Canada and his public activities on behalf of that and allied organizations.

hood." Entrance into this Kingdom was not through individual salvation, but through serving one's fellow man in this world.⁷

Smith arrived in Brandon in 1913 to become the Minister at the wealthy First Methodist Church. In October 1913 he was appointed to the Brandon Trades and Labour Council as the first delegate of the Brandon Ministerial Association to that body. Such an appointment was a natural extension of Smith's ministry. In the spring of 1919, when a series of dramatic strikes occurred in Brandon, Smith positioned himself squarely on the side of the strikers. At large open air labour rallies, he spoke in support of the strikes and used his pulpit in First Methodist to advance the case of the militants.⁸

Such solidarity was not appreciated within the city's business community. Feeling against him among some leading members of First Methodist was very bitter; some believed that "Smith deserved to be shot."⁹ During a meeting of the official Board of First Methodist Church held on 26 May 1919 Stephen Clement, a leading Brandon lawyer and Brandon's Liberal MLA, advanced a motion that the Minister be restrained from any further preaching in First Church. The motion was declared out of order as it had originated outside the Church with members of the business community organized as a "citizens' committee" to oppose labour.¹⁰ Still, Clement was

⁷*Prince Albert Advocate*, 14 May 1900 as quoted in Lorry W. Felske, "Science and the Radical Social Gospel in Western Canada," M.A. Thesis, University of Calgary, 1975, 74. and "Portage la Prairie," *Weekly Manitoba Liberal*, 5 December 1907 and 11 February 1907, as quoted in Lorry Felske, "Science and the Radical Social Gospel," 79.

⁸For a discussion of the Brandon Sympathetic Strike see Tom Mitchell, "Brandon 1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike," *Manitoba History*, 17 (Spring, 1989).

⁹RNWMP Report, 25 May 1919. Access/CSIS, 016. This file consists of 295 pages of Royal North West Mounted Police reports for the years 1919 to 1923 dealing principally with Smith's addresses to the People's Church, his political activities in Brandon, and his organizational efforts on behalf of the labour church movement outside Brandon.

¹⁰Accounts of these events are based largely on Smith's own recollection as provided in the *Canadian Tribune*, 10 February 1945 and his autobiography *All My Life*, 59-60. See also Eugene Pirie, "Rev. A.E. Smith," 11. *MSS 72 Ed Rea: Research Papers in Manitoba History* (University of Manitoba Archives). The Brandon's Citizens Law and Order League was organized on a formal basis on early in June 1919 by the city's leading businessmen. Its stated purpose was to use its influence and every legitimate constitutional means to remedy existing social and industrial ills. Members of the League were required to "assist the council of the City of Brandon to maintain in operation all public utilities ... [and] to be sworn in as a special constable at the request of the Mayor from time to time, or at the request of other duly constituted authority...." NAC, #61727, Borden Papers, C4341.

successful in securing Smith's resignation from First Methodist effective 15 June 1919.

Yet Smith was not to leave Brandon. At a meeting in the Starland Theatre on the afternoon of 8 June 1919 about 200 supporters met in connection with the formation of a People's Church "where the gospel of social Christianity could be fearlessly propounded."¹¹ The idea of creating the Church had originated with the organizing committee of the Brandon People's Forum which, through the winter of 1918-1919, had sponsored addresses from Smith, William Ivens, Salem Bland, and others. The Brandon Sympathetic Strike was "the occasion, not the cause ... for the organization of the church."¹² At the meeting, J.H. Skene, a prominent radical in the city, announced that about 125 individuals had returned pledge cards in support of the proposed Church. Smith told the assembly that the church of today would not stand for the teaching of the Social Gospel of Jesus, and that was why he wanted another platform.¹³

Though he was committed to the People's Church, Smith did not plan to leave the Methodist Church. He hoped to remain a Methodist and to reinvigorate that Church through his work in the People's Church. Committed to securing a leave from the Church to pursue the work of the People's Church, in mid-June he travelled to Winnipeg to attend the annual convention of Manitoba Methodists. William Ivens, who had created a labour church in Winnipeg in 1918, was also intent on working outside the Methodist mainstream. The Stationing Committee granted Smith's request to be left without station, but the decision was rescinded when a motion was put forward to refer all special cases to the conference as a whole. Iven's request to be left without station was also denied. Richard Allen has concluded that, with the decision to reject the requests from Smith and Ivens, "the Labour churches were cut adrift from the church and the breach

¹¹Tom Mitchell, "'A Square Deal for All and No Railroadng': Labour and Politics in Brandon 1900-1920," *Prairie Forum*, 1 (Spring, 1990), 57.

¹²Beatrice Bridgen to Dr. T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919. *Bridgen Collection*, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), MG14, C1 4. For a discussion of Bridgen's early career see Joan Sangster, "The Making of a Socialist-Feminist: The Early Career of Beatrice Bridgen, 1888-1941," *Atlantis*, 1 (Fall 1987), 14-28. Smith confirms Bridgen's explanation in a letter to Rev. M.C. Flatt, President of the Manitoba Methodist Conference. See Rev. A.E. Smith to Rev. M.C. Flatt, 13 June 1919. United Church Archives, Toronto, A.E. Smith Papers Box 3, File 64. Yet, the idea may have originated with Smith who was a member of the organizing committee of the People's Forum. Beatrice Bridgen recalled Smith explaining that the idea of creating a labour church had originated with him while on a summer course at the University of Chicago where he had become acquainted with a minister who had been the minister of such a church. Eugene Pirie, "Rev. A.E. Smith," 11.

¹³RNWMP Report, 9 June 1919, Access/CSIS, 025.

between the radical and progressive social gospel yawned ominously wider."¹⁴

On the afternoon of 22 June 1919 Smith addressed a congregation of 400 at the first meeting of the new People's Church. In his address Smith asserted that, with the arrest of the Winnipeg Strike leaders, the Strike could not be settled by an adjustment of wages or working conditions. The Strike had "become a very crusade and nothing but the abolition of the profit system and exploitation will end it."¹⁵ Smith believed that the People's Church had a central role to play in this crusade; in Brandon, it would be the means of splitting the community into two big factions. The question that would cause the split was "that of the right to free utterance and whether or not the churches [would] ... apply themselves to the great social questions ... [of the day]."¹⁶

From the outset, Smith was determined to expand the congregation of the Church. In particular, he sought to draw the non-Anglo Canadian "foreign" population of the city's North end into the Church. Smith told the congregation of the People's Church in August 1919 that the Ukrainians were going to be an immense power to reckon with. He had been asked to go and hold services for them some Sundays and he had great hopes of getting them affiliated with the People's Church movement.¹⁷

The Church would expand not only in the city, for it was Smith's conviction that the People's Church constituted a great new movement which would spread all over Canada in support of a new democracy. In Smith's assessment, the People's Church movement was only the forerunner of a movement that every church in the country would have to take up eventually.¹⁸ Smith was determined to challenge the hold of the traditional church and transform religious life in the country. To achieve this object, he believed that labour churches in Winnipeg had to cooperate with the Church in Brandon and additional congregations had to be organized in centres throughout the West and East.

In the spring of 1920, Smith launched a successful effort to establish labour churches throughout western Canada. He travelled to a variety of centers on his way West to Victoria and Vancouver where he explained how

¹⁴Richard Allen, *The Social Passion*, 115. For Smith's explanation concerning why he wished to be left without station see Rev. A.E. Smith to Rev. M.C. Flatt, President Manitoba Methodist Conference, 13 June 1919. For a discussion of the unsuccessful appeal on behalf of Smith and Ivens to the Methodist Appeal Board in the spring of 1920, see the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 April 1920 and Richard Allen, *The Social Passion*, 117-119.

¹⁵RNWMP Report, 23 June 1919, Access/CSIS, 032 "A".

¹⁶RNWMP Report, 30 June 1919, Access/CSIS, 033 "A".

¹⁷RNWMP Report, 6 August 1919, Access/CSIS, 045.

¹⁸RNWMP Report, 14 July 1919, Access/CSIS, 034.

branches were being established in all the important cities of the West. He hoped that in the summer of 1920 the Chatauqua method could be adopted to spread the influence of the movement to the smaller towns in the West.¹⁹ In Vancouver Smith explained that a new church was needed — a church which would retain religion but one that would strike out dogma, rituals, and mysticism, and replace them with the study of sociology, economics, and “class problems.” The People’s Church would retain religion but a religion divorced from the old superstitious beliefs.²⁰ On his return, Smith reported to the congregation of the Brandon People’s Church that he had succeeded in forming labour churches in Vancouver, Victoria, Calgary, and Edmonton.

The development and expansion of the labour church movement in the West following 1919 was an ongoing preoccupation of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) and the Methodist Church of Canada. The surveillance of Smith’s activities by the RNWMP beginning in the spring of 1919 was part of a larger state reaction against perceived protagonists of crisis.²¹ An early report characterized Smith as “an agitator of the Soviet system, ... more dangerous than any other Bolshevik Agitator for he has intelligence and influence.”²² In October 1919, this surveillance continued; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) Officer Commanding at Brandon was instructed to detail a constable in plain clothes to report on the meetings of the People’s Church.²³

The existence of the People’s Church, its radical message, and Smith’s efforts in the spring of 1920 to spread the People’s Church movement to other western centres, also drew a hostile reaction from the Methodist Church which concluded that the labour church movement in the West was a threat to its congregational integrity. A liaison developed between Dr. T.A. Moore, Director of the Methodist Social Service and Evangelism branch, and Lt. Col. C.F. Hamilton, Chief Intelligence Officer of the RNWMP. Their mutual hostility to the labour church movement resulted in their cooperation in the collection of information on the labour church

¹⁹RCMP Reports, 28 March 1920, 26 April 1920, 6 May 1920, Access/CSIS, 094. Effective February 1920 the Royal North West Mounted Police became the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (hereafter RCMP).

²⁰RCMP Report, 6 May 1920, Access/CSIS, 109.

²¹For a general discussion of the shape of this crisis see Gregory S. Kealey, “State Repression of Labour and the Left in Canada, 1914-1920: The Impact of the First World war,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 3 (September 1992), 281-314. See also Tom Mitchell, “‘To Reach the Leadership of This Revolutionary Movement’: A.J. Andrews, the Canadian State and the Suppression of the Winnipeg General Strike.” Forthcoming *Prairie Forum*.

²²RNWMP Report, 7 May 1919, Access/CSIS, 002.

²³RCMP Report, 27 October 1920, Access/CSIS, 131.

movement in the West and the production of a Police report entitled "Notes on the Labour Church" in which the condition of the various labour churches in the West was discussed.²⁴

It is likely that this report was also the basis for an assault on the Brandon People's Church in the summer of 1920 when, in a supplement to the August 1920 edition of the federal Department of Labour's *Labour Gazette* entitled *Information Respecting the Russian Soviet System and Its Propaganda in North America*, it was denounced as an organ of Russian propaganda. In a two page discussion of this document the *Canadian Forum* lamented the lapse of the *Gazette* from serious journalism to "propaganda." A.E. Smith responded to the *Gazette* supplement with the assertion that the responsibility for the publication of the pamphlet rested with a government that had usurped office through the War Times Election Act and was the equivalent of a "Canadian Bolshevik Party," for like the Bolsheviks it had turned to propaganda and spies as instruments of government.²⁵

Like the RNWMP, some historians have concluded incorrectly that Smith was transformed by the post-war crisis into a Marxist revolutionary. Ramsay Cook dates Smith's fall from grace from his first encounter with the higher criticism while a student at Wesley College. As Cook explains "Smith, at first, was devastated, but a moralistic liberalism reassured him for a couple of decades until he discovered another faith, this time in Marxism."²⁶ While more thorough in his assessment of Smith's career, still, Jaroslav Petryshyn has provided an oversimplified explanation of Smith's transformation. In particular, his treatment of Smith's Brandon experience is inadequate and in some instances incorrect. Neither Cook or Petryshyn has provided evidence to detail the process of Smith's intellectual transformation or to illuminate the dynamics of this move from the sacred to the profane. In fact, Smith did become a Marxist, but not a "couple of decades" after his first encounter with the higher criticism. In June 1920, J.G. Davies, who had followed Smith to the People's Church from First Methodist, reported that "To our knowledge there has been no change in the minister's theological views in the last ten years."²⁷ Contrary to what Cook and

²⁴"Notes on the Labour Churches," File 22, Box 7, Evangelism and Social Service Branch. United Church Archives, Toronto.

²⁵*Information Respecting the Russian Soviet System and Its Propaganda in North America* (Canada Department of Labour, August 1920). NAC, Records of the Department of Labour, RG 27 Vol. 168, file 613.04:1. *The Canadian Forum*, 2 (November 1920), 42-43. For Smith's reaction to this publication see *The Confederate*, 3 September 1920.

²⁶Ramsay Cook, "Ambiguous Heritage," 8.

²⁷*The Confederate*, 25 June 1920. For Petryshyn's views see J. Petryshyn, "From Clergyman to Communist," 67. Petryshyn indicates that the Manitoba provincial

Petryshen have argued, Smith's intellectual world was not transformed by World War I or the immediate post-war crisis. These developments simply provided confirmation for Smith of the inequity of a society dominated by a predatory capitalism and provided him with the challenge to fulfil his subjectivity as an advocate of radical social reform.

In the post-war era of reaction, when the advocacy of the Social Gospel became unfashionable, even dangerous for one's career in the Methodist Church, and made its advocates the objects of interest to state security, Smith clung to the principles which, since his days at Wesley College, had guided his ministry. Until at least a year after his departure from Brandon in 1923, Smith remained a dedicated social democrat who was convinced of the need to respect constitutional and democratic procedures, who viewed the British Labour Party — not a Marxist Revolution — as the ideal political instrument for change, and who was convinced that political gradualism was essential if durable change was to be achieved. In Smith's view, the first step in transforming society was to challenge the capitalist control of the public schools, churches, and the press for the salvation of the working class depended on the shaping of the working man's self-consciousness.²⁸ In short, "a revolution had to take place, not one whereby men, women and children were to be shot on the street, but by education" and political action.²⁹

The intellectual anchor of Smith's commitment to social democracy was the Social Gospel. Evident within Canadian Protestantism since the 1880s, the Social Gospel was derived from a number of modernist currents in Christianity and general European and North American intellectual life including

the broad notion of evolutionary progress and the specific scientific arguments of Darwin, populist discontent and progressivism, industrialism and urbanization with its attendant dislocations and poverty, and the socialist critique of capitalism.³⁰

Growing in influence after the turn of the century, variations of the Social Gospel from moderate to radical advanced the cause of social justice and

election took place in 1921. In fact it took place in 29 June 1920. Second Petryshyn indicates that Smith was defeated in the provincial election in 1923. The correct date is 30 July 1922.

²⁸RCMP Report, 14 June 1920, Access/CSIS, 122; 21 June 1920, 124; and, RCMP Report, 17 June 1920, Access/CSIS, 127.

²⁹RCMP Report, 26 April 1920, Access/CSIS, 107.

³⁰Diane Yeager, "Focus: The Ethics of the Social Gospel," *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 1 (Spring 1990), 4. On the general theme of the Social Gospel in Canada see Richard Allen, ed., *The Social Gospel* (Ottawa 1975) and Michael Gavureau, *The Evangelical Century* (Montreal & Kingston 1991).

turned a sharp focus on social ethics and social relations within society. Yet, the Social Gospel had a number of limitations as a guide to social analysis or as basis for political action. It was excessively optimistic and utopian and, among its adherents, the doctrine promoted a naive notion of the character of conflict and social change. The Social Gospel also posited an "untenable conception of linear universal human progress."³¹ Smith's Social Gospel incorporated the most radical aspects of this inchoate tendency in Methodism, termed by one writer "the backbone of activist Christianity."³²

Typical of most Social Gospelers, Smith was preoccupied with the temporal significance of the life of Christ. In his addresses to the People's Church, he presented Christ as a modern day political and economic revolutionary. He taught that Jesus was a great ethical teacher of fundamental truths about man and society. To illustrate the radicalism of Jesus, Smith made use of contemporary examples. William Ivens, incarcerated for his involvement in the Winnipeg General Strike, was likened to Jesus Christ. Both had been oppressed by a spiteful people. Smith asserted that officials of the churches wished "to see Ivens placed against a wall and shot."³³ Smith also transformed the traditional image of Mary from the mother of Christ to that of a political revolutionary. In Smith's view, it was

a mistake, and almost blasphemy, to consider Mary as a weak, supine creature, dressed in stately robes as she is depicted in so many religious pictures. Mary was a revolutionist, full of fire, and it is a pity that there are not more women like her to-day, who would teach revolution to their children. The one thing the Proletariat movement needed was radical minded women.³⁴

Smith believed that it was the obligation of the People's Church and all adherents of Christ to carry on Christ's work.

An important current of thought within the Social Gospel placed "the location of the Christian hope in an earthly millennium rather than in the mystic City of God...."³⁵ It followed that the approaching utopia would be a moral regeneration of man, not a physical conflagration with the actual return of Christ to earth. Smith believed in the imminent collapse of capitalism as a critical step toward such an earthy millennium. He told the congregation of the People's Church that there were large numbers of people who expected the heavens to open and Jesus to come flying down

³¹Diane Yeager, "Focus: The Ethics of the Social Gospel," 5.

³²John Herd Thompson, *Canada 1922-1939*, 60.

³³RCMP Report, 15 November 1920, Access/CSIS, 141.

³⁴RCMP Report, 27 December 1920, Access/CSIS, 146.

³⁵Michael Gauvreau, "The Taming of History: Reflections on the Canadian Methodist Encounter with Biblical Criticism, 1830-1900," *Canadian Historical Review*, 3 (1984), 316.

to Earth. This was a very foolish idea. Jesus would never visit the Earth; those who were waiting would be disappointed. Salvation on Earth would come about through the creation of a new social order and all had to work to this end if anything was to be accomplished.³⁶ In this regard, Smith taught that no person could be a Christian and a follower of Christ and believe in the existing social order. Moreover, just as the existing order lacked legitimacy, so did the Christian Church. In Smith's view, true Christianity did not exist; at least not according to the principles of Jesus. To illustrate his point Smith explained that the Lord's Prayer was unrelated to personal salvation, but a prayer directed against the present economic system.³⁷

Smith's description of the earthly kingdom which he believed Christ intended at the end of history had a contemporary ring. This society would be a communist, universal brotherhood of man which knew no boundaries.³⁸ Smith viewed himself and the People's Church as agents of human progress toward such an earthly Kingdom of God. This position was not unusual for a Methodist minister of Smith's generation. In the late 19th century Methodist thinking about the past and the future was dominated by an orientation which "led many Protestant scholars and clergymen to abolish the separation between divine and human spheres, with God no longer a transcendent deity whose activity was manifested in specific occurrences, but immanent in the historical process itself."³⁹ In May 1920 Smith told the congregation of the People's Church that he believed that the work of the People's Church had received divine sanction.⁴⁰

Smith's Social Gospel also drew vigour from his adherence to a reading of history rooted in an optimistic, naturalist teleology informed by Darwinian and positivist notions of historical change which viewed the oppressed working class as the subject, not the object, of history. As he explained to the congregation of the People's Church:

The present unrest would have come despite everything — history shows many similar movements — the democratizing of the church, education, forms of government — and now its has come to the time of the democratizing of property or economic democracy and this idea is surging through the very minds of the men today. There are two great forces pushing along for this objective today and these are the socialist movement and the Trades Unions or Labor Party — and it is going to come, the masses of the people are going to rule.⁴¹

³⁶RCMP Report, 5 March 1922, Access/CSIS, 256.

³⁷RCMP Reports, 1 April 1920, Access/CSIS, 096.

³⁸RNWMP Report, 15 November 1919, Access/CSIS. 067/

³⁹Michael Gauvreau, *The Evangelical Century*, 315.

⁴⁰RCMP Report, 6 May 1920, Access/CSIS, 109.

⁴¹RNWMP Report, 30 July 1919, Access/CSIS, 040.

In a debate in Brandon in December 1920 with Marxist Henry Bartholomew concerning whether the process of reform had value "in achieving the aims of the revolution," Smith dealt in detail with his conception of history and social change. He argued that the process of social reform had value because society was organic. He believed that

Plant and animal life grow according to laws. It is the same in the society of man, there are organic laws of social growth which cannot be suspended without destruction. There are no violent revolutions in geological history to promote development.⁴²

Smith suggested that the French Revolution was probably the best of all political upheavals. However, after the period of Utopianism had past, the movement was compelled to fit the new into the old. In Smith's view, the present order was the result of a series of concessions for the welfare of humanity. It was evident that the process of reform had value because of the organic formation of society. Revolution must not stand for violence, destruction, or war. Revolution was simply a speeding up of organic processes.⁴³ It followed that real, lasting change would be organic and evolutionary, building on, yet reforming the institutions in place in the country. In October 1919 Smith told a Labour Church audience of 800 in Winnipeg that

the natural evolution of the working class was bound to give them supremacy in all things relative to their conditions and Government and that the term Revolution simply meant that they were not going to wait for a thousand years for these things to come to pass.⁴⁴

Smith's belief in the inevitability of progress and his adherence to a Darwinian world view made him a gradualist committed to the social transformation and reconstruction of society via conventional political strategies. Force would achieve nothing. The passage of power to the

⁴²RCMP Report, 29 December 1920, Access/CSIS, 149. H.M. Bartholomew, who had emerged as a leading figure in the Brandon spring strikes was an advocate of the OBU, and a member of the Socialist Party of Canada. He was a frequent contributor to the *Western Clarion*. Following 1920, he moved to Winnipeg. In 1922, he joined the Worker's Party of Canada and remained an active Communist until his death in 1931. See Ivan Avakamoic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 24; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal 1981), 97.

⁴³Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 147.

⁴⁴RNWMP Report, 20 October 1919, Access/CSIS, 065.

proletarian would be achieved through legal constitutional methods on the terrain of politics.⁴⁵

Smith's gradualism did not sit well with some of the more militant among Brandon's workers. In June 1919, just after his return from Winnipeg where he had witnessed the arrest of Ivens and the other strike leaders and had been forced out of the Methodist Church, Smith told an audience of workers that "while he prayed that the Strike leaders might be found innocent and released, that nevertheless if any crime could be proved against them that they would have to take the consequences."⁴⁶ Moreover, Smith believed that there had been too much extremism on both sides, and that labour would have to realize that there was a great body of moderates in the country who would have to be considered and that Labour would have to abandon the strike and physical force as strategies and employ political action to achieve its ends.⁴⁷ Smith took a similarly moderate line in September 1919 during a discussion of political changes required in Canada. In advocating the introduction of proportional representation in Canada, Smith asserted that the Soviet system would never do for Canada. Moreover, he did not think that many of the European countries would adopt it. On both occasions, Smith's position, reported the RNWMP "was not at all relished by the 'Reds'" in attendance.⁴⁸

Smith's Social Gospel orientation made him a centrist on most issues of concern to labour and shaped a commitment to the building a coalition of progressive forces to usher in the new Jerusalem. Through 1919 and 1920 he maintained healthy links with all aspects of the labour community. He contributed to the *Confederate*, a newspaper published by the Brandon Trades and Labour Council in conjunction with the Brandon branch of the Dominion Labour Party. He attended events sponsored by the One Big Union in Brandon. In addition, he was active in the Brandon Defence Committee, organized in the summer of 1919 to support the strike leaders on trial in Winnipeg, and created under the auspices of the People's Church.

In the summer and fall of 1919, Smith generally avoided taking sides in the struggle for control of the institutions of organized labour which had followed the collapse of the Sympathetic Strike. As in Winnipeg, this contest did not prevent the cooperation of all elements of the labour community in the provincial election in the spring of 1920. In fact, cooperation was a natural extension of the solidarity of the spring strikes. The People's Church and the Brandon Defence Committee contributed to this unity. In

⁴⁵ RNWMP Report, 15 August 1919, Access/CSIS, 051.

⁴⁶ RNWMP Report, 20 June 1919, Access/CSIS, 39.

⁴⁷ RNWMP Report, 20 June 1919, Access/CSIS, 39.

⁴⁸ RNWMP Report, 8 September 1919, Access/CSIS, 059.

April 1920, the Defence Committee organized a meeting of Brandon labour men to consider labour's participation in the 1920 provincial election. The meeting passed a resolution in support of the convicted Winnipeg Strike leaders and agreed that a conference of representatives from every labour organization in the city would convene on 13 April 1920 to select a candidate to run in Brandon in the provincial election. In an editorial on 16 April 1920 entitled "The Awakening Masses" the *Confederate* asserted that

The history of labour is oppression. From earliest times until the present hour the productivity of human labour has been carried on under one or another form of oppression. The central and prime problem of today is the emancipation of the working class from economic and industrial oppression By the nomination of a Labor Candidate the challenge is given squarely and fairly to the traditional and reactionary elements who are solidifying into the old parties.⁴⁹

At the convention held Tuesday, 27 April attended by 106 voting delegates representing 26 organizations, Smith was nominated from among 10 candidates to run as a candidate of the Brandon Labour Party in the provincial election. A platform including support for the introduction of vocational training in the secondary schools, the adoption of the principle of collective bargaining, the enforcement of a national minimum standard of living, the extension of the Hydro-electric power line to Brandon and the western portion of the province for domestic and commercial use, and the socialization of industry and capital was approved by the convention. The *Confederate* celebrated Smith's nomination by announcing that "Labor has heard the challenge. The cry of the people has rang in its ears. It has shaken off its sloth and is awake."⁵⁰

Predictably, Smith's opposition in the Brandon constituency came from candidates of the Liberal and Conservative parties. These parties had emerged in Brandon, complete with partisan newspapers, during the 1880s. Gerald Friesen has concluded that the Liberal and Conservative Parties in the West

were parties with eastern Canadian roots and British intellectual forbears; they may have expressed significant differences in those communities, but in translation to the prairie west they came to represent two versions of the same class and cultural loyalties.⁵¹

⁴⁹ On the decision to call the meeting see the *Brandon Sun*, 5 April 1920 and 12 April 1920. *The Confederate*, 16 April 1920.

⁵⁰ *The Confederate*, 30 April 1920.

⁵¹ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: a History* (Toronto 1984), 342.

In Brandon, old line parties had dominated the city's politics, successfully exercising hegemony over agrarian voluntarists during the 1880s and 1890s and an increasingly militant working class in the years after the turn of the century. In the 1920 provincial election, it was increasingly evident that the city's politics had been transformed in the crucible of World War I. In the weeks before the election the prospect of running one strong candidate against Smith vanished when the incumbent, Smith's adversary from First Church, Stephen Clement, who had been discredited by one term in the Legislature, insisted on running in the election.

In an editorial assessment of the candidates two weeks before the election, the *Brandon Sun* condemned Clement for having failed completely to defend and advance the interests of the city. Smith fared no better. The *Sun* asserted that given a position of influence and prominence he would sow bitter seeds of dissension and distrust regarding fundamental and sacred things. "He will set forth views ... that will set class against class and cause endless bitterness and jealousy."⁵² Of the three candidates, the *Sun* believed that Brigadier General Kirkcaldy, a man who insisted on campaigning in full military uniform, had the most to commend him for Kirkcaldy "had served the city and the Empire faithfully and well. He supplied leadership in many crisis abroad and can do so here at home where forces of unrest are taking advantages of injustices to provoke a greater crisis than any yet faced."⁵³

On 18 June 1920 the *Sun* reduced the contest to Smith vs. Kirkcaldy. After condemning Clement for not withdrawing so that the contest could be between "the Reds and a candidate favouring constitutional methods," the *Sun* signaled the growing support for the Labour campaign by asserting that the central issue of the campaign was not the questionable record of the Norris regime, but whether Brandon should be represented "by a Red," for Smith had "proven himself an apostle of unrest." His election would provide him a "'grub stake'" to enable him to continue to set class against class and spread the doctrine of revolution.⁵⁴

The *Sun* sought to mobilize the traditional authority of the Church against Smith. It advised its readers that there was "reason to believe that not one of the ministers of the Christian Church in Brandon endorses the candidature of A.E. Smith or the revolution he has ceased to work for openly during the election campaign."⁵⁵ Two days before the election, the *Sun* printed an open letter from Rev. James Savage, who had resigned from St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in the East end working-class region of the

⁵²*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 15 June 1920.

⁵³*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 15 June 1920.

⁵⁴*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 June 1920.

⁵⁵*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 June 1920.

city because of a dispute with his congregation over Smith. This letter, published on the front page of *Sun*, asserted that

For months past our city has harboured A.E. Smith and countenanced his anti-Christian and pagan teachings. He is undermining our Christian institutions, stirring up a constant agitation, ill-will and class strife. Did the citizens of Brandon want to give this arch-perverter of faith and morals an indemnity from the funds of this province to keep him preaching Bolshevism, Sovietism, and "proletarian dictatorship"?⁵⁶

In the election Smith prevailed winning 10 of 21 polls and 1,912 votes compared to 1,511 for Clement and 1,232 for Kirkcaldy. A large procession headed by the City band paraded the main streets of the city finally ending at the residence of the new member where Smith triumphantly asserted that the election marked the "dawn of a great day when the emancipation of the workers will be complete."⁵⁷

In the wake of the 1920 provincial election four groups including the Liberal party, the Conservative party, the Independent Farmers and Labour vied for power in the provincial Legislature. In mid-March 1922, after two years in office dependent on the votes of opposition groups for survival, the provincial government of T.B. Norris was defeated. In late April a convention of the Brandon Labour Party was held to nominate a candidate for the provincial election. Three hundred people attended, including seventy-five delegates present from various labour organizations in the city. The RCMP estimated that 20 per cent of the attendance was made up of "foreigners" while 3 per cent were women. Smith's nomination was unanimous and a platform was approved by the convention. A committee was elected to support Smith in the campaign.⁵⁸

Smith's victory in the 1920 provincial election has come at a time when the hegemony of the city's business elite was under assault. The factionalism of the civic elite in not countering Smith with one business candidate had opened the door to Smith's victory in a three cornered contest. By 1922 there was an appreciation that the times called for special initiative unprecedented in Brandon politics. A change in the personnel, organization, and policy of the business party was required. Though it was hardly required, the drive to defeat Smith was given greater impetus by the fact that planning for the 1922 provincial election went on in the midst of a bitter schools controversy in which Smith was involved which had divided the city and

⁵⁶*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 June 1920.

⁵⁷*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 30 June 1920.

⁵⁸RCMP Report, 21 April 1922, Access/CSIS. The Platform of the Brandon Labour Party was published in the *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 6 May 1922. It never appeared in the *Brandon Daily Sun*.

devastated the community's schools.⁵⁹ In the election of 1922, the combined forces of the Liberal and Conservative parties and dissident elements in the labour community waged a ferocious campaign against Smith on behalf of a "fusionist" candidate in a drive to discredit labour radicalism in the city.

Smith was aware that members of the business elite in Brandon were determined to defeat him and had forsworn their traditional factionalism in a determined effort to do so. He believed that there was

only one basis of union in which the two parties can unite in the city of Brandon and that is the basis of hate and prejudice against the Labor party which represents the true interests of the people.⁶⁰

In fact, the initiative to run a joint candidate had come from the Brandon Liberal Party which decided in the middle of May to seek the support of the Conservatives to oppose A.E. Smith. By 25 May 1922 agreement had been reached between these traditional adversaries to hold a joint convention on Friday evening 26 May 1922 to select a joint candidate. Each party was to send 4 delegates for each of the 21 polls in the constituency.⁶¹

During a meeting of the delegates on 26 May, attention turned to consideration of Hon. G.H. Malcolm, Minister of Agriculture in the Norris government, as a possible independent candidate for Brandon. To allow time to determine whether Malcolm would be interested in running in Brandon, the meeting was adjourned until 30 May.⁶² At the meeting on 30 May, 168 accredited delegates unanimously selected Dr. J.H. Edminson as a fusion candidate to contest the Brandon constituency against Smith. Edminson had not emerged as a possible candidate until the morning of 30 May. Clearly he was a compromise candidate described by the *Winnipeg Tribune* as "known to all citizens as a man of the highest integrity and ... popular among all classes."⁶³ Electability seemed to be the principal concern in the selection of Edminson for, as the *Tribune* explained, "Nobody seemed to know to what political faith Edminson belonged and no one seemed to care."⁶⁴ In announcing the victory of Edminson, Dr. J.S.

⁵⁹Tom Mitchell, "'We Must Stand Fast for the Sake of Our Profession': Teachers, Collective Bargaining, and the Brandon Schools Controversy of 1922," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 1 (Spring 1991).

⁶⁰RCMP Report, 18 May 1922, Access/CSIS, 270.

⁶¹*The Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 20 May 1922; 26 May 1922.

⁶²Press reports indicate that Malcolm, the Minister of Agriculture in the Norris government, was viewed as a potential Premier in the event that the United Farmers of Manitoba won the provincial election. See the *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 2 May 1922, 27 May 1922.

⁶³*Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 31 May 1922.

⁶⁴*Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 31 May 1922.

Matheson, who chaired the meeting, announced triumphantly that "There are no Grits or Tories now, are there?" For his part, Edminson allowed that he was new to the political game. If he was elected, however, he would "forget all party politics and act as an independent." Moreover, he would vote in the interests of the city of Brandon and of the electors of the province.⁶⁵

Well before the call of the election Smith had told an audience of 130 at the People's Church that he expected that the United Farmers of Manitoba would sweep the province and carry about 35 seats. Moreover, Smith expected Labour to do well and to line up in the House with the agrarians. Though UFA had decided during its 1921 Convention to enter provincial politics as an organized force; still, in 1922, no UFA candidate was nominated for the Brandon constituency. Yet Smith did not benefit from this. The executive of the UFM did not view labour sympathetically. In fact, no provision was made for an exchange of views between labour and farmers at the 1921 convention except for a luncheon address by Smith.⁶⁶ Arguably, the United Farmers did not nominate a candidate in Brandon because they understood that both Smith and Edminson were prepared to associate themselves with the farmers in the Legislature.

In the election campaign of June and July, Beatrice Brigden recalled being "dumbfounded by the bitterness, hostility and hatred displayed by the *Sun* against Smith and everyone in the congregation whom they accused of every evil there was."⁶⁷ Following one meeting E.C. Whitehead, the publisher of the *Brandon Sun* and an ardent opponent of Smith, gave Bridgen such a shove that she was barely able to save herself from a serious fall.⁶⁸ The *Brandon Sun* largely ignored the Smith campaign. When it did report on the Smith campaign activities its bias was evident. For example, on 23 June the *Sun* reported that

The red "labor" meeting held in the City Hall Thursday night was attended only by the chosen and elect few, and the addresses both of W. Bailey, communist candidate in Assiniboia, and A.E. Smith, concentrated mainly on references to the *Brandon Sun* and ... a specious setting forth of the "righteous" demands of the "labor group."⁶⁹

Edminson's campaign received regular and favourable coverage. For his part Edminson sought to draw support from the city's workers. During a rally on 23 June, Edminson stated that he stood for "constitutional Govern-

⁶⁵For Brandon reports see the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 31 May 1922.

⁶⁶*Western Labour News*, 21 January 1922.

⁶⁷Eugene Pirie, "Rev. A.E. Smith," 67.

⁶⁸Eugene Pirie, "Rev. A.E. Smith," 67.

⁶⁹*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 23 June 1922.

ment." He declared that he had always been sympathetic to labour and if elected he could do just as much for labour in the legislature as his opponent could. Moreover, Edminson claimed that he was not tied to either the Conservative or Liberal Party.⁷⁰

The labour unity which had characterized the provincial election campaign of 1920 was not evident in 1922. In the fall of 1920, divisions within the organized labour movement undermined the unity of the province's labour political movement. A split between the international unions and the legislative "labour" group, which emerged as the Independent Labour Party by the end of 1920, went from bad to worse. The defeat of the Norris government in mid-March of 1922 on a motion of censure supported by the entire labour group "brought cries of anguish and condemnation" from members of the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council.⁷¹

Though Smith sought to avoid identification with any one camp, he did not succeed in maintaining the support of all elements of the labour movement in Brandon and Edminson's campaign benefitted by some notable defections from Smith's previous supporters. For example, at an organizational meeting associated with Edminson's campaign R.T. Smith, a leading figure in the labour movement in Brandon and an erstwhile supporter of Smith and the People's Church, asserted that Smith did not represent him.⁷² Another prominent figure in the city's organized labour movement, Robert Crawford, told an election rally that he supported the stand that was taken by the international unions and the Trades and Labour Council in the City of Winnipeg where a resolution had been passed opposing the labour group in the Legislature. Crawford could not support Smith and the labour group headed by Dixon because of their "socialistic tendencies." Crawford also recalled Smith's criticism of him for keeping the railway running trades at work during the Brandon sympathetic strike in the spring of 1919. As Crawford explained, he would not

forget what happened in 1919 when the attitude of Mr. Smith was against me personally because of the stand taken by R.T. Smith and myself in being instrumental in saving the international unions from disaster. As long as he continues to wage red propaganda he can count on it that I will continue to be a thorn in his side.⁷³

Throughout the campaign Smith's character and patriotism were attacked. In a speech in Brandon the Premier announced that he did not think that Mr. Smith was "a labor man at all, but that he is a socialist of the

⁷⁰*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 24 June 1922.

⁷¹Martin Robin, *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930* (Kingston 1968), 215.

⁷²*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 June 1922.

⁷³*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 June 1922.

extreme kind; he is opposed to the present system of constitutional government and therefore cannot be considered a good citizen of Manitoba."⁷⁴ In a 30 June 1922 editorial the *Sun* attacked Smith for portraying the city as a place that was

overlorded by brutal men who employed down trodden browbeaten workers whom they rob and are otherwise unjust. This old nonsense is the stock-in-trade of all labor extremists, socialists of the red kind and the more oily spokesmen of the cause of the proletariat. Nevertheless that is the whole substance of the long winded diatribes of the apostle of menace opposing Citizen Dr. Edminson.⁷⁵

On 18 July, Edminson prevailed in the contest winning 14 of 22 polls and 3,249 votes to Smith's 2,026. The *Sun* reported that the campaign was one of the best organized in any election in the city. Edminson's campaign had benefitted in particular from the recruitment of women to his organization. This was likely in response to the continued importance of the People's Church in Smith's campaign.⁷⁶

Smith's prospects in Brandon after his 1922 defeat were increasingly unattractive. As early as the spring of 1920 he had told the congregation of the People's Church that his income from the Church was inadequate. With the loss of his stipend as MLA his personal financial situation worsened. In October 1922 Smith announced to the congregation of the People's Church that he had started a class in Brandon for the study of working-class problems at which he had enrolled 27 at \$2.00 for 12 lectures.⁷⁷ By March 1923 Smith was searching farther afield for alternatives. He announced a plan to tour Ontario with a view to organizing People's Forums in various communities. These would be linked with the People's Church movement in the West. He required \$1,200 for the tour. He planned to contribute \$200 himself; he hoped to get support from the Labour MLAs and MPs. He asked the congregation for \$400.⁷⁸

In April 1923 Smith was in Toronto attempting to form a labour church. On 8 April, he addressed an audience at the Toronto Labour Temple and secured a promise of support for such a venture. Describing his church to those who attended the meeting, Smith said it laid emphasis upon sociology, economics, and history. He explained that, though the term "Church" was capitalized, there was no attempt to convert sinners, the idea was "to get

⁷⁴*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 22 June 1922.

⁷⁵*The Brandon Daily Sun*, 30 June 1922.

⁷⁶*Winnipeg Free Press*, 8 June 1922. For detailed results of the election see the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 19 July 1922.

⁷⁷RCMP Report, 16 October 1922, Access/CSIS, 272.

⁷⁸RCMP Report, 20 March 1923, Access/CSIS, 273.

people to come our direction.”⁷⁹ By June 1923 Smith had decided to move to Toronto. On 25 June the Assistant Commissioner of the RCMP sent the Officer Commanding the RCMP in Toronto Smith’s “personal history file.”⁸⁰

Smith arrived in Toronto in August 1923. On 10 September 1923 he addressed the Toronto People’s Church for the first time. He outlined the objectives of the Church as summarized in the “Declaration of Precepts.” Typical of the Social Gospel these “Precepts” were concerned with the kind of social ethics appropriate to the “New Social Order” which would arise following the demise of capitalist society. This new social order would rest “on the great principles of Love, Justice and Truth.”⁸¹ In October 1923 the executive committee of the People’s Church merged with the Forum Committee of the Labour Temple which was a branch of the Canadian Labor Party. With this merger, Smith added the responsibilities of Secretary of a Labour Forum to his activities.

Smith’s arrival in Toronto was not ignored by the Communists. Members of the English Branch of the Workers’ Party of Canada viewed Smith as a “religious crank” or a socialist of the J.S. Woodsworth type. His views were considered dangerously misleading and it was suggested to the Party’s Central Executive Committee that Smith’s views be counteracted by questions asked by Communists at his meetings and by debate.⁸² In *All My Life*, Smith explains that, in his early days in Toronto, the relative merits of Communism versus Social-Reformism was the central issue of debate in the Labour Forum and in the Labor Representation Political Association, which was the local federated body of the Canadian Labor Party. It appears that this debate was intentionally joined by the Communists as a way of countering the yet unconverted Smith. Smith defended social democratic gradualism while supporting a united front with the Communist Party. Communists Tim Buck, Jack MacDonald, William Moriarty, and Smith’s son Stewart Smith advanced the Communist view at the Labour Forum. Stewart Smith argued in defence of Marxism and the Communist International.⁸³

A.E. Smith brought to these debates on Canadian and international developments an epistemology grounded in notions of evolutionary progress and metaphysical naturalism similar to the basic moorings of the Marxism which dominated Russian and social democratic circles in the 1920s and which Smith encountered through his engagement with Buck,

⁷⁹RCMP Report, 9 April 1923, Access/CSIS, 275.

⁸⁰RCMP Report, 5 June 1923, Access/CSIS, 280.

⁸¹RCMP Report, 10 September 1923, Access/CSIS, 286-292.

⁸²RCMP Report, 14 September 1923, Access/CSIS, 277.

⁸³A.E. Smith, *All My Life*, 73-74. For biographical detail on Macdonald, Buck, Moriarty, and Smith see William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 161-169.

McDonald, Moriarty, and others.⁸⁴ Smith's turn to Communism required no profound epistemological change. Moreover, little adaptation of Smith's Social Gospel critique of capitalism was required for him to come to general agreement with members of the Communist movement on economic, social, and political questions. Yet, because Smith's practical politics tended toward the creation of a common front on the left rather than sectarianism, his formal decision to join the Communist Party rather than work within a broad social democratic alliance would be taken only after it was evident to him that he had to choose between the Communist Party or the democratic left.

In the meantime, Smith demonstrated a growing tendency to replace the vocabulary of the Social Gospel with that of a secular Marxism. For example, in a speech to the Labour Forum in late November 1923, Smith explained that in the classes he had initiated in the Labour Temple children would not be treated "as wicked sinners, but as vital forces in the social order making for a better day." He intended to develop a study program for the children which would involve "class-conscious working class teachers as an essential feature of the program." Here Smith supported the educational views of Soviet theorist Bukharin who recommended among other things "the teaching of military science because men and women must be ready when the time came to take their place."⁸⁵ The death of Lenin in January 1924 also preoccupied Smith. In a address to the Canadian Labor Party in February 1924 Smith celebrated Lenin's revolutionary exploits.

While Smith's commitments were increasingly secular in orientation, he still sought a spiritual dimension in his work. He was not disappointed. On 18 February 1924, in an address to the Toronto Methodist Ministerial Association, Smith explained, in relation to his growing involvement in the ranks of labour, that he found "deeper spiritual and religious satisfaction in this most vital and penetrating movement than I have had anywhere in my life before."⁸⁶

In June 1924 Smith returned to the West on a speaking tour. On 15 June he addressed the Regina Central Council of the Canadian Labor Party.

⁸⁴ Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought* (Oxford 1987), 66-69.

⁸⁵ RCMP Report, 14 November 1923. Access/CSIS, 294-295. Bukharin, who espoused a fatalistic, determinist Marxism has been described as "the foremost Soviet systematizer of Marxism in the 1920s." See Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought*, 67.

⁸⁶ RCMP Report, 20 February 1924. Access/CSIS, 302-303. This file consists of approximately two hundred pages of Royal Canadian Mounted Police reports for the years 1923 to 1930 dealing principally with Smith's entry into the Communist Party of Canada and his public activities on behalf of the Party and allied organizations.

Reflecting a strong Marxist perspective, Smith explained to the meeting of approximately 200 that the Canadian Labor Party was in reality an economic organization; Smith contended that all political movements were in the last analysis an expression or reflex of economic conditions and struggles. His speech dealt almost exclusively with a secular Marxist analysis of history. His comments were divided into four sections: the origin of capitalist exploitation; the epoch of revolution; the fall of the bourgeois; and the road to the dictatorship of the proletariat. Though Smith continued to speak on behalf of the Canadian Labor Party it was evident that he was moving from a general commitment to social democracy grounded in the social gospel to a commitment to Marxism.⁸⁷

Smith visited Brandon on 12 June 1924 to address the People's Church. Following Smith's departure in 1923 the leadership of the People's Church had fallen to Beatrice Bridgen. It operated a Sunday School for 40 to 50 children, held a Sunday service, Children's Expression and Men's Public Speaking Classes, and had an active Women's Group. Several Communist families had become more active in the Church after Smith's departure. Bridgen had the impression that they thought that they could take it over. She explained, however, that while "they caused no trouble, ... the fact was that most people were not particularly fond of them."⁸⁸ This explanation also explains RCMP reports that following Smith's departure the Church had become more sympathetic to Communism.

In a report based on an interview with Bridgen, one writer has reported that "in 1924 the Communists attempted to gain control of the Church and, rather than have that happen, Bridgen closed it down."⁸⁹ Further, the People's Church was replaced by the Brandon Labour Forum. This explanation is contradicted by a report of Smith's address to the Church in June 1924. This report explains that Smith told his audience that the People's Church had been created in Brandon in 1919 as the New People's Church but should be known as the Labour Forum to correspond to the name used by organizations of the same nature all over the country. This report provides a more probable explanation for the change in the name of the People's Church to the Brandon Labour Forum late in 1924.⁹⁰

Indeed Bridgen was interested in creating affiliated organizations throughout the West. In November 1922 she organized the Labour Women's Social and Economic Conference, a two day conference that was

⁸⁷RCMP Report, 17 June 1924. Access/CSIS, 309-310.

⁸⁸Beatrice Bridgen, "One Woman's Crusade for Social Reform and Social Purity," PAM, Bridgen Papers, MG 14 C19.

⁸⁹K.O. Wormsbecker, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Political Movement in Manitoba, 1919-1927," MA Thesis, Queen's University, 1977, 167.

⁹⁰RCMP Report, 9 June 1924. Access/CSIS, 316-317.

held annually for a number of years. Beginning in 1923 she undertook the task of booking speakers for meetings across the West. The "Forum Speakers Bureau" operated for several years arranging for about six speakers from October to March for meetings from Lakehead to Victoria. From Toronto, Smith cooperated with Bridgen in securing speakers for this circuit.⁹¹

In the summer and fall of 1924, Smith's estrangement from the Toronto social democratic movement became increasingly evident. Following his return to Toronto from the West, Smith sought to establish a summer camp at Scarboro Bluffs under the auspices of the Toronto and Birch Cliff locals of the Canadian Labor Party. It was to commence on 24 July 1924. As Educational Director Smith was responsible for the program of the camp which was to provide an opportunity to examine various "problems of the social order" as well as sports and entertainment. The camp was to be an extension of the educational work undertaken by the Labour Temple during the winter of 1924. Smith recruited J.S. Woodsworth and Lucy Woodsworth, and Communists Jack MacDonald, Maurice Spector, and William Moriarty to address the residents of the camp. However, the camp was closed within two weeks of its opening. The principal reason for its failure were objections from members of the Birch Cliff Labor Party to some of Smith's teachings and his invitation to Communists to speak at the camp.⁹²

In the fall of 1924 Smith continued with classes for the Labour Temple. However, here as well trouble was on the horizon. In November 1924 he resigned from the Forum Committee as

some members of the executive committee felt that I was too much disposed to bring Communist teachings into my lectures and working arrangements. They alleged that I was trying to make "Communists" out of them. The fact that my son Stewart had become National Secretary of the Young Communist League was raised by them.⁹³

Then, in December he broke with the Toronto People's Church after again being accused of being inclined too much to Communism.

As Smith's career was now rooted in his labour political activities, his political isolation also spelled professional isolation. With few options to hand, Smith approached the Communist Party with a view to the creation of Labour Forums throughout Ontario. Jack MacDonald approached the District Executive Committee on Smith's behalf in December 1924. Smith

⁹¹ RCMP Report, 22 June 1925. Access/CSIS, 389-390.

⁹² RCMP Reports, 11 July, 14 July, 21 August 1924, Access/CSIS, 319-324.

⁹³ A.E. Smith, *All My Life*, 75.

had advised MacDonald that if he joined the Party a number of younger men in the Labor Party would also come into the Communist party. Smith believed that he could be of assistance in an educational direction. As a result of these discussions, Smith was retained by the Communist Party to establish Independent Open Labour Forums throughout Ontario. His remuneration was set at fifteen dollars per week. It was agreed that the role of the Communist Party in the creation of these Forums would not be publicized. However, the Party would provide Smith with contacts in towns throughout the province and these individuals would be asked to provide Smith with all the help he required. Smith would be directly, but not publicly, governed by a Committee from the Party including Jack MacDonald representing the Central Executive Committee and William Moriarty representing the District Executive Committee. The intention was to create branches of the Party through the formation of these Forums. Smith was encouraged to create a Forum Committee involving James Simpson and other members of the Canadian Labor Party and the Independent Labour Party as well as one or two members of the Communist Party as a front organization for the Forum movement. The creation of such a body would obscure Smith's connection with the Communist Party.⁹⁴

Though Smith had undertaken the work for the Communist Party he was not yet a member. Yet it was clear from his break with the Labour Temple and the People's Church and his overtures to the Communist Party that he was once again at a crossroads. He was also short of money. His sole earnings were derived from a little work done writing for papers and magazines. Though Smith had been offered an opportunity to return to the mainstream church and had been invited to lecture for the newly created Sociological Institute of Canada, he declined, explaining that his ideas had changed because of his activities in the labour movement since 1919.⁹⁵

Early in January 1925 Smith was elected President of the Toronto Unemployed Association. The leadership of the organization had been weak prior to Smith's assumption of the President's position. An RCMP report at the time noted that "There is no doubt that A.E. Smith may build this up into a powerful organization. He has the education, the organization ability, and he can control the mass mob ... associated with this movement." On 28 January, at a meeting of the Toronto Branch of what was now termed the Unemployed Association of Canada, Smith was elected editor of the *Unemployment Review*. He was to receive fifteen dollars per week for this work. Smith sent several thousand copies of the Review to western Canada and sought the involvement of J.S. Woodsworth to make a number of

⁹⁴RCMP Report, 1 December 1924. Access/CSIS, 328-329.

⁹⁵RCMP Report, 1 December 1924. Access/CSIS, 328-329.

addresses on behalf of the Association in the West. Smith was also active in drawing up a draft Unemployment Insurance bill to be submitted to the House of Commons.⁹⁶

Aside from professional and political considerations, Smith's future commitments were likely influenced by the career of Stewart Smith. In 1923, shortly after the family's arrival in Toronto from Brandon, Stewart Smith had joined the Young Workers' League. On 24 October 1924 at sixteen years of age, he became the National Secretary for the Young Communist League. His early activities involved organizational work with the League, editing *The Young Worker*, and speaking at Forum meetings and rallies. Norman Penner has explained that in 1924 Smith "was elected to the Party's top political committee at the age of 16...." By 1925 the younger Smith was a growing power within the Communist Party. The elder Smith could hardly have ignored Stewart's activities. It seems evident that he encouraged his son's radicalism and increasingly came to agree with his political perspective.⁹⁷

Any doubt about A.E. Smith's future was resolved on 12 February 1925 when Smith and his wife joined the English Branch of the Communist Party of Canada in Toronto.⁹⁸ Smith's decision to become a Communist seems more a strategic political and professional decision than one based in any profound intellectual transformation. While his increasingly secular and Marxist orientation reflected the influence of his contact with members of the Communist movement, Smith's basic epistemological orientation remained positivist, Darwinian, and naturalistic. His ability to graft the ideology of the Communist International onto the epistemology which had been the basis of his radical Social Gospel was evident in his explanation of his commitment to Communism to a reporter from the *Toronto Star Weekly* in April 1925:

My convictions for years have been very strongly developing towards a more and more radical viewpoint.... Communism [was] a social innovation, which according to natural scientific interpretation of an innovation in nature varies the species and heightens the life. Human society [was] now in the period of what might be called social invention; the inventive processes of man [were] ... being devoted to devising means of improving social structures. All social structures have come out of experience and human experience [was] continuous and ever expanding and ever

⁹⁶RCMP Reports, 15 January, 22 January, 29 January, and 25 February 1925. Access/CSIS, 330-335 and 337.

⁹⁷For information of Stewart Smith's early years in the Communist Party see Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left — Critical Analysis* (Toronto 1977), 89-90; Lita-Rose Betcherman, *The Little Band* (Ottawa no date), 8-9; and, William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 168-169.

⁹⁸RCMP Report, 12 February 1925. Access/CSIS, 336.

deepening in intelligence and understanding. Consequently Communism, from this point of view, [was] not an accident or incident arising out of the whim or caprice of somebody or some principal, but it [was] a development of human experience, and it [would] continue on that basis.⁹⁹

Smith noted that the “gist of my teaching is from this biological standpoint.”¹⁰⁰ Smith told the *Star Weekly* that if applied to human society the process of change and progress was most evident in the class struggle. From Smith’s perspective, the principal question for society concerned the emancipation of the working class from economic oppression. This question was related to all the problems of society, the state, and the economic system.¹⁰¹

Smith’s commitment to an active role in the Communist Party was immediately evident in a busy schedule of addresses to various labour bodies. Early in May 1925 Smith addressed the Hamilton Branch of the Communist Party. Smith opened his address with a reference to the persecution and slaughter of their Communist comrades all over Europe. While Canada retained some democratic freedoms Smith believed that once the capitalist class realized how powerful the Party was they would attempt to crush it. Still, Smith believed that the day will come “when the wage earners will drive out the Capitalists in rivers of blood if need be, and take hold of the industries and of the Dominion of Canada...”¹⁰²

Touring the West under the auspices of the Brandon People’s Forum Speakers Bureau, he told the Labour Forum in that city on 1 June 1925 that he “walked the street as a revolutionist and that he was out to spread revolution far and wide.” In the final contest for power “both men and women would have to be prepared to sacrifice their lives, for it was going to be a hard fight and the better class would win.” In Regina on 9 June 1925, he urged the need for the education of the working class with regard to the class struggle. On 22 June 1925 Smith addressed the Edmonton Communist Party. He spoke about the Canadian Labor Party, emphasizing the power of the Communists in the ranks of the Canadian Labor Party. In reference to the People’s Form Speakers Bureau of Brandon, Smith noted that the Canadian Labor Party had contributed a number of speakers. He hoped in the near future to have a number of international Communist and other revolutionary speakers from Europe and the United States tour the West. Smith told the audience that Communism was “the spearhead of the Proletarian movement, forcing in the thin edge of the wedge that will

⁹⁹*Toronto Star Weekly*, Saturday, 25 April 1925.

¹⁰⁰*Toronto Star Weekly*, Saturday, 25 April 1925.

¹⁰¹*Toronto Star Weekly*, Saturday, 25 April 1925.

¹⁰²RCMP Reports, 5 May 1925. Access/CSIS, 349-350.

overthrow the present ruling class. Communism is the crystallized action of the revolutionary forces of the world."¹⁰³

In an address to the Edmonton Labour Church on 23 June 1925 Smith recounted his experience in Brandon and how he had been defeated by combined forces of the old line parties. However, he had not been defeated in his purpose for he had gone to Toronto and become President of the Canadian Labor Party and taken up educational work in the ranks of labor. There in his work on behalf of the Toronto Labor Temple he had started out with mild views but had advanced "step by step until he reached Marxism, and finally the plain bread of Leninism."¹⁰⁴

Smith's retrospective explanation of his decision to join the Party, published in his autobiography in 1947, is consistent with the explanation given his Edmonton audience in the late spring of 1925. In *All My Life* Smith acknowledged his early commitment to gradualism and evolution against revolution. Experience had changed his views. He also noted the influence of the Russian Revolution. While the Soviet government had succeeded,

elsewhere the social-democratic parties of labor had produced retreat and defeat. In Italy fascism had come to power. The Labor government in England had been a great disappointment to me.¹⁰⁵

Though his conversion to Communism had been gradual, in the end there was no hesitation for Communism "challenged my mind and spirit." In short his decision

was based upon firm and deep and studied conviction that in communism we had found the basic movement which would steadily grow into the agency by which the workers would achieve the release of mankind from economic and political bondage, from ignorance and disease — the broad movement which would eventually bring forth the true nature and spirit of man in a classless society of firm, conscious Brotherhood over all the earth."¹⁰⁶

Smith quickly emerged and remained a central figure in the Communist Party. His entry into the Party and his commitment to work within the organization for the remainder of his life cannot be accounted for as an overnight transformation or as the product of an almost inevitable transition from Biblical liberalism to Marxism. It is clear that until at least 1923 Smith remained dedicated to the radical Social Gospel. It is equally evident that after his arrival in Toronto, Smith's interchange with leading members

¹⁰³RCMP Reports, 1 June, 9 June, and 22 June 1925. Access/CSIS, 319-324.

¹⁰⁴On 14 April 1925 Smith was elected President of the Canadian Labor Party.

¹⁰⁵A.E. Smith, *All My Life*, 75-76.

¹⁰⁶A.E. Smith, *All My Life*, 77.

of the Canadian Communist movement, the growing prestige of the Soviet State, and his disillusionment with the social democratic movement in Canada and abroad, contributed to a shift in Smith's perspective away from the optimistic verities of the Social Gospel to the apocalyptic vision of the Communist International. Increasingly, his attraction to the Communist movement was evident in the content of his public declarations and in his association with members of the Communist Party. While Smith's political views were increasingly radical, he was not inclined to sectarian politics. Accordingly, his entry into the Communist Party was not so much a product of intellectual or political conversion as it was the result of his growing political and professional estrangement from the democratic left. By 1925, his erstwhile supporters in the Toronto Labour Temple simply found Smith's views and his Communist associations unpalatable. Smith was left with few options; ultimately, he chose to join the Communist Party. One other factor should be noted. While difficult to assess, the growing involvement of Stewart Smith in the Communist Party and the younger Smith's unusually important role in the Communist Party cannot be ignored in explaining Smith's entry into the Party. Underlying all of this was Smith's continuing personal engagement in ushering in the New Jerusalem.

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*The quotation in the title is derived from RCMP Report, 23 June 1925. *Access to Information File* 117-92-049, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, 396.

4 Brandon's "Revolutionary Forkins"

Errol Black

THE HISTORIOGRAPHY of Canadian Communism consists primarily of scholarly works on the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) and its leadership, the "official" histories generated by the party itself, and autobiographies and reminiscences by some of the Party's leading figures.¹ Recently there have also appeared a few works that deal with the lives and activities of lesser lights who did the work on the ground, in the workplaces and communities where the CPC established an important presence.² One is Jack Scott's oral history of his life in the Party — *Communist Life*, edited by Bryan D. Palmer.³ In his introduction to the book, Palmer suggests that we need more work on rank-and-file communists to balance the traditional emphasis on Party leadership, structure, and policies, and to clarify the differences between the Party "ruled by the bureaucratic sycophants of Stalin....," and the Party

¹For examples of the former, see: Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party in Canada* (Montreal 1981); Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto 1975); and Norman Penner, *Canadian Communism: The Stalin Years and Beyond* (Toronto 1988). For examples of works originating within the party see: Tom McEwen, *The Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary* (Toronto 1974); A. E. Smith, *All My Life: An Autobiography* (Toronto 1949); and Tim Buck, *Thirty Years: The Story of the Communist Movement in Canada — 1922-1952* (Toronto 1952). Ian Angus' book is the most complete and perceptive source on the origins of the CPC and its history in the 1920s and 1930s (although, in my view, he is over-zealous in his efforts to discredit the role and contribution of the Party in the struggles of the 1930s).

²See for example, David Monod, "The Agrarian Struggle: Rural Communism in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1926-1935," *Social History*, 35 (May 1985), 99-118; Donald H. Avery, "British-born 'Radicals' in North America, 1900-1941: The Case of Sam Scarlett," *Canadian Ethnic Studies*, 2 (1978), 65-85; and Ben Swankey, "Reflections of an Alberta Communist: The Hungry Thirties," *Alberta History*, 4, (1979), 1-12.

³Bryan D. Palmer, ed., *A Communist Life: Jack Scott and the Canadian Workers Movement, 1927-1985* (St. John's 1988).

the "people joined the better to intervene in the class struggle of the twentieth century."⁴

This paper is intended as a contribution to the history of rank-and-file communists in Canada. It deals with a remarkable family of CPC members from Brandon, Manitoba. The Forkin family (who are identified in Scott's oral history as "the Parkins from Winnipeg")⁵ immigrated to Brandon just prior to World War I. In the 1920s, six of the seven Forkin children — five boys and one girl — joined the CPC; the five boys went on to become influential organizers and leaders in the politics and struggles of the CPC and the labour movement in the 1920s and 1930s. Moreover, they remained actively involved in the Party and/or the labour movement for their entire lives.

In what follows, the conditions in the family and in Brandon which shaped and influenced the character of the Forkins, and contributed to their decisions to become involved in radical politics are explored. As well, the roles they played in the politics and activities of the CPC in the late 1920s and 1930s are discussed in detail. This account seeks to explain why the Forkins (and others) joined the Party and why they remained loyal despite evidence of significant contradictions between Party rhetoric and Party practice. The explanation here echoes in many ways Raphael Samuel's rich and probing account of his experiences in the Communist Party in Britain:⁶ the Forkins were alienated from capitalist society and in the CP they found a community and culture that gave their lives meaning and purpose.

Martin Forkin was born of peasant stock in County Mayo Ireland in 1870.⁷ As a young man he migrated to Dublin and then to England, where he found employment as an itinerant labourer — a navvy. In England, he met and married Hannah Jackson, a year younger than himself, and one of seven sisters working in the cotton mills of Yorkshire. George was born in 1897; Martin Jr. (Joe) in 1899; Stephen in 1901; Patrick in 1903; Stan in 1905; and Ruth (christened Marguerite Theresa) in 1909.

In 1911 George was killed in a railway accident at a colliery. With the bit of insurance money they received for compensation in George's death, Martin and Hannah decided to try and improve their lot by leaving

⁴Palmer, *A Communist Life*, 6-7.

⁵Palmer, *A Communist Life*, 77.

⁶See Raphael Samuel, "The Lost World of British Communism," *New Left Review*, 154 (November/December 1985), and "Staying Power: The Lost World of British Communism, Part II," *New Left Review*, 156 (March/April 1986).

⁷The bulk of the information on the family's background was provided by Taimi Davis and Dennis Forkin. See also Dennis Forkin, "Wake Up! Dirt Bag Attack," *Canadian Dimension*, 6 (October 1987), 17-18. Note that in this piece Dennis too has the Forkin family based in Winnipeg.

England. Before they emigrated they had another son, Tom, in February 1911. Australia was their first choice, but, because of a strike that tied up shipping to Australia, they embarked for Canada on the Lake Champlain, landing in Halifax in August 1912. From Halifax the family moved West to Brandon.

The family arrived in Brandon at the tail end of the biggest boom in the city's history, a boom fuelled by population growth, major construction projects and expansion in manufacturing, retail trade, and the railways.⁸ Between 1900 and 1914 the population grew from 5,630 to almost 14,000. The main industries were manufacturing, which employed some 850 workers, and the railways which employed 700 workers. As well, significant number of construction workers — carpenters, labourers, plasterers, etc. — were employed on major construction projects. The majority of railway and construction workers, and workers in some specialized trades, such as musicians, cigarmakers, and typographical workers were unionized.⁹

In 1913, the national and local economies plunged into depression. Thomas Mellalieu, secretary, Local 187, Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and Joiners, and a member of both the Trades and Labour Council and the Brandon Chapter of the Socialist Party, submitted a letter to *Carpenters and Joiners*, a journal published in Sheffield, warning potential emigrants to beware of stories from worker recruiters for Manitoba and Brandon:

In Canada you do not get much social enjoyment. You have not the modern conveniences in the houses and you have to draw water from a well, or as is the case in Brandon, from the river. In the spring this water is brownish, but after a flood it is nearly black ... and yet we only hear of "bright, bonny, beautiful, breezy Brandon." Yes, friends, poverty is barefaced in Manitoba. Personally, I see it in the faces of many every day.¹⁰

The Forkins had left England to escape poverty only to end up in poverty in Brandon. Martin managed to get a low-level job as a boiler washer's helper on the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR), and the family moved into a

⁸The value of building permits (in current dollars) for the city increased from \$349,680 in 1909 to a peak of \$1,166,204 in 1912. The value of building permits for Brandon fell to \$609,609 in 1913 and to \$395,335 in 1914. See John Everitt and Christoph Stadel, "Spatial Growth of Brandon," in John Welsted, et. al., eds., *Brandon Geographical Perspectives on the Wheat City* (Regina 1988), 69.

⁹For additional background on Brandon in this era, see Tom Mitchell, "Brandon, 1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike," *Manitoba History* 17 (Spring 1989) and Errol Black and Tom Black, "Labour in Brandon Civic Politics: A Long View," *Manitoba History* 23 (Spring 1992).

¹⁰Reprinted in the *Brandon Daily News: The People's Paper*, 14 June 1913.

small house at 545 Douglas Street, on the outskirts of the city's East end. In February 1913, they had another son, Frank. During this time, the family led a hand-to-mouth existence. Even basics such as food and winter clothing were hard to come by. Often the family went for long spells without sufficient or proper food.

At the time, there was a vigorous labour political movement in Brandon centered in the trade unions, the Trades and Labour Council, and the Brandon branch of the Socialist Party of Canada, which had been formed in 1909.¹¹ Martin Forkin was interested in political and labour issues, but he stayed away from local politics. He was a devout Catholic and directed his energies into the Church. In 1913, he was made a member of the Holy Name Society in St. Augustine's parish church.¹² Hannah did not share her husband's religious convictions. Her main preoccupation was the domestic labour required to sustain a family of nine on meagre resources. She got relief from the drudgery of this labour in her flower gardens and in her dreams, which manifested themselves in poetry and romantic songs, one of which, a waltz ballad, entitled "The Silver Brocade," she eventually published herself.

Unschoolled, the children were nonetheless educated. Around the supper table, family members talked about conditions in Ireland, England, and Brandon — the poverty, the divisions within the working class,¹³ prospects for the future. The children had fertile minds and were interested in a broad range of issues — religion, physics, political economy, revolutionary politics. They read everything they could get their hands on and debated issues with each other.¹⁴

World War I had a profound effect on the views of the Forkins. They were concerned about the devastation in Europe. As well, they were concerned about the conspicuous injustice they saw reflected in the war effort in Canada and in Brandon. Consequently, they became interested in radical politics. Jacob Penner, for example, recalled that when he was in Brandon in October 1915 to help with the establishment of a branch of the Social

¹¹Tom Mitchell, "'A Square Deal for All and No Railroadng': Labour and Politics in Brandon, 1900-1920," *Prairie Forum*, 1 (Spring 1990).

¹²Letter from P. J. O'Sullivan, 13 January 1992. The information is also contained in P. J. O'Sullivan, *By Steps, Not Leaps: St. Augustine of Canterbury Parish, Brandon, Manitoba, 1881-1981* (Brandon 1981).

¹³On this point, Pat O'Sullivan, whose family lived a couple of blocks from the Forkin family, notes that: "Catholics in east end Brandon were scarce as hen's teeth and were for the most part disliked." Letter, 13 January 1992.

¹⁴Both Taimi Davis and Dennis Forkin stressed the important role that reading and family discussions played in shaping the attitudes and views of the Forkins.

Democratic Party, young Joe Forkin was at the meeting.¹⁵ Joe joined the army when he was sixteen and was shipped overseas. When the army discovered he was under age he was sent home. He subsequently enlisted again and ended up at the front in Europe, where he received a shrapnel wound in the knee.

The views of the Forkins were also influenced by the Irish Uprising (Easter 1916) and the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia in 1917. These events demonstrated to them the capacity of people and movements to challenge and overthrow their oppressors.

In North America, conditions during World War I resulted in an intensification of class antagonisms between capital and labour. Immediately after the war ended, the hostility between capital and labour erupted into overt conflict — strikes, lockouts, demonstrations, interventions by police and troops, arrests, violence, bloodshed.¹⁶

The conflict in Brandon and Manitoba came to a head in the spring of 1919. On 24 April civic workers in Brandon struck to get union recognition and establish bargaining rights. When the strike threatened to escalate into all-out confrontation, the city capitulated and agreed to submit outstanding issues to arbitration. Then, on 15 May, 30,000 workers in Winnipeg left their jobs in support of a strike by metal trades workers. Five days later workers in Brandon launched a general strike in sympathy with workers in Winnipeg. Both strikes were eventually crushed.¹⁷ For some activists in the strike — notably, Henry Bartholomew, A. E. Smith (a strike leader and father of future Communist leader, Stewart, who was eleven at the time), and Gavin Broadhurst (a telegrapher on the CPR and son of Hubert Broadhurst, one of the strike leaders) — its outcome confirmed the need to develop a more revolutionary kind of politics. For others, perhaps the majority, it merely confirmed the futility of confronting employers and the state head on.¹⁸

¹⁵Jacob Penner, "Recollections of the Early Socialist Movement in Winnipeg," 48. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, P 599.

¹⁶For background on these events see Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 11-44.

¹⁷Ironically, at the time of the general strike, Joe Forkin was in Regina undergoing training for the RCMP. He was subsequently posted to Vancouver where he bought his way out in May 1920. RCMP File No. 175/P2272, June 1931, 0014.

¹⁸For background see Tom Mitchell, "Brandon 1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike," *Manitoba History* 23 (Spring 1989). Henry Bartholomew joined the CPC in 1921 and was a delegate to the convention in Toronto in February 1922 which created the Workers Party of Canada. Gavin Broadhurst joined the party in 1922. The Smiths moved to Toronto in 1923. Stewart Smith joined the Young Worker's League in Toronto at the age of fifteen. In 1926, he became the first Canadian to attend the Lenin School in Moscow.

The strikes — and their aftermath — fuelled debates within labour political circles.¹⁹ In 1920, Brandon Labour won an important political victory when the Reverend A. E. Smith, candidate for the Brandon Labour Party, won the Brandon seat in the provincial legislature. (Smith was defeated two years later when an anti-labour coalition of Tories and Liberals backed fusionist candidate Dr. J. H. Edminson.)²⁰

The formation of the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the CPC in 1921 polarized labour politics in Manitoba — indeed, in the whole of Canada. The ILP was a reform party which saw the class struggle as a struggle for control of parliament. The CPC, by contrast, believed that workers would only gain control of the state and the means of production through revolution.²¹

The CPC had been formed in secret in June 1921. In February 1922, the Party created a public face with the launching of the Workers' Party of Canada (a face it would keep until 1924 when the CPC came out of the closet).²² Shortly after, a Brandon chapter of the Party was organized. Joe and Stephen Forkin were the first to join and held card numbers one and two. Ruth, Pat, Tom, and Stan subsequently became members.

In the 1920s, the church ceased to be an important part of the lives of the Forkin children. Their lives now centered on their jobs and political work for the Party. Most of the Forkin boys worked at one time or another for the CPR (in the yard office, the shops, the running trades). Joe also

He figured prominently in the internal intrigues in the Party on the side of Tim Buck in the late 1920s. A. E. Smith joined the Party in 1925. He was made an officer of the Canadian Labour Defence League in 1925 and served as General Secretary from 1929 to 1940. Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*; Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada*; and William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International: A History of the Communist Party of Canada, 1919-1929* (Toronto 1968).

¹⁹One of the main fora for these debates was a People's Church formed by A.E. Smith in June 1919 after he had been drummed out of the First Methodist Church. The purpose of the new church was to reconcile the politics of labour with the texts of Christianity. Its main fare consisted of lectures by A.E. Smith or speakers from other progressive organizations on controversial issues dealing with religion and political economy ("The Communism of Jesus," "Modern Religion vs. Materialistic Socialism," "Private Property and The Common Good," "The Russian Revolution") followed by questions and debate.

²⁰These elections are discussed in Tom Mitchell, "More Dangerous than Any Other Bolshevik Agitator": A. E. Smith, The Social Gospel, and the Crisis at the End of the Great War," mimeo, 1992.

²¹See Nelson Wiseman, *Social Democracy in Manitoba* (Winnipeg 1983) and Kathleen O'Gorman Wormsbecker, "The Rise and Fall of the Labour Political Movement in Manitoba, 1919-1923," MA Thesis, Queen's University, 1977.

²²The formation of the CPC is discussed in detail in Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks* and Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*.

worked as a cook and an orderly at the general hospital. Stephen worked as a mechanic. Ruth acquired secretarial skills by correspondence and found work as a public stenographer. In 1924, Pat ended up in the Ninette Sanatorium with tuberculosis — part of the legacy of poverty and his job in the brewery — where he remained until 1929. He eventually had major surgery, which improved his condition but left him with much diminished lung capacity. Joe was also afflicted with tuberculosis and suffered recurring respiratory problems throughout his life.

Political work in Brandon was dictated by Party policy. At the outset, the Party's strategy on labour had two elements, namely, to work within and transform the existing trade union movement, and to promote and gain a leadership role in the Canadian Labour Party.²³ The Forkins honed their intellectual, organizational, and leadership skills through their activities in the local Party. Joe, in particular, emerged as a key number of the CPC in Manitoba. In May 1922, the Forkins had been instrumental in the formation of a Brandon unit of the provincial unemployment association. Joe was appointed secretary-treasurer, Stan a member of the board of directors.²⁴ The organization subsequently became inactive but was reconstituted as the Brandon Unemployed Workers Council in 1927, with Joe Forkin as Secretary. Joe was also the Brandon correspondent to *The Worker* and reported regularly on local developments.

From 1926 to 1931 the CPC was rocked by internal strife which had its origins in the struggle for control of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), between Joseph Stalin and Leon Trotsky. Jack MacDonald, General Secretary of the CPC, and Maurice Spector, editor of *The Worker*, tried to keep the CPC out of the conflict in the CPSU. By 1926, however, a minority within the Party led by Tim Buck challenged this position and demanded the CPC condemn Trotsky and opposition to Stalin in the CPSU. In November 1928, Buck, aided by Stewart Smith, who had just returned from two years at the Lenin School in Moscow, engineered the expulsion of Maurice Spector for his support of Trotsky.

In July 1929, the Buck-Smith faction gained control of the CPC, by electing six of nine members to the Political Committee. MacDonald resigned his position as leader of the Party. Tim Buck replaced him, officially, in October 1929. The Buck-Smith faction consolidated its control of the Party over the next two years. With the triumph of Buck, the CPC was

²³ Formation of the Canadian Labour Party was instigated by the Trades and Labour Congress at the convention in Winnipeg in 1917. It was formally constituted in August 1921. The CPC sought to transform the Labour Party into the political arm of Canadian labour. See Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, Chapter 11.

²⁴ *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 8 May 1922.

transformed from a party inspired by the theory and praxis of Marx and Lenin, into a Stalinist party controlled from Moscow.

Joe Forkin supported the Buck-Smith faction for several reasons. He had close ties with A.E. Smith, and through him Stewart, dating back to the immediate post-war years in Brandon. As well, there was within District Seven considerable friction between the Anglo-Canadian and Ukrainian branches of the Party. Therefore, it was not surprising that he would align himself with the Stalinist, Anglo-Canadian group in the dispute at the national level. The younger Forkins, along with other members of the Brandon branch of the CPC, deferred to Joe's judgement on this issue.

Joe Forkin made his position explicit in an article ("Leadership in Theory and Practice") written for the 31 January 1931 edition of *The Worker*.

The forthcoming session of the [party] plenum must lay out concrete directives for our future work, strengthen our party internally by leading the fight against the right danger which is a pressing one, strengthen our centre and district leadership, and attempt to break down the federalist attitude of our mass organizations [the Finnish and Ukrainian branches of the Party].

Our party must be a solid party, we must think with one mind, act as one man and learn how to strike effective blows at Canadian capitalism.

The growing influence of Moscow (through the Comintern) in the affairs of the CPC was already evident in 1926. In that year the CPC revised its labour strategy, calling for a March 1927 convention to form a trade union centre of independent Canadian trade unions. The result was the formation of the All Canadian Congress of Labour. Two years later, in November 1929, the CPC was directed to establish a "revolutionary trade union centre" in Canada. The Workers Unity League (WUL) was formed in early 1930, and would be the main vehicle for promoting party activities until November 1935, when the WUL was scrapped and Party members told to build a United Front against fascism within Trades and Labour Congress affiliates.²⁵

The formation of the WUL coincided with the beginning of the Great Depression. In Brandon, the number of families on relief climbed steadily, reaching 459 (10 per cent of total families) by 1932.²⁶ In the face of this crisis, the local CPC moved quickly to organize the unemployed and families on relief. On 11 March 1930 a large delegation from the Brandon Unemployed Association, led by P. Worthington, chairman, and Joe Forkin, secretary, appeared before council demanding support for state unemployment insurance and city work "or full maintenance at trade union rates" for

²⁵For a discussion of the formation and dissolution of the WUL, see Norman Penner, *Canadian Commission*.

²⁶W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians* (Brandon 1981), 149.

the unemployed.²⁷ The other members of the Forkin family threw themselves into the work of the unemployed council and other groups campaigning for jobs, adequate relief and rights for workers.

By this time, the politics of the Forkins had matured into a coherent understanding of the nature of capitalist society. It was a politics that came out of their personal experiences and their struggles as members of the working class in Brandon. It was, as well, a politics of hope, based on their belief that the working class would some day take the actions necessary to end its oppression and transform Canadian society into a society modelled on the Soviet Union.

The depression presented the CPC with an opportunity to expand party membership — which had been sharply reduced as a result of the internal strife in the late 1920s — and extend the Party's base and power within workplaces and in local communities. The Forkin's long apprenticeship of activism in labour struggles in Brandon and Winnipeg had impressed the Party leadership. By 1932, the Forkin family was, at the behest of the Party, dispersed across the country from Ontario to British Columbia. While their paths and activities intersected from time to time in the years ahead, they concentrated their energies on the tasks assigned to them within their particular geographical jurisdictions.

JOE FORKIN

In the latter 1920s and early 1930s Joe divided his time between Brandon and Winnipeg. He quickly assumed a prominent role in Party activities in Winnipeg, running as a Communist candidate in North Winnipeg in 1930,²⁸ and doing organization work for the WUL. And, in August 1930, he replaced Leslie Morris as organizer on the District Seven Executive Committee in Winnipeg.²⁹

In the summer of 1931, Joe Forkin was assigned to the campaign to organize mine workers in Bienfait, Saskatchewan. Following a series of meetings in July and August, the Bienfait miners established a committee of 28 members to direct an organization drive. At the request of the committee, the WUL sent Joe Forkin to help the miners organize. On Forkin's advice, the miners joined the Mine Workers' Union of Canada, and then, on 7 September, walked off the job demanding improved wages and working conditions. Forkin was one of the speakers at a rally called about ten days into the strike in response to a report that an organization

²⁷*The Worker*, 3 May 1930.

²⁸Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks*, 245.

²⁹RCMP, 175/P2772, 12 August 1930, 0005.

called the Canadian Defenders was bringing in scabs. Forkin told the miners that:

R.B. Bennett has taught the workers how to travel, and how to exist without money. The United Farmers has promised foodstuffs provided we pay the freight and we will see that no mothers or expectant mothers or children will be hungry. We must fight the operators, and you will go back to work under conditions of your own choice, when they recognize the Union.³⁰

The strike culminated in Estevan on 29 September when police opened fire on 400 striking miners and their families. When the smoke had cleared, three miners were dead and many were injured. As well, there were numerous arrests. Joe Forkin left Estevan with WUL organizer Annie Buller. They hired an insurance salesman to drive them to Brandon for ten dollars. A warrant was subsequently issued for his arrest on charges of rioting and inciting to riot. Forkin eluded the police for seven months. He was finally arrested on 19 April 1932, but was found not guilty.³¹

Two days after the case against him was dismissed, Forkin addressed a crowd of 600 workers in Market Square in Regina. He reviewed the history of the WUL and the significance of the battle at Estevan and called upon the workers to join the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL) and the WUL.³² He then returned to Winnipeg to resume his activities in the WUL.

Some of the RCMP reports filed on Forkin's activities during the latter part of 1932 suggested that he was exhausted.³³ Forkin was attending rallies and speaking almost non-stop in the summer of 1932. But invariably he seemed to rebound and follow up with a hard-hitting, inspiring speech, in which he attacked the ruling classes of Canada and the capitalist economic system.³⁴ A report on a rally in support of strikers at the Wellwood Box Factory on 20 July, for example, stated that Forkin "addressed the crowd in a very inspiring manner."³⁵ In November 1932 Forkin was a candidate for alderman in Winnipeg ward three. He lost the election, getting a mere 461 votes.³⁶

This hectic pace was sustained in 1933, with a major WUL conference in February and a seemingly endless round of demonstrations, rallies, pro-

³⁰RCMP, 175/7010, 20 September 1931, 0018.

³¹S.D. Hanson, "Estevan 1931," in Irving Abella, ed., *On Strike* (Toronto 1974), 56.

³²*The Worker*, 2 July 1932.

³³RCMP, 175/6431, 13 July 1932, 0069.

³⁴RCMP, 175/P2772, 23 September 1932, 0075; 30 September 1932, 0076; and 25 October 1932, 0079.

³⁵RCMP, 175/P2772, 20 July 1932, 0071.

³⁶RCMP, 175/P2772, 2 December 1932, 0084. (Joe Forkin also got married in 1932 – to Fay Rockner, who lived just on the border in the United States.)



Forkin Family. Frank, Stan, and Tom (back row); Mother and Father (front row), Jim and sister Ruth, 1952, Vancouver.

tests, and meetings. On 20 July 1933, a WUL-organized demonstration in support of striking workers at the Parkhill Bedding Co. resulted in a battle with police. One demonstrator lost his right eye. Forkin — along with W. Skinner — was arrested and charged with rioting.³⁷ A month or so later — on 14 August — at a demonstration in support of railway workers Forkin told the crowd that the real reason for the arrest was “because workers under the leadership of the Workers’ Unity League were winning too many strikes.... [T]he bosses can’t bear this.”

A report prepared by T. Dann, Commanding RCMP Officer, Manitoba District on 12 September 1933 tended to confirm Forkin’s assessment of the situation in Winnipeg:

The Workers Unity League have had a very successful period in conducting strikes, under the leadership of Joe Forkin. Every strike brought about by the W.U.L. has ended in a victory for, and to the satisfaction of the revolutionary movement....

Then, on 10 November 1933, Forkin was nominated by the Winnipeg Workers’ Election Conference to contest the mayoralty election against ILP candidate John Queen. Forkin received 4,745 of a total 56,025 votes.⁴⁰

³⁷*The Worker*, 9 September 1933.

³⁸RCMP, 175/P2772, 15 August 1933, 0099.

³⁹RCMP, 175/P2772, 12 September 1933, 0104.

⁴⁰RCMP 175/P 2772, 29 November 1933, 0114.

In February 1934, the Parkhill Bedding case came to court. Skinner was handed a one-year jail term, while Forkin got four months. According to a report in the *Voice of Labour*, 24 May 1934, Forkin had not been anywhere near the picket line on the date in question. Judge H. J. Whitla, however, compared Forkin to a general, and argued "that since Forkin was the district organizer of the WUL and had organized the Parkhill Bedding Workers, he must have planned the disturbance which took place, and therefore was responsible." Forkin appealed and his conviction was quashed by the appeal court.⁴¹

In the 1934 elections, Forkin was the Party aldermanic candidate in Ward Three. This time he was elected, topping the Ward 3 polls with 4,668 votes. With Forkin's victory the CP now had two members on city council. This meant that issues of concern to the CP would now be forced onto the agenda of city council by Forkin and his senior aldermanic colleague, Jacob Penner.⁴²

After his election, Forkin devoted considerable time to his activities on city council. As well, he continued speaking at rallies, helping to organize workers in particular workplaces, and mobilizing mass campaigns in support of popular issues, for example, the repeal of Sections 41 and 42 of the Immigration Act, which allowed for the deportation of persons who called for the overthrow of the state. Moreover, with the disbanding of the WUL in December, 1935 he became a leading spokesperson for the Manitoba Council of the League Against War and Fascism.

Subsequently, in July 1936 Forkin played a key role in the election of James Litterick, provincial CPC secretary to the Manitoba legislature in July 1936 — the first Communist to sit in any legislature in Canada.⁴³ These activities took a heavy toll on Forkin, and in August 1936 he was admitted to hospital with tuberculosis, "aggravated by the heavy demands made upon his time and energy arising from his manifold duties as a member of the city council."⁴⁴ But he was out again in time to serve as chairman at the first ever open session of the Manitoba section of the CPC 25 September 1936.⁴⁵

Forkin's effective performance on City Council resulted in his re-election in 1936 and again in 1938. Because of health problems and the heavy demands of city council, most of his time after 1936 was devoted to issues of concern to working people in Winnipeg.

Events in 1939 and 1940 had a profound affect on the role and influence of the CPC in labour politics. On 22 August 1939, Hitler and Stalin signed

⁴¹*Voice of Labour*, 14 June 1934.

⁴²*The Worker*, 1 December 1934.

⁴³*Daily Clarion*, 30 July 1936.

⁴⁴*Daily Clarion*, 15 August 1936.

⁴⁵*Daily Clarion*, 28 September 1936.

a non-aggression pact. The CPC was directed to abandon the anti-fascist campaign and oppose war in Europe. On 10 September 1939 Canada entered the war against Nazism in Europe. The CPC's opposition to the War led to the banning of the party by the federal government in June, 1940. Forkin and Penner had accepted the change in CPC policy and defended it on city council. Penner was interned 11 June 1940; Forkin was not. His widow Fay suggested that "perhaps to the officers Joe may have looked too frail and they would not want the man to die in their custody."⁴⁶ In any event, Forkin continued to hammer away at city council. For example, at a council meeting on 9 July 1940 Forkin declared:

The fight against Fascism in France and Spain was lost through treachery at the top, made possible by the suppression of civil and political liberties of the working classes ... Forkin spoke against a resolution urging internment of all aliens and others opposed to the war and disbarment of all former members of outlawed organizations holding public office.⁴⁷

In the elections of 1940, however, Forkin's conspicuous role in the Party became a liability and he lost his seat on city council.

On 22 June 1941, Hitler invaded Russia. There was an immediate reversal in the position of CPs around the world, including the CPC: the position now was all-out war against fascism. Joe Forkin regained his seat on city council in the elections in 1942. He remained on council until his death in 1962. He is buried in Winnipeg. His tombstone carries a simple inscription:

Martin Joe
FORKIN
Aug. 26, 1899 - Jan. 21, 1962
HONoured BY
THE CANADIAN WORKING PEOPLE
WHOM HE SERVED SO WELL

⁴⁶Letter from Taimi Davis, 27 June 1991.

⁴⁷RCMP, 175/P2772, no date but contains report from *Regina Leader Post* dated 11 July 1940, 0178.



Joe Forkin's Funeral, 1962, Ukrainian Labour Temple, Winnipeg.
Photo courtesy of Errol Black.

STEPHEN FORKIN/JIM DAVIS

Stephen Forkin was the “scientist” in the family, with a passionate interest in physics, mathematics, and philosophy. As well, he was an inventor. In 1926 he applied for a patent on “certain new and usefull (sic) improvements in Elliptical Drawing Compasses....”⁴⁸ It was rejected. In subsequent years he developed ideas on electro-magnetics, automobile transmissions, and a new ship propeller “that would send a stream of air or water in one direction, not around.”⁴⁹

In 1932, Stephen was in Saskatoon organizing for the WUL. He was arrested in March 1932 on charges of sedition — specifically, carrying a sign board which described the Saskatchewan government as a “‘ruthless government’ responsible for the murder of the three Estevan miners.”⁵⁰ The case went to trial but the crown failed to make a case. The judge dismissed the jury and released him.

⁴⁸Specification of Invention of Elliptical Drawing Compass included with patent application, 1926. (In possession of the author.)

⁴⁹Taimi Davis letter, 27 June 1992.

⁵⁰*The Worker*, 16 April 1932.



Stephen Forkin (Jim Davis), 1963. Photo courtesy of Taimi Davis.

Shortly after his release, Stewart Smith from party headquarters instructed Stephen to go to Sudbury under the name Jim Davis to avoid trouble with the police and civic authorities. He kept the name and eventually had it legalized. While in Sudbury, Davis was involved in organizational work with miners, woods workers, and the unemployed. As well,

in 1933 he married Taimi Pitkanen, a young Finnish woman from Thunder Bay. She was doing organizational work in Sudbury and had just been in jail for fifteen days for her role in a May Day demonstration in Sudbury in 1932, when Jim met her.

These were difficult days for organizers in northern Ontario. Meetings were disrupted by police and INCO goons. On one occasion Jim Davis was working in the Nicholson lumber camps outside Chapleau. A few days after his arrival, he organized a meeting to talk about conditions in the camp. He was confronted by a company man with a double-bit axe who tried to herd him into a water hole in the ice on the lake. Fortunately, he was warned by a yell from the men and avoided falling into the frigid water.

The Davis' were desperately poor, and whatever money they got Jim gave away (including a \$100 wedding gift from Taimi's mother, which went to a retired nurse in Chapleau who was assisting the strikers at the Nicholson lumber camps). Consequently, they were always behind in rent payments, relied on gifts of food from friends, and walked about in threadbare clothing. In 1933, Jim was slated to speak at a May Day rally from the roof of the Ukrainian Hall. He had to go up the back way, because the seat of his pants was gone. As Taimi Davis recalls:

Later, Comrades collected \$30.00 to buy him a suit. A navy surge that lasted for years. It just got shinier. He was so cocky about that suit, it must have been his first.⁵¹

In 1934, Davis went to Toronto to attend a gathering of unemployed workers in Ontario. He stayed and continued his work organizing amongst the unemployed and the unorganized. Conditions were not much better for the Davis' in Toronto. They lived in a bug-infested rooming house. Davis tried to get a job, but without much luck. He worked as a vacuum-cleaner salesman for a short spell, but was not cut out for door-to-door selling. Eventually they were forced onto relief. Pat Forkin contributed a pint of milk a day during Taimi's pregnancy, and Taimi supplemented the family income by doing day work in homes for two dollars per day from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

When the war broke out, Davis, and his brother Tom Forkin, went to work in an aircraft manufacturing plant. They helped organize the plant. Davis was elected local president, while Tom Forkin edited the shop paper and served on the executive. The plant closed when the war ended. Eventually Jim found a steady job at Trane Co. in the west end of Toronto. He immediately became active in the affairs of Local 512 of the United Electrical and Machine Workers, progressing from shop steward to local president. He was subsequently elected business agent of Local 512. After

⁵¹Letter from Taimi Davis, 28 June 1991.

his retirement he became active in the union retirees' organization and was elected president — a post he held until his death in 1982.

Moreover, he remained active in the CPC and was many times a CPC candidate in municipal (Ward Eight), provincial (Lakeshore) and federal elections. He did not win these campaigns, but he raised working class issues — jobs, wages, and workers' rights.

PAT FORKIN

Upon his release from the Ninette Sanatorium in 1929, Patrick Forkin became active in the local labour movement in Brandon. In 1930 and 1931 he was an executive member of the Brandon Unemployed Association and became one of the main speakers for the Association at meetings and rallies. As well, he succeeded brother Joe as secretary for the Association and local correspondent to *The Worker*.⁵² In late 1932 he moved to Winnipeg and was elected to the executive of the Unemployment Conference of Winnipeg — a new organization created to build unity and promote militancy amongst the unemployed in Winnipeg.⁵³

Patrick Forkin had neither the health — the energy, the stamina — nor the inclination to engage in the sustained grind of organizing. His main interest was in writing — in interpreting the events of his time in ways that made sense to workers and would help build the movement. In 1933, he began to publish in *The Worker* under his own name. His pieces — especially the longer ones — sought both to situate events in a historical and theoretical context and to clarify their implications for the practical work of the CPC.

In late 1933 or early 1934, the Party decided to move him to Toronto to work for the paper. The following excerpt from a column in the *Daily Clarion* (formerly *The Worker*) on 5 May 1936, demonstrates his capacity both to humanize political issues and to link the concerns of the CPC to local community issues:

On our block in a slum section of Toronto, the kiddies are welcoming spring. Bat and ball, roller-skates, hopscotch, tag and a dozen other games are the rage. The youngsters are mindful of parental warnings and they try very hard to confine their play to the sidewalk, but you can't tell a ball it mustn't roll in the street, and you can't always dodge the tag if you don't jump off the curb...

Not long ago a traffic expert made the statement that if the present rate of traffic accidents kept up, one out of every three children born today would be either a corpse or a cripple before twenty-one years had passed.

⁵²RCMP, 175/P2772, 3 May 1931, 0012; and October 1931 (exact date not available), 0024.

⁵³*The Worker*, 7 January 1933.



Pat Forkin.

Photo courtesy of Errol Black/Taimi Davis.

Yet the solution as far as children is concerned is so very simple. A supervised playground within a couple of blocks of our district would take hundreds of these small citizens off the sidewalks and roadways....

In 1936, the Party decided that Pat should become the first ever Moscow correspondent for the *Daily Clarion*. Apparently, the reason for this decision was that Pat had been off work twice in the months previous as a result of health problems associated with his diminished lung capacity, and some people in the Party believed that he would get better treatment in the Soviet Union. Phoebe Singer, a party activist from Montreal, went with him.

The articles he wrote on the Soviet Union were always favourable, but also down-to-earth and in a style that emphasized the common humanity of people in the Soviet Union and in Canada. In many of his pieces he linked his stories on the Soviet Union to conditions in Brandon. In one piece — “The Pine Trees Smell Sweeter: A visit to a Soviet Rural Commu-

nity," 3 December 1936 — he explained how decisions got made at meetings of collective farmers. He then compared democracy in the Soviet Union to democracy in Brandon.

We remember the time we unemployed workers in Brandon, Manitoba, tried to nominate one of our organization for an aldermanic seat and found nobody could run unless he had at least \$500 worth of property. That let us out. Further the mayor of [Brandon] began to push for a \$1,000 bar — evidently panicky that the unemployed might somehow jump the \$500 barrier.

Pat and Phoebe were not long in the Soviet Union when Pat's health began to fail. There are frequent references in their letters home of stays in sanatoria and of treatments for tuberculosis and pneumonia.

Pat's main concern about his health problems was that they were preventing him from doing his work as a journalist. There were frequent references in his letters to stories he wanted to finish, stories he wanted to get to, and stories he had missed because he was in a sanatorium or confined to bed. For example, he was supposed to report on the Trotskyist show trials in 1937, but had to get someone else to fill in for him.

Patrick Forkin died 12 December 1939 in the Mountain Sun Tubercular Sanatorium in Miskhor, Crimea. He was buried in Yalta. There were numerous tributes following his death. Tom and Rosa Ewen, who had visited Pat in Moscow and the Crimea in 1939, wrote to Pat's parents in Brandon:

The Canadian people have lost a great tribune in the death of Comrade Pat. His was the ability, given to very few of us, to translate the great drama of the building of a New World into warm proletarian language. Pat loved the Soviet people; he was deeply interested in everything they did; he could see the humorous as well as the serious side of things; he never posed as "an expert" of Soviet affairs and he poured the warm love of his heart into his writings.⁵⁴

STAN FORKIN

Stan Forkin married a young Brandon woman in 1929 — Marjorie Hamilton who worked as a waitress with his sister Ruth. The following year they had a son — Stan Jr. (Duffy). Because of his family responsibilities, Stan Forkin stayed in Brandon during the 1930s to do the party work on the home front. He had all of the talents of his brothers: he was a dedicated and capable organiser, an inspiring speaker, a skilful propagandist, and an intellectual.

⁵⁴Letter to Martin and Hannah Forkin from Tom and Rosa Ewen, 24 December 1939.

After his brothers moved on to Winnipeg and elsewhere, Stan became a key person in the Brandon section of the Party and took over as secretary of the Brandon Unemployed Association (which subsequently was renamed the Brandon Unemployed Council), which organized relief recipients and the unemployed in Brandon and neighbouring towns such as Virden and Souris.

Like municipal governments everywhere else, Brandon City Council's main objectives in administering relief were to make sure that nobody got relief who did not "deserve" it, (i.e., who were not truly destitute) and to keep down costs. Operationally, these objectives were reflected in frequent attempts by council to cut relief rates (often in response to pressures from senior levels of government) and to figure out ways to get relief recipients to work on valuable public projects — the installation of sewer systems, street work, etc. — in exchange for their relief. Moreover, the administration of relief was carried out in a way designed to undermine the dignity and humanity of relief recipients.

During the depression, Stan Forkin led five strikes by relief workers: September 1933; June 1934; September 1934; May 1936; and July 1937. In four of the strikes the issue was either cuts in relief schedules or improvements in compensation for relief workers. The strike in May 1936 resulted when the City laid off three regular workers with the Sanitation Department, with a view to replacing them with relief recipients. It took a great deal of courage for people on relief to strike, because the penalty was loss of relief — a loss of subsistence. But they did it anyway. And they won all five strikes.

The September 1934 strike was typical. In August 1934, W. R. Clubb, Minister responsible for relief in Manitoba, recommended to city council that cuts be made in the relief schedule. The proposed cut in food was five cents a person. The City went further, cutting food vouchers by 40 to 70 per cent. For a family of three (two adults, one child) the cuts meant they would be getting two dollars a week for food. Relief workers responded to the cuts by taking strike action:

We, the local unemployed on relief, protest this latest relief cut which is out of all reason, and demand that the scale of relief in effect Aug. 1st. be returned. Pending this action on your part we must decline to accept any work tickets or to send our children to school.⁵⁵

They won the strike, and relief rates were restored.

In addition to this work, Stan Forkin was frequently a candidate in local elections, beginning with the schoolboard elections in 1933. His electoral

⁵⁵*Brandon Sun*, 20 September 1934.

activity had two objectives. The first was to get worker issues onto the civic agenda and to advance the position of the CPC as the worker's party. The second objective was to get elected. Forkin was an effective spokesman for the Party in these activities, but he failed in his bids for election.

From December 1935 to June 1936 Stan Forkin produced a broadsheet called the *Brandon Unemployed Worker*. It was a mimeographed sheet produced once every two weeks to provide information on relief conditions "to the citizenry who are told nothing of the real situation by the reactionary local daily."⁵⁶ Forkin's broadsheet quickly became known as the "Bangdon News." The paper contained reports on the activities of CPC bodies in the city, announcements of meetings, and editorials relating to civic matters and coverage of issues by the local newspaper — the *Brandon Sun*.

As well, Stan Forkin sent out regular reports on the situation in Brandon to other CPC papers — *The Worker* and *The Voice of Labour*. The bulk of these reports were on meetings, strikes, rallies, and incidents, which reflected adversely on the treatment of relief recipient by civic authorities. This activity served to tie Brandon members (and supporters) into the national and provincial networks. The regular reports also created an expanded subscriber and donor base in Brandon for the Party and its papers.

Tragedy hit Stan and Marge Forkin in 1940, with the death of their four year old daughter — Patricia Doreen. Shortly after this, they left Brandon for Toronto, where Stan got work with the Inglis Company. While in Toronto he told Jim and Taimi Davis that "he lost the 13 best years of his life without steady work."⁵⁷ When the war ended Stan and his family moved West to Vancouver, where he eventually got work with B.C. Hydro and Power authority setting up transmission lines outside Vancouver. While with B.C. Hydro he was active in the left faction of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW).

Stan left the CPC in 1955. He never divulged his reasons to his family, but Dennis Forkin, Stan's son, suggests that his decision to quit was provoked either by a botched-up proposal to have Stan run as a Party candidate in an election or a conflict over internal Party elections.⁵⁸ He died of cancer in 1977.

TOM FORKIN

Tom Forkin went West to British Columbia in 1932. When the relief camps opened he was dispatched as an organizer for the Relief Camp Workers' Union (RCWU) to the Revelstoke area to organize the men in camps along

⁵⁶*The Worker*, 14 January 1936.

⁵⁷Letter from Taimi Davis, 23 June 1991

⁵⁸Letter from Dennis Forkin, 2 January 1992.

the Columbia River who were working on the Big Bend highway from Revelstoke to Golden at twenty cents a day. For the next two and a half years, Forkin worked in the Revelstoke area — organizing relief camp workers, generating propaganda, agitating for reforms, leading strikes, and other forms of job action.

Discontent and unrest flared up and spread in the camps in British Columbia in 1934 and into 1935. In March 1935, Tom Forkin was among those who met in Kamloops to plan a mass walkout for 4 April 1935. Some 2,500 to 3,000 men left the camps and converged on Vancouver.

According to Tom Forkin's account of these events, the strikers were a well organized, highly disciplined force.⁵⁹ At the top there was a strategy committee of six men. The strikers themselves were organized into four divisions. The four division leaders were members of the strategy committee. Within the divisions, the men were organized into small groups of six to eight, each with its own leader and a sub-leader. For the most part these groups consisted of men who knew each other. During the strike they were expected to do everything together — march together, attend meetings together, and so on. The purpose of these small groups was two-fold: first, they gave strikers a small unit to anchor themselves to and these units in turn gave the division cohesion; and second, they provided a partial defence against spies and informers.

Tom Forkin was leader of Division four, and, therefore, a member of the strategy committee. Forkin's division consisted mainly of men who had a long history of involvement in the activities of the RCWU; indeed, many of them had been blacklisted. They were experienced, dedicated, and disciplined. As a result, Division four was assigned many of the key actions in Vancouver. Two of these actions were the occupation of the Hudson's Bay store at the corner of Georgia and Granville on 23 April, and the occupation of the City Library at the corner of Hastings and Main on 18 May.⁶⁰ The Hudson's Bay store action had started out as merely another "nuisance parade," when 30 carloads of police showed up with orders to clear the store. The police were clearly spoiling for a brawl, and they got their opportunity when a "white-haired old lady crowned one of them with a pot of Easter Lilies. The cop went down flat on his back and out cold. The plant landed on his chest. That broke everything wide open."⁶¹ There were injuries and thousands of dollars in damage to store property.

⁵⁹These accounts are based on the tapes of Tom Forkin's recollections of this era. Copies of these tapes are in my possession (the author's).

⁶⁰See Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost* (Montreal 1987) and Pierre Berton, *The Great Depression 1929 - 1939* (Toronto 1990), for useful discussions of these events.

⁶¹Tom Forkin tapes.

Unlike the Bay store occupation, the occupation of the City Library had strategic objectives. The funds raised through the tag day — by “tin canning” — were being depleted and a way had to be found to get food and lodging while the strategy committee planned its next moves. While the other divisions staged diversionary actions, Forkin’s division seized the City Library and prepared for a long siege. They organized their defences in the upstairs of the library and laid in enough food — much of it brought to them by Chinese comrades — to last two days. The siege ended after six hours when the city agreed to provide two days of food and lodging in exchange for an end to the occupation.

In the latter part of May the strategy committee, of which Tom Forkin was a member, decided it was time to move the struggle from Vancouver to Ottawa and they started to plan for the On-to-Ottawa Trek. The Trek, approved at a mass meeting on 30 May, got underway 3 June.⁶²

After the Trek ended in the infamous Regina Riot, Tom Forkin went back to his organizing work. In the latter part of the 1930s he was an organizer for the International Union of Mine, Mill and Smelter Workers and one of the key people involved in the organization of the Pioneer gold mine in the Bridge River Valley in British Columbia.⁶³

When Canada entered the war in 1939, Tom Forkin moved to Toronto. He found a job in Aircraft Industries Ltd. — along with Jim Davis — and quickly became shop steward and negotiator in the union local. In 1943 he joined the army where he remained until 1945. After the war he returned to British Columbia and once again got involved in trade union work. In 1970 he was elected president of IBEW Local 258 — one of the three locals created by the IBEW when it ended its trusteeship of the B.C. Hydro workers union in the 1970s.

In the fall of 1991, Tom joined a senior’s tour to the Soviet Union. He wanted to see for himself what was going on in the Soviet Union and he wanted to visit Pat’s gravesite. He died on the tour; his body was cremated and the ashes spread in a park in Moscow.

⁶²In his book on the On-to-Ottawa Trek, *We Were The Salt of The Earth: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Regina 1985) Victor Howard briefly mentions the role of Tom Forkin: “[chairmanship of the Strike Committee] rotated every two weeks or so with Red Walsh sitting there for a time ... as did Tom Forkin, brother of WUL executive officer, Martin Forkin,” (36).

⁶³John Stanton, *Never Say Die! The Life and Times of John Stanton A Pioneer Labour Lawyer* (Vancouver 1987), in particular, Chapters 4, 42, and 47.

RUTH FORKIN

In one of her letters to me, Taimi Davis lamented the fact that the role of women in the labour movement — and in the CPC — was often ignored or, at best, obscured: “I always said the Women were the backbone and supportive in all the struggles in many ways. Work not often recognized.”⁶⁴ Ruth Forkin was one of those women that Taimi refers to — never in conspicuous positions, which would single her out for special attention, but always there, nonetheless, helping out with the many things that needed to be done for the work of the Party to be carried out.

Ruth stayed in Brandon through to the latter part of the 1930s. She ended up unemployed and on relief. During this time she worked with Stan in the Unemployed Workers’ Council and with Gavin Broadhurst in the Brandon chapter of the Canadian Labour Defence League.

In the latter part of the 1930s, Ruth moved to Toronto to do clerical and stenographic work in the office of the Canadian Labour Defence League. She subsequently went to Vancouver to visit brother Tom, liked it there, and stayed. She found work as an inspector in a garment factory and then went to the Canadian Seamen’s Union to work as a stenographer. During the war she married Bill Gee, a fisherman and activist in the United Fishermen and Allied Workers Union and the CPC. Ruth worked in the women’s auxiliary of the fishermen’s union and in the peace movement. She died 12 January 1993.⁶⁵

A SUMMING UP

What are we to make of this remarkable family? Their character was shaped in the context of family life. According to Dennis Forkin, they had four traits in common. They were outgoing and “made others feel at ease, feel appreciated and respected.” They were inquisitive, with wide-ranging interests — politics, geography, literature, art, science, technology, and political economy. They were natural story tellers, “with the olde sod’s drunken love of language.” They were temperate in their personal habits. Except for Frank and perhaps Joe, they were non-smokers. They did not drink, except on rare and very special occasions — and then moderately.

⁶⁴Taimi Davis letter, 28 June 1991. She cited Joan Sangster’s book, *Dreams of Equality*, as a welcome exception.

⁶⁵I have not included a section on Frank Forkin — the youngest Forkin and the only one born in Canada — because he was not a member of the CPC. Nevertheless, he was involved in many of the events described in this paper and was clearly sympathetic to and supportive of the activities of his siblings.

And they were faithful to their partners and loyal to their friends — even under sometimes very trying circumstances.⁶⁶

Undoubtedly, these traits were in large part a product of their upbringing and the contrasting influences of a profoundly religious and hard-working father, and a romantic mother. Moreover, because of their circumstances — poor, separated to a large extent from other families in the East end of Brandon by their religion and their school — they were obliged to rely on each other for encouragement and mutual support, and, in the process, they influenced each other.

They were independent and strong-minded as well, and clearly went against the wishes of their father when they “abandoned” the church and became revolutionary socialists and dedicated members of the CPC. Their socialism grew out of their experiences in Brandon — their lives in the working-class East end, the turbulent events in Brandon, which culminated in class confrontation in 1919, their job experiences on the railway, in the hospital, in the Empire Brewery, and so on.

During this era they also came into contact with some of the key intellectuals in the provincial labour movements — including, Henry Bartholomew, A.E. Smith, Edmund Fulcher, and Jacob Penner — and local working-class intellectuals associated with the One Big Union, the Socialist Party, and the Social Democratic Party, including Gavin Broadhurst, who introduced them to Marxism.

But the Forkins were not the only ones who had these experiences and were subject to these influences. Many children growing up in Brandon were also exposed to them, but they did not become dedicated members of the CPC.⁶⁷ There was something that set the Forkins apart. The Forkin children were profoundly alienated from the capitalist society in which they lived and from the institutions of that society — including the Catholic Church in which their father found moral and spiritual sustenance.

The Party offered them an alternative — a community and culture opposed to capitalism and dedicated to creating institutions that would serve and advance the interests of working people. Life in the Party brought them together with like-minded individuals who shared their alienation and their aspirations. As well, the Party offered them not just the opportunity

⁶⁶Dennis Forkin, letter, 3 January 1992.

⁶⁷I gave a talk on the Forkin family in the Brandon Public Library in the spring of 1991. Many of those in attendance had lived in Brandon during the 1930s. I told them that when I started my research on the Forkins the question I was interested in was: why had six members of this one family become members of the CPC? By the time I had finished my research the question had changed to: why, given conditions in the 1930s, didn't everyone become members of the CPC? Their response: people were terrified of reprisals from their employers and from the state.

to apply their skills and talents to advance a cause they believed in but also an opportunity to have those skills and talents recognized.

They went into the Party as a family, because everything they had experienced and done prior to joining the Party they had done and experienced together. In some sense, membership in the Party involved an expansion of the family to include other people with similar views and similar predispositions.

Once in the Party they immersed themselves in their assigned tasks — their Party work as organizers, as propagandists, as political candidates, and as leaders. They were effective in these tasks and their effectiveness was recognized by promotion within the Party — to key Committees, to important assignments, etc. And when they died, their lives were validated in the eulogies by the Party's leading lights and their deaths mourned by Party rank-and-file. The inscription on Joe Forkin's tombstone ("Honoured By The Canadian Working Peoples Whom He Served So Well") aptly sums up the way in which the Forkins wanted to live and the way in which they wanted to be remembered.

The second question, and in many ways the more perplexing question is: why was it that the Forkins (with the possible exception of Stan) remained loyal to the CP through the late 1930s — when the Party was making so many twists and turns in policy from the mid-1930s through to 1940 — and in the post-war era, after Hungary, the revelations about Stalin, and so on, when so many others were getting out?

On the matter of twists and turns in Party policy from 1935 to 1941, a retired colleague and long-time party member in the United States, Don Wheeler, pointed out to me that the regime in the Soviet Union and the parties in the US and Canada were not unique. Everybody was making twists and turns in this particular era. Moreover, even when people were concerned about abrupt, and sometimes inexplicable changes in policy they stayed in the Party because the concrete alternatives — including the CCF — involved an acceptance of capitalism, which was unthinkable to dedicated Party members.

The Forkins did not accept things blindly. In a letter to me dated 5 January 1992, Phoebe Curato (who was still in Moscow at that time, but has since moved to Toronto) said that questions were raised. On one occasion, for example, when she and Pat had returned from a meeting "where some people had been hauled over the coals for 'insufficient vigilance,'" Pat said: "This can't be socialism." But they were so busy with their work, so "dazzled by the success of the gigantic campaign to industrialize the country," and so ignorant of much that was going on that they just did not realize the underlying contradictions in Soviet Communism.

Another factor that is pertinent, of course, is that the CPC was perpetually under attack both from the state, and from competing organizations, such as the CCF and the trade union bureaucrats. In these circumstances, leadership from the top, Party discipline and loyalty, and a united front against Party enemies were accepted as prerequisites for survival of the organization and for survival of the cause.

As for the post-war era, Dennis Forkin (Stan's youngest son, who was born in Toronto in 1944) suggested to me that once his father and his uncles and aunt had sunk their entire lives into the building of the CPC "even the 'excesses' of Stalin were insufficient to dissuade them. They might ... criticize the guides but they would never doubt the destination."⁶⁸ This answer is equivocal and unsatisfactory. But, for all that, it is the best answer we are likely to get until we have much more research along the lines suggested by Bryan Palmer and exemplified in the work of Raphael Samuel.

In summing up the significance of the Forkins and their legacy, the last word is perhaps best left with Dennis Forkin, who has spent much of his life trying to puzzle out the answer to this question:

There is something of the very fabric of history in their lives. It is the story of how human beings are transformed from the progeny of their times — into its progenitors. To contemplate their lives is to consider the heritage of our own time.⁶⁹

I thank Dennis Forkin and Taimi Davis for providing me with most of the information upon which this article is based. As well, I thank Alice and Frank Forkin and Phoebe Curato — Moscow (Pat's widow) for letters which filled in important details. Thanks also to Doug Outhwaite, Access to Information and Privacy Coordinator, Canadian Security Intelligence Service, Ottawa, for providing me with copies of material on the Forkins and events in Brandon from RCMP files; Frank Goldspink, head of the Manitoba branch of the Communist Party of Canada, Winnipeg, for giving me access to newspapers and materials on file in their office; Dr. Dave Stewart, Killarney, for sharing his insights into conditions at the Ninette Sanatorium in the 1920s and giving me a photograph of the Sanatorium band in which Pat Forkin played the banjo; Pat O'Sullivan for providing me with details on the Forkin family's participation in St. Augustine's Church and for his interesting observations on conditions in the East end in the 1920s and early 1930s; Tom Mitchell for sending me useful bits of information from his files and for his many helpful comments; Joe Dolecki for giving me a careful and detailed criticism of the original draft of the paper; and Alvin Finkel, Jim Naylor, and two anonymous

⁶⁸Dennis Forkin letter, 26 March 1991.

⁶⁹Dennis Forkin letter, 26 March 1991.

readers from Prairie Forum for specific suggestions on how to situate the Forkin family in the broader context of CPC politics. The research for this paper was supported by a grant from the Brandon University Research Fund.

Part II

Collective Bargaining and Industrial Relations

5 1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike

Tom Mitchell

IN THE SPRING of 1919, Winnipeg was the epicentre of a national labour protest which shook Canadian society. Sympathetic strikes erupted in Calgary, Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, Vancouver, and a number of smaller communities in western Canada. The longest and most cohesive sympathetic strike occurred in Brandon.¹

Brandon's Sympathetic Strike began on 20 May 1919, and persisted until the end of June. It was preceded in late April by a dramatic and successful civic employees' strike, and followed at the end of June by an ill-conceived and futile general strike. As in Winnipeg, the Brandon strike represented a struggle between two community coalitions: one included the Brandon business community, the *Brandon Sun*, the Law and Order League, and the City Council allied with provincial and federal authorities; the other, the strikers and their supporters, the Brandon Trades and Labour Council, the Strike Committee, and the People's Church organized during the strike. While returned soldiers were prominent among the strikers, Brandon's Great War Veterans' Association, like its counterpart in Winnipeg, sought to play the role of mediator in the city's labour crisis.

The Brandon Sympathetic Strike was the climactic event in a period of surging labour militancy dating from the reconstitution of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council in 1917. It was informed by the conviction that only through labour solidarity and direct action could labour's legitimate aspirations for union recognition and improved economic conditions be achieved, and was fuelled by economic grievances accumulated during World War I. The failure of the strike left Brandon's labour movement resigned to the futility of the general strike weapon in the face of the power of the state, yet unrepentant in the defence of the principles of organized

¹Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 29

labour. In the wake of the strikes, Brandon's working class sought to advance the cause of labour through direct participation in the City's political life.

Brandon's organized labour movement dates from the turn of the century. As in other communities in western Canada, skilled British and Canadian male workers in the railway unions formed the basis of its development.² In 1906, when the Brandon Trades and Labour Council was formed following the visit to Brandon of W.R. Trotter, a Canadian Trades and Labour Congress organizer, the city had thirteen locals.³ These included locals of railway workers, sheet metal workers, plumbers and steam fitters, brick layers, carpenters and joiners, printers, cigar makers, and barbers. By 1912, the year which marked the peak of pre-war labour organization, there were 24 locals in the city.⁴

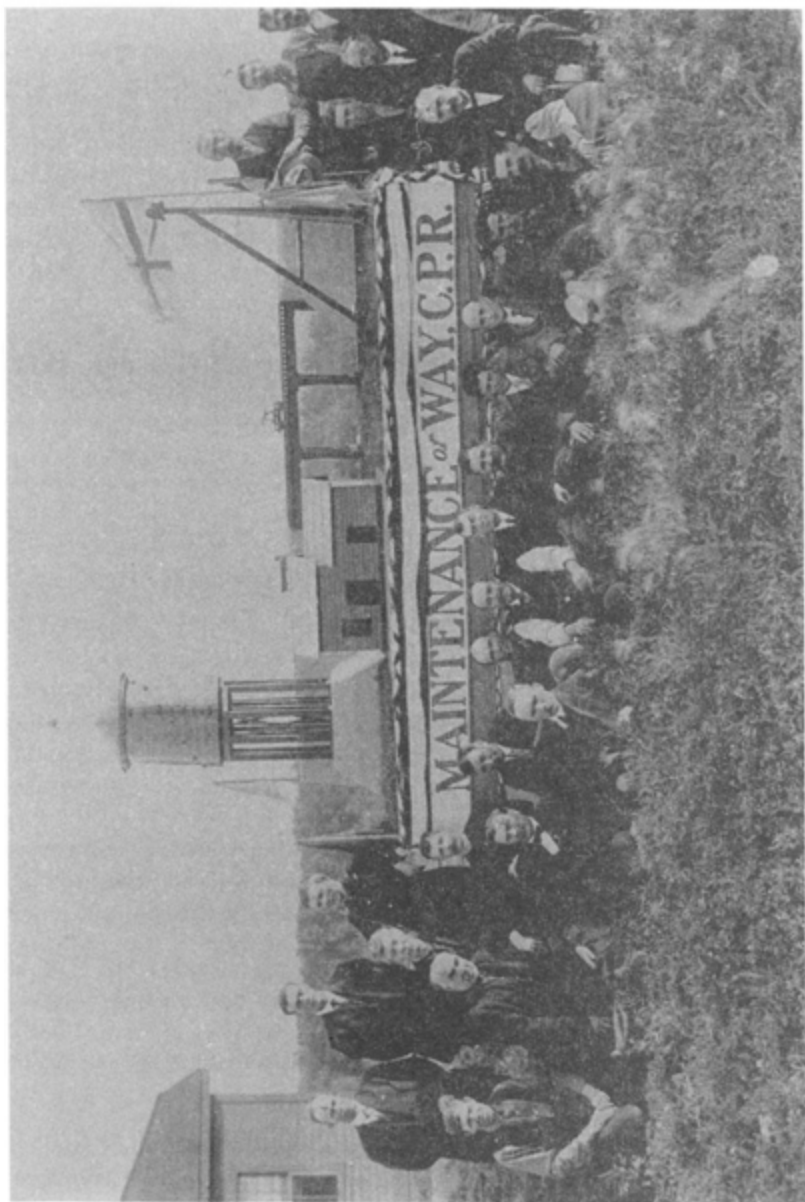
In the years prior to World War I, a growing militancy began to characterize the city's organized labour movement, climaxing in a series of strikes in 1912 involving the city's building trades. In March 1912, carpenters employed on the construction of the new Prince Edward Hotel struck because of a dispute regarding the make-up of time sheets.⁵ In April, the city's building trades labourers were organized, and in August, the newly organized building labourers went on strike for higher wages at the site of the new Asylum for the Insane. They were immediately joined by those employed in the construction of St. Matthew's Anglican Cathedral. During

²*Labour Gazette*, Vol II (1901-1902), 412.

³*The Voice*, 27 July 1906; Harold A. Logan, *The History of Trade-Union Organization in Canada* (Chicago 1918), 174.

⁴These included the International Brotherhood Maintenance of Ways Employees, No. 197; Bricklayers, Masons, and Plasterers' International Union, No. 2; Amalgamated Society of Carpenters and joiners; Cigarmakers' International Union, No. 378; International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers No. 441; International Hod Carriers, Building and Common Labourers' Union, No. 69; Federated Association of Letter Carriers, No. 21; Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, No. 484; Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen and Enginemen, No. 788; Amalgamated Sheet Metal Workers' International Alliance, No. 421; International Association of Machinists, No. 574; American Federation of Musicians, No. 501; United Association of Journeymen Plumbers, Gas Fitters, Steam Fitters' Helpers of United States and Canada, No. 258; Plasterers' International Association of United States and Canada, No. 127 Brotherhood of Painters, Decorators and Paperhangers of America, No. 660; Brotherhood of Railway Carmen of American, No. 528; Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees, No. 37; Order of Railway Conductors, No. 464; Order of Railway Conductors, No. 605; Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, No. 394; Brotherhood of Railway Carmen, No. 3.39; International Typographical Union, No. 700. *Labour Organizations of Canada 1912*, 85.

⁵*Labour Gazette*, Vol. XII (1911-1912), 993.



Champion Float — Labour Day Parade, 1913. Photo courtesy *Daly House Museum*.

a meeting on 16 August 1912, "a very militant spirit was displayed by the men, and when a general strike of all labourers in the city was called, there was not one dissenting voice."⁶ Notably, a number of men in attendance at the meeting belonged to what the *Brandon Sun* termed the "foreign element."⁷ By 19 August 1912, all 175 building labourers in the city, involving 20 firms, were on strike, and on 20 August over 100 of the strikers paraded through the city to the various work sites which had been struck. On 22 August 1912 the strike ended with a victory for labour. All the principal concerns of the strikers, including "wages, union recognition, and the barring of victimization" were achieved.⁸

As in other communities in western Canada, the depression which preceded World War I damaged organized labour and inflicted severe hardship on working people in Brandon. It created high unemployment among the city's two most important groups of organized labour — the railway trades and construction workers. Unemployment and losses in wages combined with the disappearance of men into the armed forces following August 1914, weakened the organized labour movement in the city. Union locals disappeared. The Trades and Labour Council was abandoned. Organized labour became quiescent. In February 1915, when the Brandon Builder's Exchange, an association of building contractors formed in 1913, announced a 20 per cent cut in hourly wages for all building trades, no objection from organized labour was made.⁹

However, in early 1917, spiraling wartime inflation and the prospect of conscription combined to revive organized labour and to bring about the reconstitution of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council. The reconstituted Council stood for a "square deal for all classes and no railroading."¹⁰ The Council immediately became involved in the debate concerning the question of fuel.

By late 1916, the price of fuel had risen to record levels, owing to a shortage of coal and to congestion in transportation arteries. The price of wood rose with the scarcity of coal. In January 1917, City Council had approved a by-law for the regulation of the sale of wood in the city. The by-law angered the city's fuel dealers who attempted to have the by-law amended.¹¹ The debate on the fuel by-law prompted labour's advocate on

⁶*Brandon Weekly Sun*, 18 April 1912, 22 August 1912, 29 August 1912.

⁷*Brandon Weekly Sun*, 22 August 1912.

⁸*Brandon Weekly Sun*, 29 August 1912.

⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 11 February 1915; *Brandon Weekly Sun*, 18 February 1918.

¹⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 April 1917. See also *The Voice*, 4 May 1917, for a discussion of the demise and reconstitution of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council.

¹¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 February 1917; 20 February 1917; 21 February 1917; 17 March 1917.

the Council, Alderman J.A.G. Grantham, to introduce a motion calling for the creation of a municipal coal and wood yard. While Grantham's motion was defeated, the fuel debate elicited a strong reaction from Brandon's working-class community.¹²

In May 1917, the CPR locals in the city passed a motion informing City Council of their support for the fuel bylaw, noting that

we are prepared to assist in any way possible towards its enforcement, and ... we are prepared to take drastic action, if necessary, to bring about more equitable dealing with regard to fuel or other commodities.¹³

At the end of May, the Trades Council sponsored a mass meeting in support of the creation of a municipal fuel depot. The response of City Council was to establish a committee to study the cost of living in the city. In early June, the Trades and Labour Council organized a second mass meeting, which demanded that the City go into the fuel business and not wait for a report from the cost of living committee.¹⁴

Labour's preoccupation with the price of fuel reflected growing anxiety about the rising cost of living. Since the outbreak of World War I the average cost, in 60 cities, of a group of basic needs including staple foods, starch, coal, wood, coal oil, and shelter had increased from \$7.95 per week in December 1914, to \$10.11 in December 1916, and would rise to \$11.81 by October 1917, and \$13.54 in November 1918.¹⁵ *The Labour Gazette* explained that the principal reason for the dramatic rise in the cost of living was "the enormous increase in the demand for goods of nearly every variety as contrasted with the decrease in the production of many necessities of life."¹⁶

For those organized workers who were able to secure increases in wages, the worst effects of the rise in the cost of living were ameliorated. However in 1917 only letter carriers, mail clerks, telegraph operators, and CNR trainmen, and maintenance-of-way employees in Brandon received wage increases. In 1918, CPR shop workers, engineers and firemen, maintenance of way employees, and trainmen, as well as Dominion Express employees and Provincial Telephone workers, received wage increases.¹⁷ Not surprisingly, Brandon's labour militants of 1919 were drawn primarily from those

¹²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 April 1917.

¹³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 May 1917.

¹⁴*The Voice*, 15 June 1917.

¹⁵*The Labour Gazette*, Vol. XVII, 1917, 992-993; *The Labour Gazette*, Vol. XVII, 1918, 1012.

¹⁶*The Labour Gazette*, Vol. XVII, 1917, 714.

¹⁷*The Labour Gazette*, Vol. XVII, 1917, xiii-viv; Vol XVII, 1918, xiii-xv.

groups of workers — both male and female — including civic employees, carpenters, teamsters, bakers, brewery workers, and railway employees who had not achieved wage increases during the war. Some had suffered wage reductions, which were exacerbated by the sharp rise in the cost of living. The ability of the reconstituted Trades and Labour Council to gain affiliates, to reactivate union locals, and to organize new groups of workers was facilitated by the impact of the rising cost of living on the lives of individual workers and their families, and the determination of Brandon's working people to address their worsening economic condition.

By 1918, it was clear that the city's labour movement had been revitalized. Twenty-five union locals, an increase of seven from 1916, were active in the city.¹⁸ These included the new Civic Employees' Federal Labour Union No. 69, which would be involved in a dramatically successful strike in April 1919. It also included locals of teamsters, sanatorium workers, steam and operating engineers, carpenters and joiners, all of which would be involved in the Sympathetic Strike of May and June 1919. The Civic Employees' Union was an industrial union, including all civic employees. The rapid growth of industrial unions in the spring of 1919 included those formed by retail clerks, brewery workers, railway clerks, and federal government employees.¹⁹

The popularity of industrial unions signaled a growing militancy and solidarity among the city's working class. This militancy was certainly not unique. In March 1919, the Calgary Conference of western labour, arguably the "most radical convention ever held in western Canada," was convened at a time when the western Canadian labour movement was deeply agitated following the divisive Trades and Labour Congress of 1918 and a series of federal government actions which had the effect of antagonizing organized labour.²⁰ The conference enthusiastically endorsed the principles of militant industrial unionism and labour solidarity. On 1 April 1919, following the report of the three Brandon delegates to the conference, the Brandon Trades and Labour Council embraced these principles, and made a 25 dollar donation to the committee charged with organizing the One Big Union in Manitoba.²¹ Fred Baker, who was to play a central role in the labour confrontation in Brandon in 1919, was named to this organizing committee for Manitoba.²²

¹⁸*Labour Organizations in Canada*, 1918, 161.

¹⁹*The Confederate*, 16 May 1919.

²⁰A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899 - 1919* (Toronto 1977), 69.

²¹*The Confederate*, 14 March 1919; 4 April 1919.

²²Provincial Archives of Manitoba (hereafter PAM), *One Big Union Papers*, C.A. Page to R.B. Russell, 5 April, 1919. At the Calgary Conference, Fred Baker was named

Brandon's organized labour movement had an immediate opportunity to test the utility of militant industrial unionism and labour solidarity in the struggle for union recognition, the right of collective bargaining, and better wages. In February 1919, the recently established Civic Employees' Union was refused recognition by City Council.²³ This refusal and Council's subsequent attack on the Union's leadership precipitated a strike of civic employees which quickly threatened to become a general strike.

The confrontation between Council and the Civic Employees' Union was exacerbated by Council's wartime record of undermining the standard of living of civic employees through refusing wage increases during a period of rapid inflation. Council had also threatened the job security of civic employees through arbitrary and ill-conceived proposals to reduce staff through the amalgamation of civic departments. In January 1915, \$7,000 in civic salaries was eliminated when Council cut the wages of the City's police and fire departments by 5 per cent and laid off staff. In August 1916, Council refused increases in pay to staff other than those making less than \$100 per month; individuals in this latter group were given a 7 per cent increase in pay. In March 1917, Council refused any increases in salary, and proposed to reduce salary costs by amalgamating the police and fire departments and diminishing the combined staff by ten. After three months of deliberation and debate, the proposal was dropped, the idea having provoked opposition from the City's business community and threats of resignation from members of the City's police department. In 1918, Council's approach to the matter of civic salary costs incited proposals to discharge staff in some departments and to lower the salaries of others. The civic employees had had enough. In response to the City's continuing assault on their standard of living and job security, civic employees formed local 69 of the Civic Employees' Federal Union.²⁴

In February 1919, the civic employees sought recognition of their union and the right to bargain collectively. Following Council's refusal of both, the Union applied to the federal government for a Board of Conciliation.

to the Manitoba Committee charged with promoting the One Big Union. See Norman Penner, *Winnipeg 1919: The Strikers' Own History of the General Strike* (Toronto 1975), 30. Baker had come to Brandon in 1913 to work in the car repair shops of the Canadian Northern Railway. In 1917 and 1918, Baker served as President of the reconstituted Trades and Labour Council. In 1919, he was perhaps the most militant of Brandon's labour leadership. *Henderson's Directory* (1913-1919), Brandon.

²³ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 February 1919.

²⁴ *Brandon Weekly Sun*, 27 January 1915; *Brandon Daily Sun*, 22 July 1916, 31 July 1916, 5 August 1916, 8 August 1916, 9 August 1916, 11 August 1916, 5 March 1917, 11 April 1917, 14 April 1917, 17 April 1917, 8 May 1917, 1 June 1917, 9 February 1918, 9 February 1918, 13 February 1918.

Under the Industrial Disputes Act, designed primarily to resolve disputes associated with utilities, railroads, and coal mines, a conciliation board could be established if a union and the municipal corporation were in agreement with its creation.²⁵ The City was not interested. Its response to the impending crisis was to forestall the efforts of the Union to achieve recognition by granting pay increases to civic employees, by making the increases retroactive to the first of the year, and by organizing a meeting of the civic department heads to discuss "matters of a general interest to the city and rate-payers."²⁶

In the spring of 1917 and 1918, City Council had eliminated pressure for salary increases from civic employees by threatening lay-offs through the reorganization of departments. This strategy was used again in 1919. On 4 April 1919, H.C.L. Broadhurst, President of the Civic Employees' Union, appeared before Council and presented a schedule of wages which the Union hoped to discuss with the City. Broadhurst urged Council to reconsider its refusal to recognize the Union and to agree to collective bargaining with the civic employees.²⁷ On 23 April 1919, City Council responded to Broadhurst's ideas when it adopted a report from its finance committee, which recommended that various duties in the civic administration be reorganized to accommodate a reduction in staff. Two employees were discharged: H.C.L. Broadhurst, and the secretary of the Civic Union, Robert Lessells. City Treasurer C.F. Sykes had refused to follow instructions from the finance committee and provide written recommendations calling for staff reductions. Clearly, the Finance Committee's recommendations constituted an arbitrary action designed to intimidate the civic employees.²⁸

The reaction of the Union to Council's action was immediate. At a meeting held Wednesday evening, 23 April the Union voted unanimously to strike unless City Council agreed to the creation of a board of conciliation. When Council refused, the civic employees went out on strike at 11:00 a.m.,

²⁵Bryan D. Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto 1983), 143.

²⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 March 1918.

²⁷H.C.L. Broadhurst came to Canada from the Channel Islands, Britain, and took up farming in the Miniota district. In 1913, he came to Brandon, working first as a reporter on the *Brandon Sun*, and subsequently as an accountant in a Brandon business. He joined the City's tax collection department in 1917. In the municipal election of 1920, Broadhurst ran unsuccessfully for the School Board as a candidate of the Dominion Labour Party endorsed by the Brandon Trades and Labour Council. In a letter to the electorate, Broadhurst described himself as "... a worker with a worker's outlook." *The Confederate*, 19 November 1920. See obituary of Lillian Broadhurst, *Brandon Sun*, 13 January 1966; *Henderson's Directory* (1913-1919), Brandon.

²⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 23 April 1919, 30 April 1919.

Thursday, 24 April 1919. The *Brandon Sun* explained that the strike was caused by the city's refusal to "accept the ultimatum tendered by the Union."²⁹

In an unprecedented step, the Brandon Trades and Labour Council participated in the direction of the strike. Moreover, the prospect of a rapid mobilization of other union locals in the support of the strike was a distinct possibility. On 25 April, this possibility became a reality when teamsters in the city, numbering around 100 and unionized since 1918, joined the civic employees' strike.³⁰ During the weekend the railway shopworkers and stationary engineers in the city took strike votes and were prepared to join the strike if the Civic Union's demands were not met. It was rumoured that the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council was prepared to initiate a sympathetic strike if a rapid resolution of the Brandon strike was not achieved.³¹

Fear that the strike would spread further, and the desire for a quick resolution to the crisis, led the Brandon Board of Trade and Civics to name a committee to initiate mediation efforts between the strikers and the City.³² A similar intervention had helped to resolve the Winnipeg civic strike in 1918.³³ On Saturday evening, 26 April, the City capitulated, agreeing to all of the Civic Employees' demands. The intervention of the Board of Trade and Civics (which evolved into the Chamber of Commerce) and of E. McGrath, Secretary of the Provincial Bureau of Labour, combined with the solidarity of the strikers, had determined the outcome.³⁴

The dramatic and decisive success of the Civic employees' strike confirmed the wisdom of labour's growing commitment to radical labour tactics. Accordingly, a mass meeting of labour, "the biggest gathering of labour ever held in the city," was held the evening of Monday, 28 April 1919, at the City Hall, to inaugurate a general reorganization of labour in the city.³⁵ As the *Brandon Sun* explained,

The general idea ... was that all the labour here should get into one big union, which would take in all classes of labourers and so unify the whole that they would have a great strength.³⁶

²⁹ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 24 April 1919.

³⁰ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 April 1919.

³¹ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 April 1919; *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 April 1919.

³² *Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 April 1919. The Committee included Rev. J.G. Miller, a Presbyterian minister; W.C. Hughes, a real estate manager; P.A. Kennedy, a druggist; H.W. Rankin, a grocer. *Henderson's Directory* (1913-1919), Brandon.

³³ D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto 1950), 4.

³⁴ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 April 1919; *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 April 1919.

³⁵ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 April 1919.

³⁶ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 April 1919.

On 14 May 1919, when the Board of Arbitration, created at the end of the Civic Union strike, released its report recommending wage increases consistent with the Winnipeg wage schedule, the victory of the civic employees was complete and Brandon's labour movement had compelling evidence that industrial unionism and radical labour tactics would disarm the opponents of labour.³⁷

The settlement proposed by the Arbitration Board was never implemented. On the same day that the proposed wage schedule was published in the *Brandon Sun*, the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council called a General Strike in Winnipeg, effective Thursday, 15 May.³⁸ On Friday, 16 May, George Ayers, President of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council, wired W. Robinson at the Winnipeg Labour Temple, requesting instructions for what action Brandon should take in conjunction with the Winnipeg strike.³⁹ On 20 May 1919, the *Western Labour News* reported that "Brandon had voted ... to stand by the Winnipeg strikers and would walk out in their support."⁴⁰

In joining the Winnipeg General Strike, Brandon workers, in particular the city's civic employees, were gambling their recent gains on the success of the general strike. Failure would almost certainly mean the loss of income and job security. Thus the decision of the Brandon workers to join the Winnipeg battle reflected both the confidence engendered by the success of the civic employees' strike, and the militancy of those workers who were still to achieve union recognition, the right to collective bargaining, or wage increases. The decision also reflected the commitment of individuals such as Fred Baker and George Ayers, who had assumed leading positions in Brandon's labour movement following the reconstitution of the Trades and Labour Council in the spring of 1917, to the principles of labour solidarity that had been enunciated at the Calgary Conference of Western Labour and embraced by the Brandon Trades and Labour Council.

³⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 May 1919.

³⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 May 1919.

³⁹*Western Labour News*, 21 May 1919. George Artimus Ayers was a Scottish immigrant who came to Brandon in 1911 to work as a section foreman on the Canadian Northern. Like Fred Baker, Ayers became active in the Brandon Trades and Labour Council in 1917. He served as President of the Council during the tumultuous events of 1919. In the spring of 1920, Ayers was elected to lead A.E. Smith's successful election campaign committee, and was elected President of the Brandon local of the Dominion Labour Party in July 1920. *Henderson's Directory* (1911-1920), Brandon; obituary of George Ayers, *Brandon Sun*, 11 September 1965; obituary of Mrs. G.A. Ayers, *Brandon Sun*, 2 January 1958. *The Confederate*, July 1920.

⁴⁰*Western Labour News*, 20 May 1919.

The Brandon Sympathetic Strike began 20 May, when the city's telephone operators — a workforce composed exclusively of women — as well as the Canadian National Railways' shopmen, bridge and building gangs, track repairmen, and carmen went out. These workers, totaling approximately 100, were joined on 21 May by 125 Canadian Pacific Railway roundhouse workers and carmen, and on Friday, 23 May, by 100 city teamsters, 30 carpenters, and 22 bakers. The teamsters' decision to strike was undoubtedly influenced by the refusal of employers in the city to enter into collective bargaining with the teamsters. On Saturday evening, 24 May, seventeen men employed at the electric power plant, which provided the city with power, walked out, leaving the city in darkness. The men returned to work on Monday, 26 May, at the request of the Strike Committee. By Saturday, 24 May, the Civic Employees' Union had joined the strike. At the request of the Strike Committee, the police, the staff of the waterworks pumping station, and school janitors remained at work. On Tuesday, 27 May, 22 men employed at the Brandon and Empire Brewing companies walked out, and were joined by more brewery and some cereal workers two days later. By that date, approximately 450 workers from a broad range of industries were out in sympathy with the Winnipeg General Strike. The great majority would remain out until the end of June and the collapse of the Winnipeg strike.⁴¹

In a series of *Strike Bulletins*, the cause of the strikers was set out. The first, issued 21 May, explained that,

The General Strike ... [was] a new venture. To strike alone has failed; all workers must stand together or success in securing better conditions will fail.⁴²

While the immediate objective of the strike was to win the right of collective bargaining for workers in Winnipeg metal trades, the Brandon strikers understood that success would advance the cause of labour in Brandon at a time when many Brandon workers were intent on achieving wage increases following four years of spiraling wartime inflation. The Brandon Sympathetic Strike was also fueled by contractual disputes created by the participation of workers in the Sympathetic Strike.

Labour's opponents in Brandon believed that the strike was more ominous in character. To City Council, the *Brandon Sun*, and the Law and Order League, an organization patterned after the Winnipeg Citizens' Committee of One Thousand, the strikes in Winnipeg and Brandon were,

⁴¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 20 May 1919, 21 May 1919, 23 May 1919, 26 May 1919. The *Montreal Gazette*, 30 May 1919.

⁴²PAM, *Salton Collection*, MG7, F8, Box 1, Brandon Trades and Labour Council, *Strike Bulletin No. 1*, 21 May 1919.

as Professor Pentland has explained, "the culmination of a revolutionary conspiracy intended to overthrow established institutions and install a soviet system in Canada."⁴³ Whatever was required to destroy the strike would be employed, for the opponents of the strike "were engaged, not in dealing with an industrial dispute, but in putting down a revolution."⁴⁴ Predictably, the *Brandon Sun* editorialized early in the strike that,

the evil motive which prompted the sympathetic strike in Winnipeg, and in this city too, was a deep laid plot for Revolution⁴⁵

In responding to charges that the Strike Committee had revolutionary intentions, the Committee established by the Trades and Labour Council to coordinate the strike asserted that as far as it was concerned, the Mayor of Brandon was chief magistrate of the municipality and had "full responsibility for maintaining good order during this crisis."⁴⁶ Further, the strikers were advised to,

avoid any semblance of disorder; refrain from loud talk or heated argument upon the streets; beware the stranger who manifests an eagerness to debate; keep away from crowds, which might likely contain members of labour, and generally let us make our impact upon society, for the cause we love, by doing nothing that will give the master class the occasion they so much seek: of covering the labour movement with stigma by accusing us of breaking their sacred law.⁴⁷

Further indication of the non-revolutionary intent of the strikers was evident in the efforts made by the Strike Committee to maintain essential services. As noted above, a variety of civic employees including police and firemen were left on duty during the strike. In the case of the city's teamsters, the Strike Committee issued cards permitting them to work "by authority of the Strike Committee."⁴⁸ Moreover, the Strike Committee sought to cooperate with civic authorities in dealing with potential disorder. On 21 May, City Council refused the Strike Committee's invitation to discuss ways and means to maintain law and order, and declined to review

⁴³H.C. Pentland, "Fifty Years After," *Canadian Dimension*, 14 July 1969.

⁴⁴H.C. Pentland, "Fifty Years After," *Canadian Dimension*, 14 July 1969.

⁴⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 May 1919.

⁴⁶*Salton Collection*, Box 1, Brandon Trades and Labour Council, *Strike Bulletin No. 3*, 23 May 1919.

⁴⁷*Salton Collection*, Box 1, Brandon Trades and Labour Council, *Strike Bulletin No. 3*, 23 May 1919.

⁴⁸PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June 1919, RG27, Vol. 313, file 150. Inspector F. H. French (RNWMP) to Commissioner, 25 May 1919.

the Strike Committee's intentions with regard to the working of essential industries.⁴⁹

The most vigorous opponent of the strike in Brandon was the Law and Order League which was created at the outset of the strike with the objective of "maintaining in operation all public utilities operated by the city, especially the waterworks, fire brigade and police duties."⁵⁰ The membership of the League, estimated at 300 in late May, was not publicized; as in Winnipeg, an effort was made to maintain the anonymity of the members of the League. Nevertheless, early in June, the Trades and Labour Council initiated a boycott of the business establishments operated by League members.⁵¹

Though the Brandon Police force remained on duty during the strike, City Council lacked confidence in the loyalty of the force. At the request of Council, a special detachment of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police (RNWMP) was located in the City.⁵² Under the command of Inspector F.H. French, the detachment was responsible for monitoring the Brandon situation, maintaining order, and reporting developments to the Commissioner's Office in Regina.⁵³ Council also passed a motion authorizing the appointment of special constables to assist in the maintenance of law and order. Under its constitution, the Law and Order League required that each of its members agree to act as a special constable at the request of the Mayor or other "duly constituted authority."⁵⁴ The issue of law and order was a central concern of Brandon's Great War Veteran's Association. As in Winnipeg, the Brandon Association accepted the Strike Committee's invitation to attend meetings of the strikers in order to witness the proceedings. The Veteran's request to City Council that it cooperate with the Strike Committee in maintaining law and order was rejected. Mayor McDiarmid explained that it was not possible to work with a body which had delegated to itself "powers which it does not constitutionally possess, powers which ... pertain to the elected Council of the City of Brandon."⁵⁵

⁴⁹PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June 1919, RG27, Vol. 313, file 150. Inspector F. H. French (RNWMP) to Commissioner, 25 May 1919.

⁵⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 May 1919.

⁵¹PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June, 1919. RG27, Vol. 313, file 150, Inspt. F.H. French, RNWMP (Brandon) to Commissioner, 25 May 1919.

⁵²PAC, Police Assistance to Brandon, Manitoba during civil strife, 1919. RG 18, Vol. 578, File 347, 1919. A. R. McDiarmid to Inspector F. H. French RNWMP (Brandon), 9 September 1919.

⁵³PAC, Police Assistance to Brandon, Manitoba during civil strife, 1919. RG 18, Vol. 578, File 347, 1919. A. R. McDiarmid to Inspector F. H. French RNWMP (Brandon), 9 September 1919.

⁵⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 6 June 1919.

⁵⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 May 1919.

Following the initial confident days of the Sympathetic Strike, the initiative shifted to labour's opponents. On Monday, 26 May, City Council passed a resolution giving civic employees until 2:30 p.m. Tuesday to return to work. Those workers who failed to return to their duties would be replaced permanently "by others loyal to the city."⁵⁶ On 2 June 1919, Council was advised by the city's solicitor that the action of civic employees in joining the sympathetic strike relieved the City of any obligation to implement the agreement proposed by the Arbitration Board at the end of the civic employees' strike in April. Civic employees now had a local battle on their hands to regain what they had won in April. The City's teamsters, who had been on duty at the request of the Strike Committee, walked out upon Council's refusal to pay the schedule of wages proposed by the Board, which was to take effect 1 June 1919.⁵⁷

When Council began reviewing applications for vacant civic positions on 5 June 1919, it was agreed that new employees, including any striking employees who chose to return, would be required to renounce participation in sympathetic strikes. It was also decided that irrespective of the experience of employees taken back, seniority would be ignored and all "appointees [would] commence duties as junior members of the staff, subject to promotion on proven merit."⁵⁸ As in the case of the civic employees, the provincial telephone operators were also given notice that their positions would be filled if they did not return to work. Failing an immediate return to work, the only hope civic employees and telephone operators had of regaining their positions was through the success of the Sympathetic Strike.⁵⁹

The Strike Committee fought back by attacking labour's opponents, and organizing a series of parades and rallies. In a series of *Strike Bulletin*, the workers were portrayed as victims of a "master class, which has long opposed and held in contempt the efforts of the workers to establish unions."⁶⁰ The *Brandon Sun* was characterized as the "servant of the master class dedicated ... to keeping the people in darkness and bondage...." City Council's requirement that returning civic employees renounce participation in sympathetic strikes was attacked as "another trick of the master class to keep an infamous and tyrannical hold upon the workers."⁶¹

⁵⁶ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 May 1919.

⁵⁷ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 June 1919.

⁵⁸ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 5 June 1919.

⁵⁹ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 May 1919, 3 June 1919.

⁶⁰ PAM, *Salton Collection*, Box 1, Brandon Trades and Labour Council, *Strike Bulletin* No. 1, 21 May 1919.

⁶¹ PAM, *Salton Collection*, Box 1, *Strike Bulletin* No. 3, 23 May 1919; *Strike Bulletin* No. 5, 31 May 1919.

Beginning in early June, the Committee organized a series of parades and rallies. On Friday, 6 June 1919, over 350 strikers took part in a parade headed by 36 returned soldiers. The RNWMP estimated that at least 55 per cent of the participants in the parade on 6 June 1919, were of the "foreign element."⁶² When the parade ended at Stanley Park, a number of speakers addressed the crowd. Henry Bartholomew, a returned soldier characterized by French as "one of the ablest labour men in western Canada," congratulated the workers on the solidarity evident in Brandon and urged that "labour must form one big union ... otherwise, they would always be kept down as they had in the past."⁶³

Evidence that the labour solidarity which Bartholomew referred to included "foreign" workers is cited in the RNWMP report mentioned above. This development was significant in the evolution of the city's working class. Prior to 1914, Brandon's "foreign" working class had remained largely outside the city's organized labour movement. From 1914-18, the isolation of the city's central and eastern European population was exacerbated by the hysteria generated by World War I. In Brandon, an Alien Detention center, which contained nearly 1000 "enemy aliens" at the end of 1915, gave Brandon's "alien" population a unique sense of isolation.⁶⁴ It took the resurgence of organized labour and the dramatic events in the spring of 1919 to force a reassessment by Brandon's English-speaking working class of its relations with the city's "alien" working class. While evidence suggests that animosity towards "alien" workmen continued to exist among

⁶² PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June 1919, Constable J.T. McGregor RNWMP (Brandon), to Inspt. F.H. French, RNWMP (Brandon), 7 June 1919.

⁶³ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 13 February 1915; 15 May 1915; 7 June 1915.

⁶⁴ PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June 1919, Inspt. F.H. French, RNWMP (Brandon) to the Commissioner, June 28, 1919; Corpl. D. Edward and Corpl. C. Saul RNWMP (Brandon) to Inspt. F.H. French R.N.W.M.P. (Brandon), 7 June 1919. *Brandon Daily Sun*, 7 June 1919. H.W. Bartholomew, a native of the United Kingdom, quickly emerged as a leading figure in the strike leadership. Bartholomew, while not holding any official position in the Brandon labour movement, was clearly influential in labour councils and as a platform speaker. He was also a determined advocate of the One Big Union. In the spring of 1920, Bartholomew unsuccessfully sought the nomination to run in the provincial election as a Brandon Labour Party candidate. He moved to Winnipeg and became active in the Socialist Party of Canada. In 1922, he joined the Workers' Party of Canada and remained an active Communist until his death in 1931. Bartholomew's initial participation in the strike was reported in the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 6 June 1919. See Ivan Avakamovic, *The Communist Party: A History* (Toronto 1974), 24; Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal 1981), 92.

segments of the working class, it is clear that a significant portion of the participants in the Sympathetic Strike were of "foreign origin."

One other development which had the effect of creating greater working-class solidarity in the city was the creation, in early June 1919, of a labour church, the People's Church, under the leadership of Rev. A.E. Smith. Smith had been very active in supporting the strikers.⁶⁵ He recalled in his autobiography, *All My Life*, that he,

was very close to the Strike Committee and was consulted by them at every turn I helped prepare the *Strike Bulletins*. I spoke at the great open air meetings called by the Strike Committee in the City parks. I marched at the front of the strike parades.

My church was open to the strikers who, on one occasion, marched in as a body.⁶⁶ Smith soon found himself in conflict with his congregation. His resignation was demanded and received. The People's Church was organized at a meeting held at the Starland Theatre on 8 June 1919.

Beatrice Brigden, a founding member of the Church, explained that the Sympathetic Strike was "the occasion, not the cause to be sure, for the organization of such a church."⁶⁷ The idea of creating the People's Church had originated with the organizing committee of the People's Forum which, through the winter of 1918-1919, had sponsored addresses by Smith, William Ivens, Salem Bland, and others.⁶⁸ The People's Church began with more than 200 adherents. Its capacity to transcend ethnic and religious differences among the city's working class was evident in a description by Brigden of an early meeting of the congregation:

in one sweep of the eye, I saw three men — one who had served time for attempting to murder his wife, — second, an influential Jew, — third, an Austrian Greek Catholic who bears the nickname of "King of the Austrians" on the flats, he holds the key to every Austrian home — and all three men were eager and susceptible.⁶⁹

While the Sympathetic Strike and the struggle to maintain solidarity had the effect of diminishing ethnic divisions within Brandon's working-class population, it also helped to integrate women into the city's organized

⁶⁵Smith, *All My Life*, 48.

⁶⁶Smith, *All My Life*, 48.

⁶⁷PAM, *Brigden Collection*, MG14, C1 4, Beatrice Brigden to Dr. T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919.

⁶⁸PAM, *Brigden Collection*, MG14, C1 4, Beatrice Brigden to Dr. T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919.

⁶⁹PAM, *Brigden Collection*, MG14, C1 4, Beatrice Brigden to Dr. T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919.

labour movement. In March 1919, the Brandon Trades and Labour Council had refused to accept women delegates named to the Council by the newly organized Sanatorium workers union, but women telephone operators and civic employees were prominent participants in the Sympathetic Strike.⁷⁰ Women participated in the parades and rallies of strikers and were active in the People's Church. Two noted members of Manitoba's labour political movement, Beatrice Brigden and Edith Cove, dated their involvement in the province's labour movement to the Brandon labour crisis of 1919.⁷¹

Beginning in late June, the rapid succession of events in Winnipeg shaped the outcome of the Sympathetic Strike in Brandon. The arrest of the Winnipeg Strike leaders on 16 June for seditious conspiracy provoked the passing of a resolution at a rally in Brandon on the evening of 17 June calling for their immediate release.⁷² W.A. Pritchard, who had addressed a rally in Brandon on 16 June and Henry Bartholomew, were expected to speak at the rally, but did not appear. They were attempting to avoid arrest. Pritchard was subsequently arrested in Calgary and charged with seditious conspiracy. On 19 June, another rally was held during which Fred Baker called on the railway running trades to join the strike:

there was only one link left now in the men to go out on strike and that is the running trades ... if you don't come out on strike ... [you] will have something to answer for.⁷³

But it was too late. Regardless of the action of the running trades, the Brandon strike was soon to collapse. By Wednesday, 25 June, the Winnipeg General Strike was over. In Brandon, a meeting of the Strike Committee was convened at the Fraternal Hall. Following H.C.L. Broadhurst's report that the City refused to reinstate striking civic employees "without prejudice," or withdraw the requirement that civic employees renounce sympathetic strikes, the Strike Committee announced that a general strike of unions affiliated with the Trades and Labour Council would begin Thursday, 26 June.⁷⁴ The decision to call the strike was taken only after it was agreed that no local would be bound by the decision to strike.⁷⁵ Surprisingly,

⁷⁰ Minutes of Sanatorium Attendants' Federal Union No. 27, 27 March 1919; 7 April 1919; 20 April 1919, in author's possession.

⁷¹ *Winnipeg Tribune*, 13 August 1969.

⁷² *Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 June 1919.

⁷³ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 20 June 1919. See also Norman Penner (ed.), *Winnipeg 1919: The Strikers' Own History of the Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto 1973), 158, for the subsequent arrest of Pritchard in Calgary.

⁷⁴ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 June 1919. See also PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June, 1919, Inspt. F.H. French RNWMP (Brandon) to the Commissioner, 28 June 1919.

⁷⁵ PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June 1919, Inspt. F.H. French RNWMP (Brandon) to the Commissioner, 27 June 1919.

the Strike Committee believed that the direction for strike activity in western Canada could be shifted from Winnipeg to Brandon. Acting on this assumption, the Brandon Strike Committee wired Regina, Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, and Calgary asking that a general strike be called in each of these centers.⁷⁶ The Brandon Committee's call for a General Strike was a failure. The only workers to respond were the firemen and coal handlers at the Brandon pumping station.

By Monday, 30 June 1919, most of the striking workers other than the civic employees had returned to work. None of the striking telephone operators were taken back, as their positions had been filled during the strike. The Canadian National Railways took all of the strikers back, including Fred Baker. All but three of the Canadian Pacific Railway employees were able to return to their positions. Teamsters in the city also returned to their pre-strike positions.⁷⁷ On Monday evening, the RNWMP, accompanied by the Brandon Chief of Police, raided the homes of Fred Baker, Thomas Hanwell, and W.R. Thornton. Hanwell was the Treasurer of the Brotherhood of Railway Trainmen; Thornton owned the Record Office where the *Strike Bulletins* were published. The Fraternal Hall and the Record Office were also entered and a variety of materials seized.⁷⁸

The striking civic employees sought a meeting with City Council. The delegation which met with City Council on Monday afternoon, 30 June, did not include H.C.L. Broadhurst. The City would not withdraw the requirement that civic employees renounce sympathetic strikes; nor could the Civic Employees' Union affiliate with any organization which could call it out on strike. Council's abolition of seniority announced during the strike would not be rescinded. The capitulation of the civic employees was complete. Following a brief review of the City's position, the vast majority of the striking civic employees signed application forms, requesting employment by the City.⁷⁹ H.C.L. Broadhurst did not apply for his former position, and on Tuesday, 2 July he resigned as President of the Civic Employees Federal Union.⁸⁰

In the spring of 1919, the Brandon labour movement experimented with new forms of labour organization and new strategies of industrial action. The success of the civic employees' strike, and the growing commitment of

⁷⁶PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, Inspt. F.H. French (RNWMP), to the Commissioner, 27 June 1919.

⁷⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 2 July 1919.

⁷⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 2 July 1919.

⁷⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 June 1919. See also *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June 1919, Inspt. F.H. French RNWMP (Brandon) to the Commissioner, 2 July 1919.

⁸⁰PAC, *Sympathetic Strike Brandon*, June 1919, Inspt. F.H. French RNWMP (Brandon) to the Commissioner, 3 July 1919.

the western Canadian labour movement to direct action through the general strike, carried the Brandon labour movement forward with unprecedented militancy. The Sympathetic Strike in Brandon was the climactic event in a period of increasing labour aggressiveness dating from the reconstitution of the Trades and Labour Council in the spring of 1917. Launched in sympathy with Winnipeg in the defence of the principles of organized labour, the central purpose of the Strike was the defense of labour's right to union recognition and collective bargaining. The absence of revolutionary intent on the part of labour was evident in the repeated efforts of the Strike Committee to ensure social order and the maintenance of essential services. Nevertheless, to the *Brandon Sun*, the Law and Order league, and the majority of City Council, the strike was part of an evil conspiracy to overthrow constitutional authority. Negotiation with the disloyal was impossible: active civic opposition and the coercive power of the state were required to obliterate the strike. In the end, the state prevailed decisively.

The collapse of the June strikes left organized labour in a state of turmoil and division. During the fall and winter of 1919-1920, the proponents of the One Big Union struggled with the advocates of the Trades and Labour Congress and the international craft unions for control of Brandon's organized labour movement. In November, 1919, a motion calling for the affiliation of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council with the One Big Union was referred to the Council's affiliated locals. Though some organized workers in Brandon chose to affiliate with the OBU, by 1921 control over the Trades and Labour Council had been asserted by individuals loyal to the Trades and Labour Congress. While a small local of the One Big Union existed until 1923, the events of 1919 rendered the city's organized labour movement wary in its approach to industrial conflict. The defense of working people in Brandon shifted to the political arena. In the aftermath of the strikes, Brandon's labour community sought to foster working-class solidarity and political action through the People's Church, the Brandon Defence League, the Dominion Labour Party, the Trades and Labour Council, and in the spring of 1920, the Brandon Labour Party. The labour crisis of 1919 was a seminal event both in shaping the evolution of Brandon's organized labour movement and in galvanizing the commitment of the city's working people to direct participation in Brandon's political life.

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6 “We Must Stand Fast For the Sake of Our Profession”:¹ *Teachers, Collective Bargaining and the Brandon Schools Crisis of 1922*

Tom Mitchell

AS THE CANADIAN ECONOMY expanded in the early years of the 20th century, a central theme of development was the creation of organizations designed to advance the collective economic interests of particular groups in Canadian society. Operating on the axiom that “... organization was the principle of survival in the new national economy,” workers, farmers, and businessmen, to name only the principal groups, sought to assert their economic interest through collective action.² While the nation’s teachers, in conjunction with local school boards, had organized associations for the general advancement of education, it was not until the end of World War I that teachers, initially in western Canada, mounted successful campaigns to organize teacher associations as a step toward the achievement of better salaries, and the advancement of the profession of teaching.³ Advocates of

¹This statement was attributed to Duncan McDougall, principal of the Collegiate Institute, in his remarks to fellow teachers during the early days of the Brandon schools controversy in 1922. See Margaret Mann, *The Strike That Wasn’t* (Brandon 1972), 49.

²Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921 A Nation Transformed* (Toronto 1974), 144-45.

³For a discussion of these developments see: G.J. Buck, “The Contributions of Teachers’ Associations to the Status of the Teaching Profession in Canada,” Ph.D. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1949; C.L. Cambell, “The British Columbia Teachers’ Federation,” MA Thesis, University of Washington, 1961; J.W. Chafe, *Chalk, Sweat and Cheers. A History of the Manitoba Teachers’ Society Commemorating Its Fiftieth Anniversary, 1919-1969* (Winnipeg 1969); J.W. Chalmers, *Teachers of the Foothills Province. The Story of the Alberta Teachers’ Association* (Toronto 1968); A. Kratzmann, “The Alberta Teachers’ Association – A Documentary Analysis of the Dynamics of a Professional Organization,” Ph.D. Thesis, University of Chicago, 1963; S. McDow-

the creation of such organizations for teachers, a profession that included growing numbers of women, pointed to the existence of spiraling war-induced inflation, and the resistance of school boards to improvement of the salaries of teachers, as the principal reasons for teachers to organize. Moreover, improvements in the salaries of teachers, it was argued, would attract better qualified individuals to the profession and improve the general quality of education.

In Manitoba, the ground work for the creation of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation was completed in the summer of 1918. In April 1919, the Federation held its first formal meeting, during which a constitution was adopted and an executive was elected. In the summer of 1920, the executive of the new teachers' organization in Manitoba initiated the creation of the Canadian Teachers' Federation. Though teachers sought to base such organizations on the principles of collective bargaining, they did not see themselves as workers. Collective bargaining was a means to secure, for teachers, the status and salaries of middle class professionals. As the Manitoba Teachers' Federation *Bulletin* commented in its report of the formation of the Canadian Teachers' Federation, "in federating, the teachers ... [were] using the principles of collective bargaining to secure what is long overdue them."⁴

From its creation in 1918, to its dissolution in 1922 with the dismissal of the city's entire teaching staff, the Brandon Teachers' Association served as the main bulwark for the city's teachers in their struggle for improved status and salaries. Notably, this was a struggle in which women teachers dominated for 73 of the 84 teachers employed by the Brandon School Board in 1922 were women. The Brandon School Board, which insisted on complete autonomy in setting the terms and conditions of employment for teachers

ell, "The Dynamics of the Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1965; G. Nason, "The Canadian Teachers' Federation: A Study of Its Historical Development, Interests and Activities from 1919 to 1960," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Toronto; S.N. Odynak, "The Alberta Teachers' Association As an Interest Group," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1963; A.H. Skolrood, "The British Columbia Teachers' Federation: A Study of Its Historical Development, Interests and Activities from 1916 to 1963," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Oregon, 1967; Harold Vidal, "The History of the Manitoba Teachers Society," M.Ed. Thesis, University of Manitoba, 1958.

⁴Harold Vidal, "The History of the Manitoba Teachers Society," 17. For a discussion of the efforts of British teachers to advance their professional status and achieve middle class salaries see Barray H. Bergen, "Only A Schoolmaster: Gender, Class, and the Effort to Professionalize Elementary Teaching in England, 1870-1910," *History of Education Quarterly*, (Spring 1982), 1-21. For a discussion of the development of teacher unions in the United States see Wayne J. Urban, *Why Teachers Organized* (Detroit 1982).

in the school district, rejected the demands of the its teachers and sought to undermine the existence of the Association. A crisis in the affairs of the city's schools erupted in April 1922, when, in response to a non-negotiable offer from the Board of a 25 per cent reduction in pay for all teachers, Brandon's entire teaching staff, including its principals and superintendent, left the employ of the Brandon School Board and "precipitated as grave a crisis as ever confronted any public body in the history of the city."⁵ Provoked by the economic malaise which affected the rural West at the end of World War I, this crisis was fuelled by the adherence of the Brandon School Board to a policy of rigid economy and an archaic system of industrial relations, and by the commitment of Brandon's teachers to collective bargaining and improved salaries. Acknowledged as the most infamous case of industrial conflict in the history of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation, the Brandon schools controversy of 1922 destroyed the Brandon Teachers' Association, and left the city's schools in chaos, yet galvanized support for the emergent teachers' movement across the country.

In the decade following 1900, Brandon's population of 5,000 grew to more than 13,000. As the city's population expanded, so did its schools; by 1914, the Brandon School Board employed more than 75 teachers. Throughout World War I, the salaries of the city's teachers remained at the 1914 level, while the cost of living escalated. By 1918, war time inflation was spiraling upward.⁶ In Brandon, the failure of the School Board to raise teachers' salaries forced many teachers to liquidate savings to make ends meet. These circumstances also caused the teachers to seek to transform their relations of employment with the School Board through the adoption of the principles of collective bargaining. On 10 May 1918, Brandon's teachers created the Brandon Teachers' Association. The central consideration in the timing of the formation of the Association was the decision pending concerning teachers' salaries for 1919. The School Board's record of refusing to provide salary increases necessitated by the rise in the cost of living, explained the *Brandon Sun*, had "led to the formation of a teachers' association."⁷

⁵On the composition of the Brandon teaching staff see Margaret Mann, *The Strike that Wasn't*, 122-125. *Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 March 1922. In the history of public schooling in Canada, prior to 1922, the only comparable crisis involving a dispute between a school board and its teachers took place in New Westminster, British Columbia, in 1921. This dispute was settled when school board elections resulted in the election of a board prepared to meet the teachers' demands. F. Henry Johnson, *A History of Public Education in British Columbia* (Vancouver 1964), 241-242.

⁶*The Labour Gazette*, Vol. XVII, 1917, 992-993; Vol. XVIII, 1918, 1012.

⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 11 May 1918. At the meeting, it was "agreed to adopt a constitution similar to that of the Winnipeg teachers...." For the editorial view of

Dominated since its inception by the city's business and professional elite, the Brandon School Board had never had to respond to an organized body of teachers in setting salaries. Created in 1881, and transformed in 1890 into the Brandon School District following the dismantling of Manitoba's original denominational school system, the Board was accustomed to an industrial relations model which allowed the Board to determine independently the salaries, working conditions, and tenure of the Brandon teaching staff. This model was transferred to Manitoba with the arrival of Ontario settlers who established the city in the years following the arrival of the Canadian Pacific Railway in September 1881.⁸ In 1918, the Brandon Board anticipated no change in its relations of employment with the city's teachers. On Monday, 13 May 1918, without any consultation with the recently established Teachers' Association, the Board announced that the entire teaching staff would receive a boost in salary.⁹

This did not satisfy the teachers, who were determined to meet with the Board and to secure professional salaries which reflected the rise in the cost of living since 1914. Though the Board agreed to meet representatives of the Association, it was not prepared to deal with the Association in formal collective bargaining. Board representatives described the meeting as a "round table discussion."¹⁰ As well, the Board rejected the Association's claims for higher salaries on the grounds that the Board's ability to increase the salaries of the city's teachers was constrained by the limited financial resources available and the high level of unpaid taxes in the city. Demands for higher pay could be met only by cutting out the manual training and domestic science departments, reducing the teaching staff, and increasing the student-teacher ratio.

The School Board's response to the teachers' demands typified the approach taken by municipal authorities in Brandon when dealing with demands by public sector employees for increases in pay. Assertions of financial incapacity were followed by the threat of amalgamation of positions or departments and the dismissal of employees. In the event that such a body of employees sought redress through collective action, the right to collective bargaining was denied and efforts were made to dismiss the union's leadership. These tactics reflected a central assumption of the city's system of industrial relations: while the right to collective bargaining had

the *Brandon Sun* on the creation of the Brandon Teachers' Association, see *Brandon Daily Sun*, 1 June 1918.

⁸Clare Pentland, "The Western Canadian Labour Movement, 1897-1919," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 2 (Spring-Summer 1979), 60.

⁹*Minutes of the Brandon School Board*, 13 May 1918. The *Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 May 1918, reported that "an application of the teachers based on the increased cost of living was given sympathetic consideration."

¹⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 30 May 1918.

to be conceded to a small number of groups of skilled workers, demands for collective bargaining by other groups should be denied. This was particularly so in the case of public sector employees.

Like the teachers, the civic employees in Brandon, including police, firemen, City Hall, and civic maintenance workers, had organized a union in 1918. In February 1919, the Civic Employees' Federal Union was refused recognition by the City. The confrontation between City Council and the Union was exacerbated by the Council's deplorable wartime record of undermining the standard of living of civic employees by refusing wage increases during a period of rapid inflation. Council had also threatened the job security of civic employees through arbitrary and ill-conceived proposals to reduce staff through the amalgamation of various departments.¹¹

In late April, 1919, Council followed its rejection of the Union's demands with an assault on the Union's leadership. On 23 April 1919, City Council adopted a report from its Finance Committee which called for a reduction in the staff of the City Hall. Two employees were dismissed: H.C.L. Broadhurst, President of the Civic Union, and Robert Lessells, the Union's secretary. In reaction, the Union voted to strike unless Council recognized the Union, reinstated Broadhurst and Lessells, and agreed to the creation of a Board of Conciliation. When these demands were rejected, the Union went out on strike at 11:00 a.m., 25 April 1919, twenty days before the Winnipeg General Strike erupted. On Saturday, 27 April, following the threat of a general strike of organized workers in the city under the direction of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council, the intervention of the Board of Trade and Civics in the controversy, and the organization of a demonstration of public support for the strikers, the City agreed to the Union's demands.

With the conclusion of the strike, the Civic Union was recognized and Broadhurst and Lessells were reappointed to their positions in City Hall. However, the wage settlement proposed by the Board of Conciliation in mid-May was never implemented. Beginning on 20 May 1919, over 450 organized workers in Brandon, including members of the Civic Employees' Union, joined the Winnipeg workers out on strike in the defence of the principles of collective bargaining. The Brandon Sympathetic Strike, the longest and most cohesive of the sympathetic strikes associated with the Winnipeg General Strike, continued until the end of June when it collapsed

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of the Brandon labour crisis of 1919, see Tom Mitchell, "Brandon 1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike," *Manitoba History*, 17 (Spring 1989).



Brandon Collegiate Staff, ca 1921-1922. Photo courtesy *Provincial Archives of Manitoba*.

with the defeat of the Winnipeg strike.¹² The failure of the Sympathetic Strike reinforced the authority and confidence of Brandon's business and professional elite and stiffened the resolve of the Brandon School Board in its resistance to the demands of the Teachers' Association. Though the Brandon Teachers' Association had not affiliated with the Brandon Trades and Labour Council, nor participated in the spring strikes, the labour crisis of 1919 obliterated the prospects of the teachers for recognition of their Association, or the acceptance of collective bargaining by the Board, now galvanized by the labour crisis of 1919 into a determined vigilance in the defence of its historical prerogatives.

The Board's determined opposition to the Brandon Teachers' Association in the three years following 1919 illustrates Clare Pentland's observation that Canadian employers "have never taken a forward step in industrial relations by intelligent choice, but have always had to be battered into it."¹³ Even before the Sympathetic Strike had ended, the Board sought to undermine the leadership of the Teachers' Association and intimidate advocates of change among the teachers. On 10 June 1919, in the midst of the ongoing Sympathetic Strike, the School Board decided to eliminate the manual training and domestic science programs for a period of two years. The decision was justified as a necessary response to the expansion of the district's student population which made it impossible to continue to house these programs. Board members asserted that the unsettled state of affairs in the City arising from the protracted labour crisis made it impractical to submit a bylaw to ratepayers authorizing the sale of debentures for the construction of a new school, or the issuance of a contract for the addition to, or erection of, a school.¹⁴ As a result of the Board's decision to eliminate manual training, the Director of the program, James Skene, would be dismissed from his employment with the Board. Since his arrival in 1911, Skene had been an advocate of radical social reform and an organizer of various reform organizations including the Brandon Social Democratic Party, the Peoples' Forum, the Labour Representation League, and in 1918, the Brandon Teachers' Association.

In fact, there was no crisis in school accommodation. This was made evident by the resignation of Superintendent of Schools, Alfred White, in response to the Board's action. White contended that there was no justification for the Board's action. Moreover, he argued:

¹²Gregory S. Kealey, "1919: The Canadian Labour Revolt," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 29.

¹³H.C. Pentland, "The Canadian Industrial Relations System: Some Formative Factors," *Labour/Le Travailleur*, 4 (1979), 19.

¹⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 11 June 1919; see also, *The Confederate*, 12 June 1919, and Minutes of the Brandon School Board, 10 June 1919.

At this time when every progressive nation is realizing as never before how fundamental the very best kind of education is in making of good citizens, it seems incredible in a city like Brandon such a retrograde step could be contemplated, much less taken.¹⁵

White's resignation was followed by protests of the Board's action by the Brandon Teachers' Association, the Brandon Social Service Council, the Brandon Board of Trade, the Great War Veteran's Association, and the Brandon Women's Institute.¹⁶ *The Confederate*, a labour newspaper established by the Brandon Trades and Labour Council and the Dominion Labour Party, concluded that the Board's action was motivated by a desire to "injure individuals because of their private opinions and to produce intimidation on the whole staff of teachers."¹⁷ The Department of Education, through B.J. Hales, Principal of the Normal School, offered to accommodate the Manual Training and Domestic Science programs in the new Normal School. At a special meeting of the School Board, the Board reversed its decision and accepted the Department's offer. Such a resolution of the problem could have been achieved without the threat of staff and program terminations.

The unsettled state of affairs in Brandon's schools at the end of World War I was not unique in Canada; controversy concerning the status and salaries of teachers was evident across the country. After four years of wartime sacrifice, culminating in privation and demoralization, teachers were determined to improve their salaries and professional status through collective action. In the fall of 1919, demands for action from the Manitoba Teachers' Federation prompted the provincial government to establish a Commission of Investigation into the Status and Salaries of Teachers in the province.¹⁸ In Brandon, submissions to the Commission stressed the complete inadequacy of teachers' salaries and underlined the concerns of teachers with the erosion of their status as middle-class professionals. Women teachers, already paid less than their male colleagues, were placed at even greater disadvantage. An elementary school teacher explained to the Commission that many of her colleagues had redeemed bonds, dropped insurance, and spent holidays at home because of inadequate salaries. W.H. King, a Brandon Collegiate teacher who had been elected to the first executive of the newly created Manitoba Teachers' Federation, explained that dentists, civil engineers, doctors, and lawyers were all better paid than teachers. Moreover,

¹⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 16 June 1919.

¹⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 June 1919.

¹⁷*The Confederate*, 12 June 1919.

¹⁸Alexander Gregor and Keith Wilson, *The Development of Education in Manitoba, II: 1897-1982* (Winnipeg 1983), 43.

the farmer at the Brandon Asylum receives \$1,800. and everything found. A tailor can draw \$40. per week, and a station agent in a small village receives \$2,000. per annum, with house and fuel, while the principal in the same place gets \$1,600.¹⁹

B.A. Tingley, Secretary Treasurer of the Brandon Teachers' Association, urged the Commission to recommend that teachers' salaries be increased to reflect "a teacher's academic and professional equipment, and ... the quantity and quality of ... previous experience." The Chairman of the Brandon School Board conceded that the Board would like to pay teachers more than the current minimum of \$750, but he did not know where the Board could get the money.²⁰

In a report issued early in 1920, the Commission recommended that a pension scheme for teachers be established, that increased provincial funding for education be provided, that salary schedules designed to retain desirable teachers be ensured, and that a Board of Reference to deal with salary disputes between teachers and trustees be created. Unlike the Board recommended by the Commission, the Board of Reference created in 1920 did not have any authority to enforce its decisions. Nevertheless, in the first year of its existence the new Board of Reference was invited to mediate disputes in three districts; in each instance, the solution recommended by the Board was accepted by the disputing parties.²¹

In 1920, the antagonism between the Brandon School Board and the Teachers' Association intensified. In February, following consultation with representatives of the Association, the Board granted a salary "bonus" to each member of the District's teaching staff who had been employed by the Board since September 1919. Teachers at the minimum salary received a "bonus" of \$250, the remaining staff received \$200. During consultations with the Board, the Teachers' Association had agreed to a bonus of \$300 for each teacher. Confused and irritated by the Board's arbitrary decision to reduce the size of the "bonus," the Association's executive sought an explanation from the Board. None was provided.

In April, the Board agreed to meet with the Teachers' Association regarding a new wage schedule. A series of informal meetings with teachers selected by it to represent the district's teachers followed. In mid-June, the Board rescinded the schedule adopted in the spring of 1918 and adopted

¹⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 October 1919.

²⁰Gender differences in pay were also raised. Mrs. S.E. Clement, President of the Brandon Council of Women, asserted the Council's opinion that teachers' salaries should be much higher and "in such cases as women did the same work as men, they should receive the same pay." *Brandon Daily Sun*, 20 October 1919.

²¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 4 February 1920, 17 February 1920. On the record of the Board of Reference, see *Proceedings of the Manitoba School Trustees' Association, 1920-1926*, March 1921, 18.

a schedule of salaries for the district's teachers "conferred upon by the management committee and Mr. Knapp, representing the Teachers' Association...."²² The Teachers' Association had not delegated Knapp to represent Brandon's teachers. Moreover, the Board's schedule did not reflect a recognition of the education or experience of each teacher in the District. Gaining such recognition was a central objective of the Association. During a special meeting of the Board on 29 June 1920, held to deal with the Association concerns, the Board refused to reconsider any alterations to the new schedule.²³

In the fall of 1920, the Teachers' Association made representations to the Board concerning the need to improve teacher salaries. In November, the Association proposed a salary schedule for the Board's consideration. The Board referred this proposal to the new Board, which would not be elected until December. Angered by the School Board's failure to grant a comprehensive and fair salary schedule, its attempt to manipulate the Association by negotiating with individuals other than those designated by the Association, and its decision to postpone discussion of the teachers' proposed schedule until the election of a new School Board, the Brandon Teachers' Association laid its concerns before the executive of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation. In late November 1920, H.W. Huntley, President of the Federation, advised the Brandon School Board that if a settlement of the dispute between the Board and teachers was not achieved by Tuesday, 7 December 1920, the executive of the Federation would ask the provincial government to appoint a Board of Reference to settle the dispute.²⁴ Ignoring the deadline set by the Federation, the Brandon Board referred the correspondence from the Federation's President to the new Board to be elected in December.

In January, the new Board rejected the salary increases proposed by the Association. It took the position that the "present unsatisfactory economic conditions and strong tendency for much lower prices in commodities and labour" made it impossible for Brandon to finance any increases in the salary schedule adopted in 1920.²⁵ In the debate on the salary question, Board member Marlatt, a long standing labourite in the city, warned of the inevitability of a Board of Reference if the School Board continued to ignore the teachers' demands. Moreover, he argued, the position of the teachers was quite reasonable: the cost of living had increased by 160 per cent since 1914, while the total amount for teachers' salaries had increased only from \$100,000 to only \$200,000, and more teachers had been added to the

²² *Minutes of the Brandon School Board*, 14 June 1920.

²³ *Minutes of the Brandon School Board*, 21 June 1920.

²⁴ *Minutes of the Brandon School Board*, 13 December 1920.

²⁵ *Minutes of the Brandon School Board*, 14 January 1921.

staff.²⁶ Predictably, the response of the teachers to the School Board's motion was to reaffirm the decision taken in November 1920, that the entire matter of teachers' salaries in Brandon be referred to a Board of Reference.

On 29 January 1921, a Board of Reference, consisting of J.A. Glenn representative of the Manitoba Trustees' Association, C.W. Laidlaw of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation, and A.E. Hill of the Advisory Board of the Department of Education, met in Brandon.²⁷ While the teachers were prepared to abide by the recommendations of the Board of Reference, the School Board insisted on its absolute authority in setting the salaries and conditions of employment of its teachers, and contested the Board of Reference's right to interfere in the affairs of the School Board. Ignoring the provincial government's express purpose in creating the Board of Reference, James Kilgour, a Brandon lawyer, explained on behalf of the School Board that "the School Board had no legal right to treat with any other body and could not allow any outside body to interfere with the findings of the School Board."²⁸ Accordingly, the Board of Reference had no authority to intervene in the dispute between the Brandon School Board and its employees. Moreover, as collective bargaining with the teachers was "absolutely prohibited by law ... the School Board could not accept any finding from the Board of Reference."²⁹

In setting out the teachers' position, G.R. Coldwell, former Conservative MLA for Brandon and Minister of Education in the Roblin government, explained that the teachers did not insist that the School Board recognize the Association for purposes of collective bargaining. The teachers, however, were determined to secure salary levels comparable to those of teachers in other western Canadian communities, and to gain agreement that a teacher's salary should reflect the personal qualifications and years of service provided to the school district by the teacher. Kilgour rejected all claims made on behalf of the teachers, and asserted that the difficult financial circumstances of the City made any increase in teachers' salaries impractical. In any case, Kilgour asserted, it was the School Board's view that the current salary schedule was fair to the teachers.

The Board of Reference sought a middle course in resolving the points of dispute. It recommended that the teachers accept the 1920 salary schedule as the effective salary schedule for the period beginning 1 January 1921. The Board also recommended that the School Board concede to the teachers' demand that salaries reflect the qualifications and years of service of individual teachers. Evidently accepting the reasonableness of the Board

²⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 15 January 1921.

²⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 31 January 1921.

²⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 31 January 1921.

²⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 31 January 1921.

of Reference's position, during its meeting of 14 February 1921, the Brandon School Board rescinded its motion of 14 January 1921, which had denied any increase in salaries, and adopted a salary schedule for 1921 incorporating salary differentials recommended by the Board of Reference.³⁰

Though recognition of the Teachers' Association for purposes of collective bargaining was not provided, the settlement of the immediate dispute between the Board and the teachers seemed to remove the immediate obstacles to the improvement of relations between the Association and the Brandon Board. Unfortunately, the city's worsening financial condition and the Board's continuing unwillingness to deal with the teachers on salary and contractual matters in a manner which respected the basic assumptions of collective bargaining, provoked a profound community crisis in the spring of 1922. This crisis culminated in the dismissal of the entire teaching staff of the District. Brandon's schools were thrown into chaos, and the community suffered deep and lasting divisions. Ironically, the Brandon crisis galvanized support for the recently created teachers' associations in each of the western provinces, and provided a focus of solidarity for the Canadian Teachers' Federation created in Saskatoon in the summer of 1922.

The influence of Brandon's worsening financial situation in setting the underlying conditions for the schools crisis of 1922 can not be ignored.³¹ In the years between 1901 and 1915, Brandon's population increased from 5,620 to 15,866. While the rapid expansion of the city's population broadened its tax base, the city's growing population also prompted demands for expanded municipal services. In the years before World War I, extensive improvements in sidewalks, bridges, pavements, public buildings, sewers, and public utilities were carried out. In 1913, a street railway system was constructed. Though the size of the city did not justify the project, it was anticipated that the existing rate of growth would soon provide the economic base required for the operation of the railway. By 1915, Brandon's civic debt totaled \$2,870,638.

The historic expansion of the city and of western Canada peaked in 1912. Prior to the outbreak of World War I, a recession caused high unemployment in the city as capital investment, railway construction, and business expansion ended. During the war, industrial expansion driven by wartime industrial production did not benefit Brandon or other urban centers in western Canada. While high prices for grain and pressure to expand

³⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 1 February 1921, 2 February 1921, 15 February 1921.

³¹This discussion of Brandon's development and its financial condition in 1922 is derived in large part from Donald Ian MacDonald, "A Study of the Financial Problems of an Urban Municipality in Manitoba — the City of Brandon," MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 1938.

acreage under cultivation did prompt agricultural expansion, crop yields declined after 1917 leaving many farmers with heavy debt loads at a time of declining yields and falling prices. Moreover, in southern Manitoba, poor crops from 1916 to 1921, chiefly as a result of rust, and drought, exacerbated the difficulties of the immediate postwar years. Brandon's economy, based almost exclusively on the provision of goods and services to a local market, suffered in turn. The city's population declined from 15,866 in 1915 to 14,421 in 1920.

While poor economic conditions in southwestern Manitoba eroded the city's tax base, inflation during the latter years of World War I increased the cost of municipal operations. As tax levies peaked in 1921, jumping from 23 mills in 1917 to 40 in 1921, tax collections declined between 1915 and 1921. At the same time, the growth in the city's school population, and the increase in capital and operating costs of education, made the School Board levy the most significant single item of municipal taxation. By 1922, Brandon's financial situation was poor, with an accumulated deficit on current account of over \$300,000. In January 1922, the newly elected City Council faced a deteriorating financial situation. It had few options. Fixed costs associated with debt maintenance and essential programs had to be financed; the prospect of continuing municipal deficits had to be dealt with.

Thus, the determined effort of the Brandon Teachers' Association to improve the salaries of its members coincided with a period of deep civic financial crisis. A similar crisis had occurred in 1886. The failure of Brandon City Council to provide the Brandon Protestant School Board with revenue to operate the schools had caused the Board to threaten to close the school. Teachers were advised that their employment would end following the conclusion of the school year in June 1886. While the City Council relented and provided funds to continue the operation of the schools, the principal cost of resolving the crisis was borne by the teachers, whose salaries were arbitrarily reduced by the Board.³² In the spring of 1922, Brandon's teachers refused to accept a similar solution to the city's financial dilemma. Crisis ensued.

The sequence of events leading to the dismissal of Brandon's entire teaching staff began with the civic elections in the late fall of 1921. During these contests, Brandon's financial condition was the central issue. Harry Cater, Mayor of Brandon from 1915-1918, was elected on a platform of civic austerity. In his inaugural statement, Cater cited the report of the city treasurer that outstanding real property taxes for 1921 were \$110,000 as compared to \$58,000 for 1920 and \$15,000 for 1919. In Cater's view, the need for civic economy could not be more compelling. During a meeting

³²Tom Mitchell, "In the Image of Ontario: Public Schools in Brandon 1881-1890," *Manitoba History*, 12 (Fall 1986), 31.

of City Council and the School Board in February 1922, the two bodies agreed to impose the "most rigid economy." On 21 February, City Council rejected aldermanic salary increases for 1922 and imposed salary reductions of 12.5 per cent on all civic employees. Following these moves by Council, the *Brandon Sun* editorialized that the School Board "cannot escape the absolute necessity of paring their estimates to the bone."³³

On Saturday, 25 February the School Board announced its plans for budget reductions. These included the reduction of teachers salaries by 25 per cent and the salaries of school janitors by ten per cent; the abolition of manual training, domestic science, and commercial courses; the release of the art teacher and an additional 12 teaching staff; and, the probable elimination of physical training and grade 12 in the Collegiate. In defending these proposals, George Fitton, Board Chairman, noted that the financial resources available to the Board from the education levy amounted to \$168,500, compared with the sum of \$210,000 made available in 1921. Accordingly, the Board had to reduce its budget by the sum of \$41,440.³⁴

To put the Board's position before the teachers, a special conference was called for Monday afternoon, 27 February, at the City Hall. During the conference, teachers were advised that if they would accept an immediate reduction of 25 per cent in pay, it might not be necessary to implement all of the program and staff reductions proposed by the Board. Moreover, the proposed salary reduction was subject to change, if the revenues available to the Board were greater than expected. However, if the teachers failed to agree to the salary reduction proposed by the Board immediately, they would be given notice of termination effective 1 May 1922. The Board may have banked on the proposition that it could intimidate its largely female teaching staff into submission. Finally, and ominously, the Board advised the teachers that it had adopted a policy of making all engagements of teachers on an annual basis; the engagement of individual teachers would be made by written agreement prior to 1 June of each year.

To allow time to consider the Board's ultimatum, the teachers agreed to waive notice for the number of days after 1 March that they delayed in responding to the Board.³⁵ On Saturday, 5 March 1922, the Teachers'

³³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 4 January 1922; *Brandon Daily Sun*, 10 January 1922, 15 February 1922, 22 February 1922, 23 February 1922. In the elections for the 1922 School Board, all but one of the "labour" candidates for the Board were defeated. It is noteworthy that Robert Bullard, the one labour spokesperson on the Board, disassociated himself from the Board's policy during the crisis through his intentional absence from Board meetings. Thus, the claims of Board unanimity were possible only because of the non-participation of labour's one representative on the Board.

³⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 February 1922.

³⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 February 1922.

Association advised the Board that it was not prepared to agree to an immediate reduction in the salaries of its members. In a written statement signed by the District's teachers, principals, and supervisors, the Board's salary proposal was rejected on the grounds that a deficit in "the finances of the city ... [was] not a sound principle upon which to base a reduction in the salaries of teachers."³⁶ Moreover, the teachers argued that the Board and City Council had acted arbitrarily in setting the levy for the School Board. An increase of three mills on the education levy, they asserted, would raise the school appropriation to the amount budgeted for 1921. Even then, the education levy would not "be higher than that paid in many other municipalities." Moreover,

A three mill increase would affect the ratepayers at the rate of about three dollars on every thousand dollars of income, while the school board proposes a cut of \$250 on every thousand dollars of income for the members of the teaching staff, or a reduction of eighty times greater than would be required for the general citizenship of the city.³⁷

The Association's response also noted that teachers' salaries in Brandon were already lower than those in St. Boniface, Portage la Prairie, and Winnipeg. While teachers' salaries in Saskatchewan and Alberta were higher than those paid in Brandon, there was no evidence that they would be lowered in 1922, and "the Saskatchewan and Manitoba Trustees' Associations have put themselves on record as being opposed to any general reductions." While acknowledging the difficulty of the Board, the teachers were not prepared "to bear a share of the burden not commensurate with that borne by the citizens generally."³⁸

In an editorial response to the teachers' rejection of the Board's ultimatum, the *Brandon Sun* alleged outside interference in Brandon's affairs and asserted that the teachers were,

not well advised (from Winnipeg) in refusing to accede to any reduction in their salaries ... [and that] ... no outside influence should be tolerated in the settlement of matters for which the City of Brandon has to pay a big bill annually.³⁹

Clearly, the *Sun's* preoccupation with the Manitoba Teachers' Federation's participation in the dispute was a legacy of the Brandon Sympathetic Strike of 1919, when the city had been traumatized by a strike triggered by events in Winnipeg. The defeat of the Sympathetic Strike, the rejection of broadly

³⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 6 March 1922.

³⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 March, 1922.

³⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 March, 1922.

³⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 March, 1922.

based labour organizations, which had given labour greater bargaining power, and the deep antagonism of the School Board to the acceptance of the basic principles of collective bargaining resonated through the response of the *Sun* and the Brandon School Board to the activities of the Brandon Teachers' Association and its provincial body, the Manitoba Teachers' Federation, in the spring of 1922.

In reaction to the refusal of teachers to accept immediate salary reductions, the Board directed Alfred White, the District's Superintendent, to ask teachers to write to the Board individually and to indicate the conditions on which each was prepared to continue for May and June, "... having in mind ... [his professional] ... responsibilities to the children of the city and the financial conditions which at present confront the Board."⁴⁰ Through their Association, the teachers declined the opportunity to communicate individually with the Board. In a letter signed by 84 of the 88 teaching staff (of the 4 remaining, 2 were ill, one could not be reached, and the last was a substitute) the teachers reaffirmed support for their Association's position that the city's economic condition was not a proper basis for a reduction in their salaries. They were prepared to continue teaching through May and June only if the Board rescinded motions, which required the reduction of teacher salaries, the termination of all contracts with current teachers, and the issuance of notices of termination to teachers. This offer was conditional upon Board acceptance by 31 March 1922.⁴¹

The Board reacted angrily to the defiance of the teachers. Its Chairman asserted that the "conditions the teachers' body sought to impose were utterly impossible and antagonistic ... precipitating as grave a crisis as ever confronted any public body in the history of the city." Fitton disclaimed any malice towards the teachers or hidden motive in the reduction of teachers' salaries, and, attacking the civic character of the teachers, regretted that "a more loyal citizenship was not manifest by the teachers." The intransigence of the teachers forced the Board's hand. With the rejection of its conditions by the teachers the Board was compelled to seek new teachers for the city's schools.⁴²

On 7 April 1922, the Board's position was defended by J.F. Kilgour, who had won election to the School Board in November 1921. In a letter drafted by Kilgour which appeared on the front page of the *Brandon Sun*, Kilgour asserted that the city "was drifting steadily into a dangerous and critical financial crisis," as its accumulated deficit on current account was

⁴⁰ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 March 1922.

⁴¹ *Brandon Daily Sun*. For the teachers' position see also "To the Citizens of Brandon," *The Executive of the Brandon Teachers' Association*, Brandon, 1922. R.S. Kenny Collection, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

⁴² *Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 March 1922.

\$302,000.⁴³ The School Board had to protect Brandon's solvency through reductions in its expenditures. Kilgour dismissed the notion of raising taxes. Such a course was impractical, he argued, when many ratepayers were currently on the brink of financial disaster because of the depressed economic conditions affecting the city. Moreover, because of the "necessity of providing the large salary increases to the teaching staff following the recommendation of the Reference Board,"⁴⁴ the School Board had a deficit at the end of 1921 of \$30,756.38. Program reductions in domestic science, art, commercial classes, physical and manual training would not allow for sufficient reduction in expenditures to meet the expected level of revenue available to the Board; the teachers must accept salary reductions of 25 per cent. Alas, the teachers had rejected the Board's decision "in a studied memorandum in which the surprising view was expressed ... that financial ability or inability on the part of the Board or City was an irrelevant factor in the case and one that did not concern the staff."⁴⁵

Interpreting the teachers' defence of their already inadequate salaries as a species of labour radicalism, Kilgour objected to the fact that the teachers were dealing with the Board as a collective body. He had no "discredit to cast on trade unionism in its relation to trades ... but deplored this movement in the teaching vocation"⁴⁶ In a reference to the suggestion made by the Teachers' Association that the impasse be resolved through third party arbitration, Kilgour repeated arguments he had made to the Board of Reference, in 1921, that the School Board had no legal capacity to delegate its responsibilities to set the salary and working conditions of teachers to a Board of Arbitration or to engage in collective bargaining with the teachers.

In an editorial, the *Brandon Sun* extended Kilgour's misplaced attack on organized labour. It asserted that unions in the city were attempting to help the teachers by pressing for higher taxes to pay the teachers. Moreover, the *Sun* charged, the Teachers' Association had initiated a campaign to discourage those who were considering taking up teaching positions in the district. It was clear to the *Sun* that the Manitoba Teachers' Federation "wielded an autocratic power...[and] some of its methods seem[ed] near akin to sovietism."⁴⁷

Indeed, opposition to the School Board's policy, not reported by the *Sun*, had been expressed by Brandon unions, the Brandon Council of Women, students at the Collegiate Institute, and students at the province's Normal

⁴³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 7 April 1922.

⁴⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 7 April 1922.

⁴⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 7 April 1922.

⁴⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 7 April 1922.

⁴⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 7 April 1922.

Schools in Brandon and Winnipeg. Brandon's labour movement provided the focus of opposition to the Board. On 3 April, Local 464 of the Order of Railroad Conductors adopted a resolution protesting the action of the School Board, and calling for a "fair and businesslike settlement" of the dispute. Labour was prepared to increase taxes rather "than have the school year disarranged."⁴⁸ The resolution adopted by the conductors was endorsed by a number of union locals in the city.

On 11 April, Rev. A.E. Smith, Brandon's Labour MLA elected in the 1920 election, organized a public meeting on the school question. The School Board declined to attend, asserting that the meeting was not "a regularly called or organized meeting, and therefore not one in which this board should officially participate."⁴⁹ During the meeting, a committee was established to review the impasse between the Teachers' Association and the School Board. Composed predominantly of individuals associated with the city's labour movement, yet including the wife of a former Liberal MLA for Brandon, Mrs. S. Clement, the current President of the Brandon Council of Women, the committee was directed to interview the Teachers' Association executive, the School Board, and the Minister of Education with a view to resolving the crisis.⁵⁰

On Smith's initiative, negotiations involving the teachers and the Board were renewed. On Monday, 17 April, the Board proposed that the teachers agree to continue through the school year at reduced salaries on the condition that a new schedule of salaries would be negotiated for the fall. While this proposal required the elimination of special programs, it provided for all grades in the public schools and the Collegiate. The representatives of the Teachers' Association insisted that any decision on the Board's proposal could be taken only in a meeting of the Association, and reaffirmed the Association's insistence that a third party arbitrator be asked to arbitrate the dispute between the Board and Teachers. The School Board was not prepared to provide time for the Association to review this latest proposal or to agree to the principle of third party arbitration. Board representatives left the meeting determined to proceed with consideration of the applicants for teaching positions in the District "with a view to securing their services for the months of May and June."⁵¹

⁴⁸"Deadlock Unbroken in Brandon School Affair," *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 April 1922.

⁴⁹*Minutes of the Brandon School Board*, 10 April 1922.

⁵⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 April 1922. Many members of the committee, which included Beatrice Brigden, Rev. A.E. Smith, W.H. Marlatt, William Hill, George Morris, and Mrs. E.A. Ellams, most had longstanding associations with the city's labour movement and had been involved in both organized labour and labour political activities. In the 1921 School board election, Marlatt and Ellams had been unsuccessful candidates.

⁵¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 April 1922.

On 22 April, a well attended public meeting convened by Mayor Cater listened to presentations from Cater, George Fitton, J.F. Kilgour, and A.E. Smith. The meeting adopted a motion calling for the re-engagement of the current teaching staff at present salary levels and the creation of an arbitration board to develop a new schedule for the fall. On 25 April, a delegation composed of executive members of the city's Council of Women pressed the School Board to agree to the steps set out in the motion adopted during the public meeting of 22 April. In pressing the Board to agree to this course Aleita Clement urged that "the situation is wrecking our homes, as well as our schools."⁵² She acknowledged that, though the resolution she favoured had been developed by the "labour party" and had not been adopted by every organization affiliated with the Council, yet she had no doubt that all would support it. The Board refused to budge.

Opposition to the School Board was manifest also in petitions and resolutions expressing opposition to the Board's policy. On Wednesday, 4 April, a petition, which the students claimed was an independent project of the student body, was signed by over three hundred Brandon Collegiate Institute students. It termed the decision of the Board to dismiss the Collegiate's staff as "unwarranted," expressed confidence in the staff, and urged the Board to serve the "best interests of the students" by retaining the teachers for the remainder of the term.⁵³ During April, student teachers at both the Brandon and Winnipeg Normal Schools passed resolutions in support of the Brandon teachers.⁵⁴

The School Board was not dissuaded by opposition to its plan to dismiss its teaching staff. As the contracts of the District's teachers ended on 30 April, the last teaching day for the staff was Friday, 28 April. On Saturday, 29 April, the Board held a special meeting to review plans for the operation of the City's schools when they opened the following Monday. To ensure a smooth transition to the new order, it was decided that a member of the Board would be present at each of the schools Monday morning. When the schools opened on Monday, they were staffed with fewer than half the usual number of teachers. Students in grades one through three and ten through

⁵²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 26 April 1922. *The Toronto Globe*, "Treat Trustee to Who's Filling in to Ink Barrage," 13 June 1922, reported in early June that "strife divides all sections of the community. Friendships have been split up, families disagree, discord in churches, lodges and associations has upset the labor of years." The involvement of the trustees also resulted in one trustee being charged with assault. See "Brandon School Trustee Charged with Assault," *The Toronto Globe*, 13 June 1922.

⁵³"Deadlock Unbroken in Brandon School Affair," *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 April 1922.

⁵⁴"Brandon Normal Students Endorse Teachers' Action," *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 April 1922; "Winnipeg Normal Students Endorse Teachers' Action," *Manitoba Free Press*, 11 April 1922.

twelve were sent home until further notice. Opposition to the Board, made evident in the petition of students in early April, was renewed at the Collegiate Institute:

The entrances were decorated with notices of "Welcome Scab. But Beware." Only four teachers put in an appearance with several trustees, but no order could be obtained. It was determined to keep open only the four rooms of grade IX, and finally, the seniors were persuaded to leave the building.⁵⁵

Once outside, the students held a mass meeting in front of the school, demanded the return of their old teachers, and paraded through downtown streets. Police were placed at the Collegiate to prevent further trouble.⁵⁶

In the days that followed, trustees and private citizens did what the *Manitoba Free Press* termed "sentry duty" in the city's schools in an attempt to ensure order.⁵⁷ That they were largely unsuccessful was evident in a *Brandon Sun* editorial of 12 May, which blamed the disorder in the schools on

parents ... [who] deliberately encouraged their children to be unruly, wilful, and uncouth ... or influences which sought to hide behind the children so they could ruin the schools....⁵⁸

J.F. Kilgour attributed the disorder of students to the "Red" activities of some of the dismissed teaching staff. In Kilgour's view, the students and community were being manipulated by malevolent forces and the School Board was confronted with a situation that was identical, though on "a smaller scale, with the attempted Soviet reign in Manitoba in 1919."⁵⁹

It is more likely that the disorder in the schools was a product of the incompetence of the youthful and inexperienced teaching staff retained to replace the dismissed teachers. During the months of May and June, the Board employed 74 teachers, 29 had no training as teachers, 21 had had 8 to 10 months.⁶⁰ The failure of the Board to secure adequate replacements was evident from the Board's advertisements in eastern newspapers in the fall of 1922 for 8 Collegiate teachers, 6 principals, and 60 teachers.⁶¹ Alfred White, the District's dismissed Superintendent, offered the following assess-

⁵⁵ "Studies in Brandon Schools Disrupted," *Manitoba Free Press*, 2 May 1922.

⁵⁶ *Manitoba Free Press*, 2 May 1922.

⁵⁷ "Brandon's School Dispute Unchanged," *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 May 1922.

⁵⁸ *Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 May 1922.

⁵⁹ "Treat Trustee Who's Filling In to an Ink Barrage," *The Toronto Globe*, 13 June 1922.

⁶⁰ Margaret Mann, *The Strike that Wasn't*, 93.

⁶¹ Margaret Mann, *The Strike that Wasn't*, 94.

ment of the implications of the Board's decision to displace the regular teaching staff:

Every pupil ... was ... deprived of the opportunity of completing the year's work. What can 30 or 50 teachers, or even an entire staff ... accomplish in two months without direction or supervision of any kind, especially when nearly all of them ... are not properly qualified. It is beyond their power to make any serious contribution. They are being asked to do the impossible.⁶²

In the fall of 1922, White's assessment was confirmed. Provincial school inspector J.E.S. Dunlop, speaking to the Western Manitoba Teachers' Association meeting in Souris in October 1922, asserted that the Brandon School Board had "perpetrated a crime against the children of the city" through the dismissal of the city's teachers, "the schools are carried on in a way, but it would be better if they were not. Under present conditions, it would be better for the children to be at home or on the street."⁶³ Though the Brandon Board demanded a retraction of these remarks from the Minister and the Inspector, none was made.

Early in May, a final unsuccessful effort to resolve the conflict was attempted through a committee of twelve convened by Mayor Cater. The committee, composed of four teachers, four Board members, and four citizens, was given no power to act other than to report its recommendations to its constituent bodies. The teachers on the committee were adamant that their Association would reject the Board's insistence that applications for positions in the district be dealt with individually; it was the view of the Association that the board "had a plan to get rid of the services of some of the staff."⁶⁴ Board representatives at the meeting seemed to confirm this by reaffirming the Board's position that the "special" departments including art and manual training would not be continued. The Teachers' Association representatives also continued to insist that any proposal to resolve the crisis would have to include an arbitration board to recommend on the matter of salaries.

The solidarity of purpose and action evident in the behaviour of the Brandon teachers throughout the spring was remarkable. In part, it was a product of the experience with the Brandon School Board over the four years since the creation of the Teachers' Association in 1918. The Association had won concessions from the Board and had campaigned successfully for a Board of Reference, which had affirmed the Association's position that

⁶²"Letters to the Editor," *Manitoba Free Press*, 20 May 1922.

⁶³"Brandon Scored by Teachers at 1922 Gathering," *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 13 October 1922.

⁶⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 May 1922.

the salaries of teachers in the district should reflect qualifications and years of service. Moreover, the leadership of individuals in the Brandon Association, including B.A. Tingley, who was also a member of the executive of the Manitoba Teacher's Federation, Alfred White, the district's former superintendent and a teacher in the city since 1906, and Duncan McDougall, the former Principal of the Collegiate, also promoted solidarity among the teachers. Donald Forsyth, a commercial teacher in the Collegiate, and Tingley's assistant in dealing with Association matters in 1922, recalled that Duncan McDougall's insistence on the national importance of the Brandon crisis in the struggle for the professional advancement of teachers had great influence. McDougall had asserted that,

Teachers across the Dominion were looking at Brandon — their eyes are upon us as teacher colleagues. If we submit, they will say, sadly, "Brandon, you let us down." We must stand fast for the sake of our profession at large.⁶⁵

Teachers throughout the province and across the country did more than follow the developments in Brandon. Canadian teachers contributed to the unity of the Brandon Teachers' Association by making common cause with the teachers in Brandon. Members of the Manitoba Federation came to Brandon to confer with the Brandon teachers. The Federation took out advertisements in newspapers across the country advising teachers of the Brandon situation and responding to attacks on the Federation and the Brandon teachers, which appeared in the press. On 19 May 1922, a meeting of over 1000 teachers, held at Kelvin High School in Winnipeg, adopted a resolution of support for the Brandon teachers.⁶⁶ The Saskatchewan Teacher's Alliance and the Alberta Teachers' Federation pledged moral and financial support to their Brandon colleagues. The Canadian Teachers' Federation gathered financial support for the Brandon teachers, as did the Manitoba Teachers' Federation. In total, a fund of \$15,000 was contributed by teachers in Manitoba and across the country to support the Brandon teachers. In June 1922, the Manitoba Teachers' Federation's *Bulletin* acknowledged that it was "not possible to estimate the significance of this fund in the development of the esprit de corps of the teaching profession both in our province and elsewhere."⁶⁷ While Brandon's teachers benefitted from this national campaign in support of their struggle with the Brandon School Board, clearly the Brandon controversy galvanized support for the emerging teachers' movement across Canada.

⁶⁵Mann, *The Strike That Wasn't*, 49.

⁶⁶Mann, *The Strike That Wasn't*, 104.

⁶⁷Mann, *The Strike That Wasn't*, 108.

The direct involvement in the Brandon dispute of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation and of teachers in other parts of Canada was attacked by the Board and the *Brandon Sun*. The *Sun* assailed the Manitoba Federation's involvement in the Brandon dispute, and the Federation's efforts to discourage teachers from accepting positions in the city "Sovietism of that type can not exist long in a democratically free country however sinister and insidious the methods of labour unions might be...."⁶⁸

The *Sun* believed that Brandon was "the victim of local and outside plotters to make a cause...."⁶⁹ George Fitton explained in a letter published in the *Brandon Sun* and *Winnipeg Tribune* in early June that the response of the Federation to the Brandon dispute amounted to a declaration of war. The Board was "pilloried and assailed, blacklisted and boycotted from one end of Canada to the other and the public were told that this Board was unworthy of trust or confidence."⁷⁰

By early June, any prospect of resolving the dispute between the Board and the Teachers' Association had vanished. Many of the Brandon teachers had found positions elsewhere. It remained for the Board and community to take whatever steps possible to restore the quality and retrieve the reputation of the city's school system. This would not be accomplished easily or quickly. During the July 1922 annual meeting of the recently established Canadian Teachers' Federation in Saskatoon, the Federation established its formal position on the Brandon controversy when it unanimously adopted "one of the strongest resolutions ever produced by the national organization." In the motion the Federation asserted that,

as soon as the school board ... will express its disapproval of the ultimatum and the manner in which it was issued to the teachers in the spring of 1922, and will ... declare it to be ... its policy to consult ... with its teaching staff in an effort to establish a just and reasonable salary schedule and in the case of disagreement to be willing to refer the matter of their difference to a board of arbitration and to abide by its decision-thus making it an honourable and professional act for Canadian teachers to apply for and accept positions on the Brandon staff, then will the Canadian Teachers' Federation urge its various ... branches to do all in their power to assist the board to secure a teaching staff in every way capable of that excellence for which it was so long renowned.⁷¹

The controversy in Brandon in the spring of 1922 was the culmination of four years of determined effort on the part of the Brandon Teachers'

⁶⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 15 May 1922.

⁶⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 15 May 1922.

⁷⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 3 June 1922; "Brandon School Board Replies to Federation," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 5 June 1922.

⁷¹Mann, *The Strike That Wasn't*, 108-109.

Association to gain professional status and middle-class salaries through collective bargaining. While the city's difficult financial condition ignited the school crisis, the Board's opposition to the demands of its teachers, and its determination to address the city's financial crisis at their expense, fueled the controversy. Though a solution to the crisis was at hand through recourse to non-binding arbitration by a Board of Reference, the School Board prevented such a solution through its adherence to an archaic and oppressive system of industrial relations. The dismissal of the entire teaching staff at the end of April 1922, and the failure to resolve the crisis, damaged the reputation of Brandon's schools and undermined the education of the city's students. While the crisis destroyed the Brandon Teachers' Association, within two years, a local of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation was organized in the city and acknowledged by the School Board as the legitimate representative of the teachers. Moreover, the development of the Manitoba Teachers' Federation, the national movement to organize teachers, and the progress of Canadian education, all benefitted from the solidarity of the Brandon teachers in their refusal to be dealt with arbitrarily.

7 25 Cents an Hours; 48 Hours a Week; More Toilets; Less Cats — The Labour Struggles of the “Girls” at the A.E. McKenzie Company in Brandon

Errol Black

IN RECENT YEARS, much work has been done to clarify the role of women in the history of the working class in Canada. This research, much of it by feminist historians, has demonstrated that while women were both subordinate in relations between the sexes, and in an inferior position in the labour market, they did not passively acquiesce in this situation. On the contrary, it is now clear that historically women have been engaged in a double struggle, a struggle to reduce inequalities between the sexes, and a struggle to overcome their inferior position in the labour market.¹

In the latter struggle women have used the same tactics as men to defend and advance their material interests, namely, the formation of trade unions, collective bargaining, and militant job action. Much of the research on women's involvement in trade unions has focused on the obstacles created for women by male-dominated trade unions. In particular the results of this research suggest, amongst other things, that in many situations unions either excluded women from their memberships or, alternatively, collaborated with employers in relegating women to inferior jobs. These responses were inspired by either ideological considerations, namely, a belief that women's proper place in society was in the home — the domestic sphere

¹ Some of the books I have found particularly useful in my own work are: Alison Prentice and Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, eds., *The Neglected Majority: Essays in Canadian Women's History* (Toronto 1977, 1985), vols. 1 and 2; Ruth Roach Pierson, *'They're Still Women After All': The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood* (Toronto 1986); Mary Kinnear, ed., *First Days Fighting Days: Women in Manitoba History* (Regina 1987); and Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women On The Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto 1989).

— or material considerations, notably, a fear that employment of women would erode the wages, benefits and status of male workers. There is considerable validity to this perspective, but it is overly one-sided, because it ignores or downplays situations in which efforts by women workers to advance their material interests were supported both by male co-workers and by male-dominated labour organizations.²

This paper seeks to redress the balance with an account of industrial relations at the A.E. McKenzie Company in Brandon, Manitoba from 1944 to 1952. The account is useful for three main reasons. First, it confirms the fact that efforts to organize unions and militant job actions were not the exclusive preserve of men; indeed, at the A.E. McKenzie Company the impetus for trade union organization and strike action quite clearly originated with the women. Secondly, it demonstrates that efforts by the women to redress inequities in the work situation were supported by male co-workers, by the parent union, by other labour organizations in Brandon, and by the labour council in Winnipeg. And thirdly, it clarifies the nature of the obstacles which women did confront in struggles to improve their material conditions, in this case, obstacles created by the employer, a provincial government unsympathetic to the needs and aspirations of working people in general, and working women in particular, and the courts.

Labour's weakness following the events of 1919 was compounded by the post-war economic stagnation which took hold in western Canada in 1920 and persisted through to World War II.³ In Brandon, the number of union locals declined from a peak of 27 in 1918 to 24 in 1924. The number of locals stabilized at 25 for the remainder of the 1920s, but declined again during the Great Depression, reaching a low of 21 in 1936.⁴ Under these conditions, labour was quiescent. Indeed, while there was a number of strikes by workers employed on relief projects in the 1930s, there was not a single strike in Brandon by employed workers for the entire period 1920 to 1943.⁵

With the advent of war in 1939, conditions in Brandon's economy improved dramatically. By 1941, the unemployment rate, which had stood

²For a discussion of research in Canada see Joan Sangster, "Women and Unions in Canada: A review of historical research," *Resources for Feminist Research*, 2 (July 1981); and Julie White, *Mail & Female: Women and the Canadian Union of Postal Workers* (Toronto 1990), in particular, Chapter 11.

³This point is made by Paul Phillips in "Spinning a Web of Rules: Labour Legislation in Manitoba," unpublished paper, 1989.

⁴These data are from: *Canada, The Labour Gazette*, and *Labour Organizations in Canada*, various issues.

⁵There were at least five strikes by relief workers in Brandon in the 1930s: September 1933, June 1934, September 1934, May 1936, and July 1937. For details on these strikes see *Brandon Daily Sun*, specified years and months.

at 20 per cent in 1936, was down to 4 per cent.⁶ This decline was a result of both the absorption of people into the armed forces (705 men and 5 women were reported on active service in the 1941 census) and of an increase in jobs. The improvement in labour market conditions contributed to a regeneration of organized labour. By 1945, Brandon had two labour councils affiliated with the two main trade union centrals in Canada — the Trades and Labour Congress and the Canadian Congress of Labour. As well, new unions were organized in local firms which had historically resisted unionization. Brandon's long era of labour "peace" finally came to an end in 1944, when the women at the A. E. McKenzie Company staged a spontaneous strike in support of demands for better wages and improved working conditions.

THE "GIRLS" WALK OUT

Prior to World War II women made up less than a quarter of Brandon's workforce. As well, they were concentrated in a relatively small number of occupations. Thus, in 1936, women accounted for 24.6 per cent of the gainfully occupied workforce in Brandon's economy. The bulk of them — 71 per cent — were in six occupations: sales clerk, domestic service, nurse (graduates and in training), teacher, waitress, and stenographer/typist. With the advent of war in 1939, the employment of women increased. By 1941, women accounted for 27.9 per cent of the gainfully occupied workforce. The proportion in the occupations cited above remained constant, however, at 71 per cent. Moreover, women wage earners had much lower earnings than their male counterparts. In 1941, the average annual earnings of women were 40.2 per cent of the earnings of men — \$413 as compared to \$1,028.⁷

Very few women were employed in manufacturing and processing firms, and even fewer in production jobs. A. E. McKenzie Company, Limited was one firm that did employ women. Moreover, for women without the resources to acquire skills for professional and clerical work, jobs at the Company were about the only alternative to domestic work and waitressing. Therefore, there were lots of young women after these jobs.⁸ The firm was started in 1882 as a flour, grain, and feed business. In 1896, A. E. McKenzie inherited the business from his father and converted it to a seed house — the Brandon Seed House. At the outset, the firm processed both field and

⁶Canada, *Census of Canada*, 1936 and 1941.

⁷Canada, *Census of Canada*, 1936 and 1941.

⁸Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991. Prior to getting jobs at the A. E. McKenzie Company in 1940 Grace Riley worked as a domestic for four dollars a week; Mickey Riley worked part-time at a Delicatessen for the minimum wage.



A. E. McKenzie followed by strikers, 1944. Photo courtesy *Daly House Museum*.

packet seeds. Eventually, it concentrated on packet seeds and by the 1940s was the dominant firm in the Canadian packet seed market, with distribution facilities in Moose Jaw, Saskatoon, Edmonton, Toronto, and Winnipeg. In 1945 the firm became a crown corporation when 90 per cent of the shares were transferred to the Manitoba government as part of an arrangement worked out in 1939 to secure funding for Brandon College. McKenzie ran the firm until just before his death in 1962.⁹ In his dealings with employees, McKenzie was paternalistic and authoritarian; he took care of his employees but he would brook no opposition: "It was almost feudal. He was the top man and that was it. His word was law. You didn't tell Mr. McKenzie anything. It was his world."¹⁰

⁹This background on A. E. McKenzie and the A. E. McKenzie Company comes from: Industrial Development Board of Manitoba, "A Canadian Seed Enterprise," *Manitoba Industrial Topics*, 3 (July-August 1943); and, "A. E. McKenzie: 'Most Travelled Man in Brandon,'" *Trade and Commerce* (August 1961). See also, Errol Black, "Seeds of Destruction," *Monthly Review*, 31 (April 1980).

¹⁰This observation was confirmed in discussions over the years I have had with former employees of the company. As well, I have a personal anecdote which reveals much about A. E. McKenzie's attitudes toward workers. In 1960, my wife, Margaret,

In January 1940, the firm's production workforce consisted of eighteen men and eighteen women.¹¹ By January 1945 it was up to 32 men and 53 women.¹² The workforce was segregated. The processing of seeds was done on the fifth floor by men. When the seeds were ready, they were transferred to the third floor where the women packed them for shipping. A high proportion of the men were farmers and agricultural workers who got seasonal jobs at the company in the winter. In contrast, virtually all of the women were from Brandon. "It was a good gang of kids. The camaraderie was great. Everybody helped one another."¹³ The wage structure was uncomplicated. In 1940, experienced male workers were paid 30 cents an hour, inexperienced male workers 25 cents. The hourly rate for women was fixed in accordance with minimum wage regulations. It ranged from 18 3/4 cents an hour in the first three months of employment to a top rate of 25 cents after 9 months employment.¹⁴ During the war years, the differential between men and women increased significantly. Males' wages were increased, while females' wages remained frozen at 1940 rates. In February 1944, women workers at the firm were seeking adjustments in their wages. James Leslie, Chairman of the Manitoba Minimum Wage Board, conciliated in the negotiations and got the company to agree to raise the rates for a 48-hour week from: \$10 to \$10.71 for workers with 4 to 8 months experience; \$11 to \$11.73 for workers with eight to 12 months experience; and \$12 to \$12.90 for workers with more than 12 months experience. The rate for beginners would remain at nine dollars per week — i.e., 18 3/4 cents an hour. This proposal was placed before the 35 women seeking a wage adjustment on 22 February 1944. They rejected it and went on strike to back up their demands.

The *Brandon Sun* carried a report on the strike on 25 February, under the caption, "Girl Employees of Seed Firm Walk Out — Parade Their Grievances Around Town." According to this report, the grievances of the striking women were recorded on their placards:

applied for an office job with the company. She was interviewed and then subsequently called in and told she had the job. When she asked what the wages were, McKenzie said: "I'll work you for a month and then tell you what I'll pay you." My wife declined the offer.

¹¹Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), Retail Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU) Collection, Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, Local No. 1, Payroll sheets for A. E. McKenzie Company, 1940, P. 3096, f. 7.

¹²PAM, RWDSU Collection, Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, Local No. 1, Payroll sheets for A.E. McKenzie Company, 1945, P. 3096, f. 7.

¹³Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991.

¹⁴Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991.

These are that they were underpaid and they demanded 25 cents a hour on a basis of a 48-hour week; there was a deficiency of toilets in the McKenzie building; the first aid kit was locked up and they had to provide their own soap; there were no rest periods and cats were around them as they ate their meals.¹⁵

A. E. McKenzie, the firm's owner, "attributed the walkout to a few radicals" — specifically, a few girls who had just been hired on a temporary basis. He claimed the complaints were unjustified: "the girls were receiving more than the minimum wage rate, and in addition the cost of living bonus."¹⁶

The Manitoba government intervened in the dispute on 26 February. James O. McLenaghan, Minister of Labour, announced that the Minimum Wage Board would investigate the causes of the strike. Board chairman, James Leslie, and five board members toured the plant and interviewed some of the "girls" on 29 February.¹⁷ Subsequently, the Board attempted to resolve the dispute by drawing up an agreement which provided for "25 cents an hour and a 48-hour week with the exception of 16 women who were to receive \$11 for a 48-hour week."¹⁸ Initially the "girls" rejected the proposed solution and voted to stay out until everyone got 25 cents an hour.¹⁹ The strike ended 2 March when the women agreed to return to work on the understanding both that the Minimum Wage Board would develop new regulations for the A. E. McKenzie Company and that there would be no reprisals against the strikers.²⁰

From the outset of the 1944 strike A. E. McKenzie insisted that it had been provoked by outsiders (apparently he could not believe that the young women at the plant would have the temerity to challenge his wisdom and authority). He reiterated this view in his report on the strike to the Department of Labour in Ottawa: "The Company is strongly of the opinion that the entire fiasco was definitely and directly engineered from outside."²¹ This view was, however, repudiated by an operative from the Brandon detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who investigated the dispute. In his report, the operative noted that there was no union involved, no evidence of "any communistic influences," and no likelihood of violence:

¹⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 25 February 1944. Grace and Mickey Riley told me some of the "boys" kept watch on the picket line to make sure the "girls" didn't encounter any problems. Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991.

¹⁶Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991.

¹⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 February 1944.

¹⁸*Winnipeg Free Press*, 1 March 1944.

¹⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 1 March 1944.

²⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 2 March 1944.

²¹Public Archives of Canada (PAC), RG 27, Volume 435, File 40, Report on strike submitted to Department of Labour, Ottawa, 10 March 1944.

I may add, for your information, that parades of the strikers are taking place daily in Brandon. The girls taking part are orderly in their manner, they are equipped with banners on which are worded their demands. Public interest in this strike has been aroused and the general consensus of opinion is that the girls should have struck a long time ago, however, I can find no evidence that the girls are being influenced by any outside Union or subversive organization²²

ORGANIZING A UNION

Despite the assurances of the Minimum Wage Board, the situation for women workers at the company did not improve appreciably after their return to work. Wage data for 13 January 1945 indicate that the range of rates for male workers was 32.5 to 50 cents an hour, with 24 of the 32 getting 45 or 50 cents an hour. The structure of women's rates, in contrast, was essentially the same as it had been prior to the strike, with 28 of the 53 getting \$11 for a 48 hour week, and another 21 getting \$12 a week.²³ By January 1946, however, the wage structure for women had opened up significantly as a result of changes to the Manitoba minimum wage law which took effect 24 March 1945. After the adjustments to wages necessitated by the changes in the legislation, the range in weekly rates for women was nine dollars and sixty cents to seventeen dollars and forty cents. For some of the women, the increase from 1945 to 1946 was 20 per cent or better. Experienced workers, for example, had their weekly rates increased from twelve dollars to fourteen dollars and forty cents — although this was small consolation for the four women who had been with the firm and stuck at twelve dollars since 1940. Ironically, despite the marked improvement in wage rates for experienced women in 1946, the average weekly wage rate rose by a mere 50 cents — from \$11.66 to \$12.16 — because of a high rate of turnover which placed 24 of the 56 women on the payroll at the bottom rate of \$9.60 a week.²⁴

In the spring of 1946, the Winnipeg Labour Council made a submission to the Manitoba government protesting the nine dollar and sixty cent starting wage for women at the A. E. McKenzie Company. Premier Garson, who was also nominally the head of the now provincially-owned corporation, promised to rectify the situation. Subsequently, Garson convened a meeting of those MLA's who had also objected to the low rates at the

²²PAC, RG 27, Vol. 435, File 40, Report on strike submitted to Department of Labour, Ottawa, 10 March 1944. Report prepared on dispute by Brandon detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 25 February 1944.

²³PAM, RWDSU Collection, A.E. McKenzie payroll records, 1945, P. 3096, f. 7.

²⁴PAM, RWDSU Collection, A.E. McKenzie payroll records, 1945, P. 3096, f. 7. 1946. The women getting wage rates of more than fourteen dollars and forty cents a week were employed as machine operators.

company, A. E. McKenzie, C. Rhodes Smith (Minister of Labour), and the MLA for Brandon. This meeting resulted in an agreement that:

Effective for the Fall, when the Company began its new Winter Season, a new wage pattern would be put into effect, which would curtail the previous long term of training [for women], from a five-month basis to a two months basis and the beginners rate of 20 [cents] per hour would be eliminated.²⁵

Under this "MLA's agreement" the beginner's rate was raised from 20 to 24 cents an hour, one step in the wage structure was eliminated, and the qualifying period to obtain the top rate of 30 cents an hour was compressed from 6 months to 2 months.

At roughly the same time dissatisfied McKenzie workers appealed to the Brandon Labour Council for help in forming a union. The Brandon Labour Council (an affiliate of the Canadian Congress of Labour) organized a meeting of the workers for 28 March 1946 to discuss unionization.²⁶ The turnout at the meeting was small. Those employees who showed up reported that:

the reason there was such a small attendance was the fear of the employees that if they attended they would be dismissed from their employment. It was further put forward that that day the foreman had interrogated a number of the employees in a very brusque manner as to whether they were going to attend that Union meeting.²⁷

A second meeting was organized for 7 April. This time a letter was sent to all employees advising them that they could not be discharged for union activity: "such action is now definitely prohibited by law, and the Provincial Government, as major owners of the plant, are extremely anxious that there be no such possibility."²⁸ Attached to the letter was a pamphlet with the caption "Why Be An Individualist," which explained the advantages of unionization:

There is only one way to get the things you want and need, the way other workers have done; join a Union. Without a Union the individual Worker is helpless. He

²⁵ PAM, RWDSU Collection, Submission to Mr. Justice A.K. Dysart, Arbitrator, by Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, Local No. 1, 5 June 1947, P. 3097, f. 1.

²⁶ PAM, RWDSU Collection, Notice of meeting circulated to A.E. McKenzie employees by Brandon Labour Council, p.3096, f. 4.

²⁷ PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees organized by the Brandon Labour Council, 28 March 1946, P. 3096, f. 4.

²⁸ Notice of 7 April 1946 organization meeting sent to McKenzie employees by Brandon Labour Council, P. 3096, f. 4.

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cannot bargain with his employer. He must in most cases take work on the Employer's terms, or do without. The employer can easily do without the individual worker, but the individual worker cannot do without a job

You owe it to yourself to join. You owe it to your Fellow workers on the job, and throughout Brandon. You can give them an irresistible lead. You can help the transformation of your industry from one of the lowest paid in Brandon to one of the best.²⁹

At the Sunday 7 April meeting, McKenzie workers reported that four of the people who had attended the previous meeting had been discharged on the grounds that there was no work available. As well, the foreman in charge was phoning other employees and discharging them for the same reason.

It was put forward that the Foreman had received one of the notices ... and had been seen waiting on Mr. McKenzie, in the corridor, to show him the bill, and that after reading same, Mr. McKenzie had told him to 'Go ahead and fire them'.³⁰

After much discussion on this matter the employees called for the establishment of a commission within the week to investigate the dismissals. Failing this, they would hold another meeting 12 April to call a strike.³¹ William T. White, business agent for Canadian Bakery Workers' Union No. 1, advised the meeting that there was no reason why a commission could not be out to Brandon by Wednesday or Thursday.³²

An investigation was conducted by Thomas J. Williams, an employee of the Manitoba Department of Labour. Williams found that six men had been dismissed for union activity. As well, he confirmed that there was a campaign of harassment and intimidation aimed at preventing unionization of the firm. One of those interviewed by Williams was Della Burton, who told him that one of the foreman had come to her home on 7 April to ask her if she was going to the union meeting and tell her that: "Mr. McKenzie had stated that it would not be to her advantage to go to the meeting."³³ Burton also revealed that on Monday, 8 April the supervisory staff had had a meeting with female employees and told them that they should set up "a

²⁹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Statement, "Why be an individualist," from Brandon Labour Council to A.E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 4.

³⁰PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 7 April 1946, organizing meeting convened by Brandon Labour Council, P. 3096, f. 4.

³¹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 7 April 1946, organizing meeting convened by Brandon Labour Council, P. 3096, f. 4.

³²PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 7 April 1946, organizing meeting convened by Brandon Labour Council, P. 3096, f. 4.

³³PAM, RWDSU Collection, Records of interviews with A. E. McKenzie employees compiled by Thomas J. Williams, 11 April 1946, P. 3096, f. 4.

committee of three which together with a similar male committee would deal with all matters of dissatisfaction."³⁴ Williams submitted his report to Premier Garson.

The meeting of 12 April went ahead as scheduled. This time 40 of the McKenzie workers attended. William White told the meeting the investigation had been done and the report was now with the Premier. In the discussion that followed, some of the workers argued that they should get organized immediately to ensure there would be no repetition of the firings. A motion to this effect was made and carried. A second motion called for those present to pay their initiation fees; 25 paid immediately and were welcomed into the Bakery Workers' Union. A third motion directed the Bakery Workers Union to file for certification as the bargaining agent for McKenzie employees. Finally, a committee consisting of three men and three women was created to complete the organizing drive in the plant.³⁵

An application for certification was filed with the Manitoba Wartime Labour Relations Board 15 April 1946.³⁶ The application included evidence that 32 employees supported unionization. The Board advised the company that an application had been received and certification would be granted unless the employer requested a representation vote. The firm requested a vote, which was conducted 10 May. A decisive majority — 34 of 42 — voted in favour of certification.³⁷ The company responded to this outcome by immediately laying off five additional — male — workers; indeed, the workers subsequently reported that they had been warned that a vote the wrong way could have serious repercussions.³⁸

Certification was formally granted 16 May 1946.³⁹ The same day, William T. White wrote to A. E. McKenzie requesting that they begin negotiations on a collective agreement. White enclosed with the letter a proposed

³⁴PAM, RWDSU Collection, Records of interviews with A. E. McKenzie employees compiled by Thomas J. Williams, 11 April 1946, P. 3096, f. 4.

³⁵PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 12 April 1946, meeting of A.E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 4.

³⁶PAM, RWDSU Collection, Application for Certification of A. E. McKenzie employees filed with the Labour Board 12 April 1946, by William T. White, General Secretary, P. 3096, f. 4.

³⁷PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 10 May 1946, meeting of A.E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 4.

³⁸PAM, RWDSU Collection, Records of interviews of A.E. McKenzie employees conducted by William T. White at 10 May 1946, meeting, P. 3096, f. 4.

³⁹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Certificate No. 364 issued by Manitoba Wartime Labour Relations Board, 16 May 1946, P. 3096, f. 4.

agreement which had been discussed and approved by McKenzie workers at a meeting 7 May.⁴⁰

THE 1947 STRIKE

Negotiations with A. E. McKenzie went nowhere; he would not negotiate a collective agreement with the union. Finally, the union applied 26 June 1946, in accordance with The Wartime Wages Control Order (P.C. 9384), to the Regional War Labour Board for adjustments in wages and working conditions. A hearing was held 28 August at which the union submitted the "MLA's agreement" (an agreement which had been signed by A. E. McKenzie) along with its own proposals. On 11 September 1946 the Board issued an order for adjustments.⁴¹ Both the union and the company requested a review of the order because it contained errors and inconsistencies. The Board held a further hearing on 6 November to iron out the problems. On 16 November, the Board issued its final order, which maintained existing rates for most male classifications and short-term female employees, but increased the rates for female employees who had been with the firm for nine months or more from 30 to 38 cents an hour.⁴² All adjustments were retroactive to 1 June 1946. The adjustments represented an improvement over the status quo for experienced women, but for women at the bottom it fell far short of the "MLA's agreement." When William White saw the award, he immediately protested to C. Rhodes Smith, Minister of Labour. Smith called W. Elliot Wilson, Chief Executive Officer, Regional War Labour Board, on the carpet to find out why he had ignored the "MLA's agreement" in fixing the award. Wilson replied that "in the absence of established proof to the contrary by the applicant Union, it was the practice of the Board to accept the Employer's statement and in view of McKenzie's denial, the Board proceeded to promulgate its decision."⁴³ The company applied to the Regional War Labour Board for leave to appeal to the National Board. The application was denied. With the wages issue apparently settled, a conciliation board was established to deal with the remaining issues. An agreement was achieved in short order. But, once again, A. E. McKenzie reneged on his commitments, refusing both to sign the agree-

⁴⁰PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from William T. White to A. E. McKenzie, 16 May 1946, P. 3096, f. 4.

⁴¹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Order for Adjustment to Wages issued by Manitoba War Labour Board, 11 September 1946, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁴²PAM, RWDSU Collection, Order for Adjustment to Wages issued by Manitoba War Labour Board, 16 November 1946, P. 3096, f. 7.

⁴³PAM, RWDSU Collection, Submission of William T. White to Justice A. K. Dysart, Arbitrator, 5 June 1947, P. 3097, f. 1.

ment and to pay the wages ordered by the Regional War Labour Board. The Regional Board decided to bring charges against the company under Section 33 of the Wartime Wages Control Order. As of 17 January 1947, however, the Board was still grappling with two procedural questions: first, the number of charges to be laid; and second, whether the charges would be brought against the company (which was 90 per cent government owned), or A. E. McKenzie, in his capacity as general manager.⁴⁴

By this time the workers were fed up with the delays and the lack of action and decided to take matters into their own hands. On 17 January 1947 the employees voted to strike the company to secure a collective agreement and their wage increases:

Quietly, some 56 employees of the McKenzie Seed Company left Friday noon the building in which they work, with the determination to go on strike 'and delay garden seed delivery in the west until we get our promised back wages'⁴⁵

The strike was put off one day following a plea to the workers by William White at a meeting held in the YMCA the same evening. Negotiations between White and A. E. McKenzie on Monday 20 January resulted in an agreement by McKenzie to give back pay to the 35 workers who had been with the company since 1 June 1946. The strike was, therefore, averted. However, White warned McKenzie that there would be strike action unless the company agreed to the terms of a collective agreement by 1 February.⁴⁶

Then, on 27 January, the day before workers were to get their back pay, White received a telegram from R. H. Neilson, Chief Executive Officer, National War Board, advising him that the Board had agreed to hear an appeal by the company of the Regional Board's award.⁴⁷ A. E. McKenzie refused to deliver on his commitment to give the workers their back pay. William White and the workers were stunned and outraged by this development. Under the legislation, application for leave to appeal to the National Board had to be filed within 60 days of a ruling by a regional board. The company had gone beyond the 15 January 1946 deadline. This was confirmed by W. Elliot Wilson in a telegraph to White on 28 January:

⁴⁴*Winnipeg Free Press*, 17 January 1947.

⁴⁵*Winnipeg Free Press*, 17 January 1947.

⁴⁶*Winnipeg Tribune*, 21 January 1947.

⁴⁷PAM, RWDSU Collection, Telegram from R. H. Neilson to William T. White, 27 January 1947, P. 3096, f. 7.

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No notice either registered or otherwise ever given regional Board Office of any McKenzie appeal. On contrary I have letter from National Board January seventh reading in part as follows 'If they intend to appeal I wish they would do so.'⁴⁸

McKenzie, however, insisted that the appeal had been filed before the deadline.

The workers held a meeting the evening of 28 January at which they decided to take strike action at midnight on the 29 if the back pay was not paid. As well, the workers voted to send an appeal to the Canadian Congress of Labour "for assistance both financial and moral, in the event of strike."⁴⁹ Premier Garson made an appeal to the workers to delay strike action. White also requested a delay. The workers met the evening of 29 January to consider the appeals to defer the strike. They decided to stick to their decision and shut down the plant at midnight. Two committees were established to manage the strike, a finance committee made up of three women (including local president G. Riley) and two men, and a relief committee, made up of four women and two men.⁵⁰ In an interview with the *Winnipeg Free Press* the following day, Premier Garson expressed his regret at this turn of events:

When Mr. White discussed this matter with me yesterday, we agreed that the best move which could be taken was to arrange a meeting of the Union representatives with the board of directors of the A. E. McKenzie Company on Friday of this week. This was accordingly arranged.

It is a matter of regret that the employees did not see fit to accept Mr. White's request not to go out until this meeting took place⁵¹

Labour organizations in Brandon and Manitoba rallied to the cause of the McKenzie strikers. The membership of the Canadian Bakery Workers' Union in Winnipeg contributed \$1,000 to a strike fund and the Brandon Labour Council organized a public meeting in city hall on 3 February to publicize the issues and generate support for the strikers.⁵²

⁴⁸PAM, RWDSU Collection, Telegram from W. Elliot Wilson to William T. White, 28 January 1947, P. 3096, f. 7. While I have not been able to confirm this, it seems that the National War Labour Board accepted A. E. McKenzie's request for leave to appeal the Regional Board's award of 16 November 1946, which was denied by the Regional Board, as notice of appeal to the National Board.

⁴⁹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 28 January 1947, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees. P. 3097, f. 1.

⁵⁰PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 29 January 1947, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees. P. 3097, f. 1.

⁵¹*Winnipeg Free Press*, 30 January 1947.

⁵²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 30 January 1947.

The meeting between union officials and the company board of directors arranged by Premier Garson went ahead as scheduled on 31 January. A proposed settlement was hammered out and then submitted to the striking workers for their consideration. The proposed settlement included acceptance of the wage structure for women established in the "MLA's agreement" in 1946 and payment of back wages by 4 March 1947.⁵³ The strikers considered the proposed agreement at afternoon and evening meetings on 3 February. After further negotiations with the company on 4 February, the strikers agreed to the settlement and resumed work the following day. In a written statement issued to the media:

Mr. White said ... a collective bargaining agreement had been reached and that 'wage rates directed by the Regional War Board have been adjusted on a temporary basis subject to the company's appeal to the National War Board.'⁵⁴

Mr. White also revealed that the new agreement established ... 'a labour-management relations committee to take up improvement of general morale and working facilities.'⁵⁵

The hearing of the National Board was held in Ottawa 25 March 1947. In his presentation for the company, A. E. McKenzie noted that the packet seed industry was dominated by three firms: McKenzie Seeds, Steel Briggs (Toronto), and William Rennie (Toronto). He argued that the company was constrained in its ability to pay higher wages by its inability to raise prices.

If one pauses to remember, it will appear that seed packets have been selling in Canada for over a quarter of a century at five cents and ten cents. I should say forty or fifty years....

This price has become a fixture.... To change now after so many years, would be so revolutionary as to jeopardize the finances of the company.

This type of business although conducted by a few large firms, is, nevertheless, highly competitive and this competition, combined with the sales resistance which would be encountered by the buying public, makes the subject of an increase in price unthinkable.⁵⁶

⁵³PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 3 February 1947, of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁵⁴*Winnipeg Tribune*, 6 February 1947.

⁵⁵*Winnipeg Free Press*, 5 February 1947. Additional details on the strike are available in PAC, R.G. 27, Volume 453, File 8.

⁵⁶PAM, RWDSU Collection, A. E. McKenzie submission to the National War Board, 18 January 1947, p. 8, P. 3097, f. 1.

On the general issue of wages McKenzie asserted that: "the wages this company is paying are equitable, fair, and show up greatly to the company's credit when compared with the wages being paid by the company's competitors in other cities...."⁵⁷ As justification for the lower wages paid to women workers McKenzie cited their age — young — and their education — often little. The data submitted by McKenzie — which he had worked out on a train to Ottawa — showed: (i) that 41 of the 72 women employees were 20 years of age and less; and (ii) that 34 had grade eight education or less, 18 grade nine, 15 grade ten, and five grade 11 or better.⁵⁸ There is much information in the material presented during the hearing by both parties, but the details need not concern us here. The important thing is the Board's decision. This was handed down 3 March 1947. On the basis of the evidence submitted by A. E. McKenzie, the Board deleted two occupational classifications from the Regional Board's award, namely, "machine operator" and "warehousemen." The decision then went on to say that:

In all other respects we think the Regional Board fixed fair and reasonable wage rates and, [except for the deletion of the "machine operator" and "warehousemen" occupational classification], we confirm the Regional Board's decision.⁵⁹

The Board's decision was yet another setback for the union, because it reduced the gains that had been in the agreement of 4 February which had ended the strike. In the ensuing months the union attempted, without success, to get the company to honour the 4 February agreement. The most contentious issue was undoubtedly the wage structure for female employees. The union insisted that the structure established in the "MLA's agreement" should apply. McKenzie Seeds applied the structure set by the Regional

⁵⁷PAM, RWDSU Collection, A. E. McKenzie submission to the National War Board, 18 January 1947, p. 10, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁵⁸PAC, National War Labour Board, Proceedings A. E. McKenzie Co. Ltd. & Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, Local No. 1, March 1947. A. E. McKenzie submission to Board hearing, 25 March 1947, pp. 63-64. R.G. 36/4, Volume 129, File 742. In a previous written submission to the Board, McKenzie described the women taken on in the peak season as "teen age girls who have never been away from the 'mother's apron strings' until they entered the service of the company. They know nothing whatsoever about the Seed Business They are constantly liable to making mistakes and it requires a full period of two months before any reliability can be placed on their work." A.E. McKenzie supplementary submission, 19 March 1947. PAM, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁵⁹PAC, Reason for Decision by National War Labour Board Re: A. E. McKenzie Company Limited, Brandon, Manitoba, and Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, Local No. 1, 31 March 1947, p. 2. R. G. 36/4, Volume 129, File 742.

Wage Board (and subsequently confirmed by the National Wage Board). Certain of the wage rates were adjusted upwards on 15 April 1947 to bring them up to the new minimum established under the Minimum Wage Act which took effect on the same date, but the company would not change the structure. Finally, on 30 May the two parties submitted this issue, plus certain other issues that had arisen in interpreting the agreement — a total of seven questions — to Justice A. K. Dysart for arbitration. Justice Dysart made his award 25 July 1947. Dysart found for the company and against the union on every issue submitted to him.⁶⁰ A union meeting was held to discuss the award on 31 July. In his report on the arbitration award,

Brother White ... read out a few of the reasons upon which Justice Dysart had made his award, claiming that they showed quite clearly that the judge had not dealt with the facts of the submission, and that accordingly his award was a complete distortion of the matters in dispute.⁶¹

Following discussion of the award a committee of three women and three men was elected to prepare proposals for a new collective agreement.⁶²

1948 — ANOTHER YEAR, ANOTHER STRIKE

On 31 August 1947 the union notified McKenzie Seeds that it wished to commence negotiations on a new collective agreement. Seven meetings were held in September and October. The outstanding issues were reduced to three: wages, hours of work, and union security. At a union meeting on 6 November, White reported that on that same day A. E. McKenzie had finally made an offer on wages, namely, "15 per cent to the girls and no change for the men."⁶³ It was moved that "the Company's offer be rejected

⁶⁰PAM, RWDSU Collection, The Award of Arbitrator, Justice A. K. Dysart, Re: A. E. McKenzie Company Limited and the Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, Local No. 1, 25 July 1947, P. 3097, f. 1. The issue involving the wage structure and rates for women was clearly the most contentious issue submitted to Dysart. On this question Dysart found that the agreement of 4 February 1947, provided that "both parties to abide by the decision of the National War Labour Board and to substitute the classifications and rates prescribed by it, ... and the rates prescribed by the said Board shall be maintained throughout the life of this agreement," p. 2.

⁶¹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 31 July 1947, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁶²PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 31 July 1947, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁶³PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 6 November 1947, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, p. 3097, f. 1.

and that Brother White be instructed to make application to the Board for a Conciliation Officer."⁶⁴ The motion was carried.

White wrote to W. Elliot Wilson, Chairman, Manitoba Labour Board, 8 December 1947, requesting appointment of a conciliation officer to assist the parties to conclude a collective agreement.⁶⁵ M. T. McKelvey, Registrar of the Board, responded to White's application 12 December. In his response McKelvey noted that while the agreement had an expiry date of 31 October 1947, it had become operational not on 1 November 1946 but rather on 4 February 1947. According to McKelvey, this meant that the agreement would not expire until 3 February 1948. He concluded that: "Your application for conciliation services would, therefore, appear to be premature"⁶⁶ McKelvey's ruling was confirmed in a subsequent letter to White dated 20 November.⁶⁷ The McKenzie workers were upset by the Board's ruling and threatened strike action. In response to the strike threat, the Minister of Labour, on 18 December 1947, appointed Thomas J. Williams to act as an Industrial Disputes Inquiry Commission. The letter of appointment directed Williams to ascertain the causes of the dispute and propose potential remedies:

IT HAVING BEEN ALLEGED that the said existing or apprehended dispute or difference relates to wage rates to be paid to, and working conditions to be enjoyed by the said employees, I DO DIRECT YOU, ... to make inquiry as to present wage rates and working conditions and as to the measures, if any, that should be taken to resolve any such disputes or differences between the said employer and its employees.⁶⁸

William White presented Williams with a list of the union's grievances prior to Christmas. A. E. McKenzie was out of the country until 7 January 1948. On the evening of 7 January, the workers held a meeting to discuss the progress of the inquiry. White reviewed the responses A. E. McKenzie had made to the questions and issues submitted to Williams by the union. One of the issues that had been fuelling the discontent of McKenzie workers

⁶⁴PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 6 November 1947, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁶⁵PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from William T. White to W. Elliot Wilson, Chairman, Manitoba Labour Board, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁶⁶PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from M. T. McKelvey, Registrar of Manitoba Labour Board, to William T. White, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁶⁷PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from M. T. McKelvey, Registrar of Manitoba Labour Board, to William T. White, 20 November 1947, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁶⁸PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter appointing Thomas J. Williams to be an Industrial Disputes Inquiry Commissioner in the conflict between A. E. McKenzie Company and McKenzie employees, 18 December 1947, P. 3097, f. 1.

was the refusal of the company to pay certain workers for the Good Friday and King's birthday holidays in 1947. The answer given by A. E. McKenzie was that, "all employees had been paid for Good Friday, and that the King's Birthday was not included in the Agreement."⁶⁹ The workers at the meeting advised White that payments for the Good Friday holiday had just been made the day before, on 6 January. Moreover, two people had still not been paid for Good Friday, and five (all of them women, including Grace Riley, president of the local, and Martha Stock, secretary) had not yet been paid for the King's birthday. This was typical of the way in which A. E. McKenzie replied to the union grievances; i.e, he either denied their validity or simply dismissed them out of hand. For example, on the union's complaint that there was no fire escape on the sixth floor, McKenzie replied, "Not needed." Similarly on the union's complaint that the company had failed to establish the labour-management committee required by the collective agreement, McKenzie replied that he had been too busy.⁷⁰

White also informed union members that during the meeting that afternoon, Williams had proposed that the company give male employees seven cents an hour and female employees an increase of 17 per cent. A. E. McKenzie "agreed" to the proposal. This proposal was rejected by the workers at the meeting:

[I]t was unanimously and forcibly put forward that they were not prepared to consider less than 15 cents per hour, and that the question of a differential between males and females would not be accepted. Brother White pointed out the difficulties of getting the Company to raise its sights any higher than what the cost-of-living had actually risen, but as the employees were definitely determined to accept no less than 15 cents per hour agreed to take the matter up with the Executive Council of the Union....⁷¹

On 12 January, White wrote to A. E. McKenzie advising him that the wage offer was unacceptable:

Your proposal cannot be justified either by the rise which has taken place in the cost of living during the life of the past agreement, nor does it take into consideration the fact that the cost of living is still rising.

Secondly, the proposal that the female rates be adjusted on a percentage basis, is equally unacceptable as it is the firm conviction of your employees, and the

⁶⁹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 7 January 1948, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁷⁰PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 7 January 1948, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁷¹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 7 January 1948, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5.

members of this Union, that the rise which has taken place in the cost of living, has been equally heavy, if not more so, on the lower paid employee ... particularly when we are dealing, as in this case, with employees at the basic minimum of wages payable.⁷²

By the 20 January it was evident to the employees that negotiations had stalled. The employees — 61 women and 14 male warehouse labourers — struck. The strike caught everyone by surprise; it was an “unauthorized” (and under the terms of the legislation, illegal) strike. In a statement to the media, William White,

admitted that the local employees had called the strike without instructions from the union executive but he had no criticism of their action.

“They’ve been kicked around for two and a half years and we don’t blame them for any action they have taken.”

He said he had been sent to Brandon with instructions to get the employees back to work on a reasonable basis as soon as possible.⁷³

A meeting involving White, McKenzie and Williams had been set for 21 January. White did not get to the meeting. McKenzie wrote to him the same day:

I changed [my plan to fly out of Winnipeg Monday evening] to accommodate the Union, in order to carry out a meeting to be held ... today’ at which you and Mr. Williams were to be present. However, when I came back to Brandon yesterday afternoon, I found that some of the employees had gone out on an illegal strike.

I should be back in Brandon not later than Monday afternoon next, 26th inst....

In any event, if I were in Brandon from today on, one of the conditions would be that the Company is not prepared to enter into any more negotiations with the Union until the staff has returned to work.⁷⁴

The first few days of the strike were uneventful — no meetings with the employer, no incidents on the picket line. Then, on 26 January, the union requested a meeting with the Board of Directors of the company.⁷⁵ The next day, 27 January, a joint meeting of the Brandon Labour Council and the Brandon Trades and Labour Council (an affiliate of the Trades and Labour Congress) was called for 28 January in the Oddfellows’ Hall.⁷⁶ At

⁷²PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from William T. White to A. E. McKenzie, 12 January, 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁷³*Winnipeg Free Press*, 22 January 1948.

⁷⁴PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from A. E. McKenzie to William T. White, 21 January, 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁷⁵*Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 January 1948.

⁷⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 January 1948.

this meeting, White reviewed the events leading to the strike. The men and women attending the meeting — from 16 labour organizations in the city — passed resolutions endorsing the strike action and pledging moral and financial support. As well, they demanded that Premier Garson force a meeting of the company board of directors to deal with the dispute. In their statements to the media, labour leaders stressed the fact that this was a publicly owned company — with the government holding 90 per cent of the shares and appointing a majority of the board of directors.

It is our opinion that the wage rates and working conditions which have prevailed too long at this plant are a challenge to the industrial labor standard of all Brandon workers and as such must be immediately and substantially corrected, particularly, in this publicly owned establishment.⁷⁷

On 10 February, White, Grace Riley, president of the local, and striker James Loughheed, made a pitch for support to the Winnipeg Labour Council. White revealed at this meeting that he and G. S. Borgford, regional director of the CCL, had met with Premier Garson the previous day, but Garson was not very sympathetic: "He takes the stand by the terms of the [share] transfer he is not involved in any conditions in that plant."⁷⁸ Following the presentation of the Brandon delegation, the Winnipeg Labour Council pledged support for the striking workers and passed a resolution calling for immediate intervention by government and appointment of,

a committee of the Legislative Assembly '[with the power] of investigation and recommendation to the government, to bring about a speedy settlement, in favour of the just demands of the employees, to rectify the low wage rates and bad working conditions prevailing at the plant.'⁷⁹

The next day, 11 February, Premier Garson (along with two Ministers, D. L. Campbell and C. Rhodes Smith) met with G. S. Borgford, J. James, and C. F. Schubert, respectively, president and secretary of the Winnipeg Labour Council, to discuss the strike. Garson agreed to arrange a meeting of the parties to the dispute for 12 February, but he also let it be known that he found it strange that the workers had gone out on strike before the expiry of an agreement which they had negotiated and agreed to the previous year.⁸⁰

⁷⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 January 1948.

⁷⁸*Winnipeg Tribune*, 11 February 1948.

⁷⁹*Winnipeg Tribune*, 11 February 1948.

⁸⁰*Winnipeg Free Press*, 11 February 1948.

With the intervention of Garson, the dispute was quickly resolved. A renewal of negotiations led to an agreement which provided for: (i) a temporary seven and one half cent an hour increase for all employees retroactive 1 December 1947; and (ii) the submission of outstanding issues to arbitration. The proposed agreement was submitted to the strikers at a meeting on the evening of 12 February. Jimmy James told the workers that "he had no hesitation in saying that any Board set up would give the workers the decision over 7 1/2 cents an hour. He claimed that strikes have their purpose, and that the workers had won a victory and they were sure of at least 5 cents more."⁸¹ By a margin of 25 to 24 the workers accepted the proposal.⁸² The agreement was signed on 13 February. The workers ended their strike 14 February.

A. E. MCKENZIE RENEGES AGAIN

In accordance with the agreement, C. Rhodes Smith, Minister of Labour, appointed, on 26 February, a conciliation board to prepare an award on wages and the question of union security, which the parties agreed in writing "shall bind them and be written into a new labour agreement, which will be effective from 31 October 1947." The board consisted of:

Judge W. J. Lindal, chairman, Ebenezer Claydon, president of Claydon company limited ... the employer's representative and James James, president, Winnipeg Labour Council ... appointee of the union. Judge Lindal was appointed on the joint recommendation of the other two members.⁸³

The conciliation board submitted its unanimous award to C. Rhodes Smith 29 May 1948. In view of the statements made to McKenzie workers by Jimmy James on 12 February about the likely results of an arbitration award, the award must have come as a great disappointment to them. Table 1 compares existing and proposed wage rates for women with those approved by the conciliation board.

⁸¹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 12 February 1948 meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5. The agreement between A. E. McKenzie Company Ltd. and the Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, Local No. 1, 13 February 1948, is also in P. 3096, f. 5.

⁸²PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 12 February 1948, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5. As is indicated in the following comparison, this was the costliest — in terms of man-days lost — of the three strikes: 1944, 35 workers, 270 man-days lost; 1947, 60 workers, 300 man-days lost; and 1948, 72 workers, 1500 man-days lost. These data are from: Canada, *The Labour Gazette*, specified years.

⁸³*Winnipeg Free Press*, 27 February 1948.

Table 1
Comparisons of Existing, Proposed and Awarded
Wage Rates for Female Employees
Wage Rate (Cents an Hour)

Classification	January 1948	Interim Rate*	Union Proposal	Company Proposal	Award
First Month	27	34.5	40	32	36
Second Month	27	34.5	45	32	39
Next three months	30	37.5	50	35	42
Next three months	35	42.5	55	41	45
Thereafter	40	47.5	60	47	48
Permanent (one year or more)					50

*As defined in the 13 February 1948 agreement.

Sources: Union submission to conciliation board, dated 20 February 1948; and conciliation board award, dated 29 May 1948.

The award raised the rates for all classifications above those stipulated in the 13 February agreement, but, in most cases, the increase was much less than the five cents an hour predicted by Jimmy James. On the matter of union security, the Board recommended that:

the employer comply with any voluntary check-off arrangement and that Section 4 of the last agreement be inserted in the next one. It provides that union members cannot serve as stewards or members of committees until they have been employed by the Company for at least nine months.⁸⁴

McKenzie union members met to review the award on 3 June 1948. Jimmy James was granted permission to address the meeting.

[I]n connection with the Female Rates [he said] he realized that 36 cents an hour was not an adequate wage, but he looked forward to an increase in the Minimum Wage Regulations which would provide for still higher increases....

On the question of Union Security, the Board had recommended a voluntary check-off, which he felt was a step in the right direction.

Summarizing his report, he pointed out that the ... award was far better than if it had been a divided one, and that when the agreement expired, provided they

⁸⁴PAM, RWDSU Collection, Award of Conciliation Board established to resolve dispute between A. E. McKenzie Company Limited and Canadian Bakery Worker's Union, Local 1, 29 May 1948, P. 3097, f. 1.

had the same determination and militant leadership, he felt confident that they would go forward to a better standard of life.⁸⁵

In his comments on the award, William White,

drew to the attention of the members that when they agreed, during the strike, to go to arbitration, he had advised against it The results were now before the employees and good or bad they would have to make the best of it. Personally he was disgusted with the Board's results but he felt it should be held in the minds of the employees when they next come up for negotiations.⁸⁶

As it turned out, it was one thing for the employees to have an award, it was yet another thing to get it enforced. On 28 June 1948 White wrote to A. E. McKenzie to ask him when he intended to make the wage adjustments and to incorporate the provisions of the award into a new collective agreement. In the same letter White requested that McKenzie "look into the lay-off today of Mr. James Lougheed, Vice-Chairman of the Unit, who I am informed has been given a week's notice, although he is certainly not the junior employee."⁸⁷ Subsequently, on 7 July, White wrote to C. Rhodes Smith, Minister of Labour, providing details of Lougheed's layoff and suggesting that he was "dismissed, because of his Union association, and for no other reason"⁸⁸ White requested permission to prosecute the company for an unfair labour practice.⁸⁹ White wrote to Smith again on 13 July. He stated that McKenzie employees also wanted the company prosecuted for refusing to implement the recommendations of the conciliation board. However, he then went on to say that "it is the opinion of the [Bakery Workers' Union] Executive, including myself, that the process of prosecution, in itself will have no real effect on the source of the trouble as far as Mr. McKenzie is concerned, and might, and indeed most probably will, ... create an even worse relationship than has existed hitherto."⁹⁰ White

⁸⁵PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 3 June 1948, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁸⁶PAM, RWDSU, Minutes of 3 June 1948, meeting of A.E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁸⁷PAM, RWDSU, Letter from William T. White to A. E. McKenzie, 28 June 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁸⁸PAM, RWDSU, Letter from William T. White to C. Rhodes Smith, Minister of Labour, 7 July 1948, P. 3096, f. 5. In his letter White stresses the fact that he fears that if Lougheed is not "immediately reinstated that he will never be recalled to work there, as for example the cases of Mr. D. Skuse, and Mr. F. Sowa, last year."

⁸⁹PAM, RWDSU, Letter from William T. White to C. Rhodes Smith, Minister of Labour, 7 July 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁹⁰PAM, RWDSU, Letter from William T. White to C. Rhodes Smith, Minister of Labour, 13 July 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

concluded the letter with a request to Smith to bring the parties together with a view to settling the issues.

On 27 July W. Elliot Wilson, Deputy Minister of Labour, wrote to White to tell him that Mr. Williams from the department had met with A. E. McKenzie. McKenzie told Williams that the wage adjustments had been made.

When Mr. Williams told him that there were too many complaints to make this understandable, Mr. McKenzie said that the employees who had been paid were those now on the payroll. Adjustments had not been made to former employees, of whose address the Company was not aware⁹¹

Wilson also said that he had written to McKenzie and told him to incorporate the provisions of the award "into a labour agreement *at once*; and advised him that the Minister has instructed me to press for fulfilment of this promise without further delay." (emphasis in the original)⁹² McKenzie was not apparently impressed by the directive from Mr. Wilson, because the matter went unresolved. Indeed, the only new information that came to light was on 10 July when Jimmy James told White that McKenzie had told him that "under no conditions will he do business in any shape or form with this man White."⁹³ White passed this information on to Wilson in a letter dated 10 August.

A special meeting of the McKenzie local was held on 14 September to discuss the matter. In his review of recent developments White made two revelations. First, he claimed that when Loughheed had been laid off he had phoned Brandon to ask that the notice be deferred until he had met with McKenzie. He was told that the decision was Mr. McKenzie's and that he was now out of town. White alleged that he had since found out that McKenzie had been in Brandon, and that "he was in the office at the time the telephone call was made."⁹⁴ The second revelation was even more startling.

⁹¹PAM, RWDSU, Letter from W. Elliot Wilson, Deputy Minister of Labour, to William T. White, 27 July 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁹²PAM, RWDSU, Letter from W. Elliot Wilson, Deputy Minister of Labour, to William T. White, 27 July 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁹³PAM, RWDSU, Letter from W. Elliot Wilson, Deputy Minister of Labour, to William T. White, 27 July 1948, P. 3096, f. 5. Letter from William T. White to W. Elliot Wilson, Deputy Minister of Labour, August 10, 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁹⁴PAM, RWDSU, Minutes of 14 September 1948, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5.

The latest development had been, the visit to Winnipeg, of Mr. Pat Conroy, and A. R. Mosher, of the Canadian Congress of Labour, who had both discussed the case with the Minister of Labour, who had informed them that he, Mr. Smith was in receipt of a communication from Mr. McKenzie that under no circumstances would he, Mr. McKenzie, negotiate or deal with Mr. White. President Hall and he, had been asked by Brother Conroy and Mosher to submit the name of some other person to deal with McKenzie, which the local officers had turned down, and had proposed instead to take the matter to court.⁹⁵

The McKenzie workers endorsed, unanimously, a motion that White proceed with the prosecution.⁹⁶

On 5 October a Statement of Claim was filed in Court of King's Bench against the A.E. McKenzie Company Limited by "Fred L. Bruce, W.J. Loughheed, J. Kelor, Grace Riley, Martha Stock and Kay Town, on behalf of themselves and of certain employees and former employees of A. E. McKenzie Company Limited and William T. White."⁹⁷ The main point in the Statement of Claim was that the company had refused to comply with the award of the conciliation board. As redress, the plaintiffs asked for an order "to cause the Defendant Company to enter into an Agreement containing those terms already agreed upon in the Agreement dated 13 February 1948, and embodying the recommendations of the Conciliation Board."⁹⁸ While this case was pending, the Manitoba Department of Labour finally, in December 1948, granted the union permission to proceed with the prosecution of the Company. Four consent orders were issued on 15 December. The first three orders alleged violations of Section 15(a) and Section 38 of the Manitoba Labour Relations Act arising from the failure of the A. E. McKenzie Company Limited (and A. E. McKenzie) to make every reasonable effort to negotiate a new collective agreement and to comply with the conciliation award.⁹⁹ The fourth order alleged a violation of Section 4(2) of the Act: "That A. E. McKenzie Company Limited ... on or about the 3rd day of July, 1948, did unlawfully, being an employer, refuse

⁹⁵PAM, RWDSU, Minutes of 14 September 1948, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁹⁶PAM, RWDSU, Minutes of 14 September 1948, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 5.

⁹⁷PAM, RWDSU, Statement of Claim filed with Court of King's Bench, 5 October 1948, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁹⁸PAM, RWDSU, Statement of Claim filed with Court of King's Bench, 5 October 1948, P. 3097, f. 1.

⁹⁹PAM, RWDSU, Consent orders to the institution of prosecution against A. E. McKenzie Company Limited, for contravention of Sections 15(a) and 38 of the Manitoba Labour Relations Act, 15 December 1948, P. 3096, f. 5. The three consent orders issued on these matters are in f. 5.

to continue to employ James Loughheed because the said James Loughheed was a member of a trade union"¹⁰⁰

The cases came to court in January 1949. The civil action was dismissed by Mr. Justice W. J. Donovan with costs in favour of the company.¹⁰¹ The prosecutions for violations of the Labour Relations Act were heard by Police Court Magistrate, W. Stordy on 12 and 13 January 1949. Stordy dismissed the charge relating to Loughheed on the grounds that a *prima facie* case was not made by the informant: "On the basis of the evidence before me there is nothing to prove either directly or by inference that he was dismissed because of union activity."¹⁰² In his testimony on the remaining charges White testified that he had had no contact with A. E. McKenzie since early July 1948. Then, "he had received a communication dated January 6, 1949. Enclosed was a copy of a new agreement signed by Mr. McKenzie and based on the draft he had submitted following the report of the conciliation board."¹⁰³ On 22 March 1949, Magistrate Stordy dismissed all charges against the company and A. E. McKenzie on the grounds that the prosecution had failed to produce evidence that showed unreasonable behaviour on the part of the defendants.¹⁰⁴

THE DEMISE OF THE UNION

The unrelenting struggle against the duplicity and treachery of A. E. McKenzie continued after the court case. When White got an opportunity to study the agreement which McKenzie had signed and forwarded to him on 6 January, he found that McKenzie had amended and added clauses to provisions in the agreement that had previously been agreed upon.¹⁰⁵ White could not get the agreement altered. On 4 May 1949 a special meeting of the McKenzie workers was called to discuss the situation. White explained that the workers had three options: (i) they could sign the agreement McKenzie had submitted, "in which case there would be an argument (sic) over the effective date; (ii) they could "let the matter ride until the end of the Agreement period and open up in October 15th;" or, (iii) the workers could "form a chartered local of the C.C.L. and try and

¹⁰⁰PAM, RWDSU, Consent order to the institution of prosecution against A. E. McKenzie Company, Limited, for contravention of Section 4 (2) of the Manitoba Labour Relations Act, 15 December 1948, P. 3096, f. 5.

¹⁰¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 11 January 1949.

¹⁰²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 January 1949.

¹⁰³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 13 January 1949.

¹⁰⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 22 March 1949.

¹⁰⁵PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from William T. White to A. E. McKenzie, 20 January 1949, P. 3096, f. 6.

secure an agreement by Mr. Borgford.”¹⁰⁶ The workers chose the second option. At the same meeting, White announced that he was leaving the organization in a matter of days and they would have a new business agent.

G. Robinson took over from White. He had his first formal meeting with the McKenzie workers 10 August 1949, at which time they authorized him to begin negotiations on a new collective agreement. On 12 August, Robinson notified A. E. McKenzie of the employees' wish to begin negotiations on a new collective agreement. McKenzie ostensibly entered into negotiations with the union, but, as had become customary, the negotiations went nowhere. Indeed, McKenzie simply stalled the process, sensing perhaps that union members had been worn down by the long battle to secure the union and establish a decent collective agreement and no longer had the capacity to sustain the struggle. McKenzie was simply never in town, and would allow no one else from the company to deal with the union. Robinson was replaced by T. E. Clarke in 1951. There was still no agreement, although when he took over Clarke attempted to get things moving again with a proposed agreement retroactive to 15 October 1949. Clarke had no more success than Robinson. On 6 April 1951 he wrote to McKenzie yet again seeking a resumption of negotiations:

Further to my letters of 13th of February and March 6th, 1951, I wish to inform you that your employee's have instructed me to communicate with you again requesting that negotiations be resumed.

As you no doubt realize, this delay is causing deep unrest amongst the employee's, which does not help to make good Labour Management relations.¹⁰⁷

Clarke received his reply in a letter under the signature of F.B. Roberts dated 14 April 1951.

Referring to your recent letter.

We would have you understand that the President of our company, Mr. A. E. McKenzie, finds it necessary to be out of the City very considerably. You will be hearing from him shortly.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 4 May 1949, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 6.

¹⁰⁷PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from T. E. Clarke to A. E. McKenzie, 6 April 1951, P. 3096, f. 6.

¹⁰⁸PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from F. B. Roberts to T. E. Clarke, 14 April 1951, P. 3096, f. 6.

On 25 May 1951, Clarke advised the McKenzie workers that he was resigning his job with the union.¹⁰⁹ G. Robinson once again took over the responsibilities. Efforts to get an agreement carried on through 1951, with no success.

Meanwhile, there were signs that the union was disintegrating. On 22 January 1951, Martha Stock, shop steward and local secretary wrote to the Canadian Bakery Workers Union, remitting \$93.20 in dues she had collected and apologizing for getting them in late. As well, she resigned as shop steward.

I'm sorry to have the last 3 months dues in so late but really its driving me crazy trying to get the dues collected. I've been away sick for 2 weeks and when I get back to work the kids keep putting it off, so I hereby put in my resignation as Shop Steward as all I've been doing is paying out Dr. bills for my nervous condition and the doctor has warned me to get everything off my mind and my husband insists this shop steward business was the 1st main thing I was quitting or else quit work. So sorry to say but I have to do it¹¹⁰

Moreover, the male workers in the plant had abandoned the union, leaving the women workers on their own. This issue came up at a meeting 1 March 1951. In a report to the meeting on the progress of negotiations, T. E. Clarke told the members that in revising proposals for negotiations he had left out wage rates for male employees "due to the fact that they were not Union Members"¹¹¹ He also warned the members,

that McKenzie might ask for a vote, in order to get the Union de-certified. However, he stated that for the members to remain as they are, would not be of any benefit to them, and that it might be best to go ahead and take a chance as the Members had every thing to gain if successful, and not very much to lose if unsuccessful.¹¹²

In the discussion that followed Clarke's report:

¹⁰⁹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 25 May 1951 meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 6.

¹¹⁰PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from Martha Stock to Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, 22 January 1951, P. 3096, f. 6. Martha Stock apparently remained active in the union as secretary.

¹¹¹PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 1 March 1951 meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 6. According to Grace and Mickey Riley the main problem was that the men hired on a seasonal basis had no long-term attachment to the job at the company and, therefore, could see little point to joining the union. Interview April 1991.

¹¹²PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 1 March 1951, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 6.

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It was stated by a member that there were 30 female employees out of which 25 were Union Members, also that there were about 30 Male employees, who were not in the Union. The Secretary asked if it would be possible to obtain their names and addresses in order to try and sign them, but the Members present felt that this would not be of value as they were afraid to join.¹¹³

There is evidence in the minutes, as well, that A. E. McKenzie unilaterally adjusted wages from time to time. For example, in a letter to Grace Riley, McKenzie local president, 20 September 1951, G. Robinson appends a list of women employees and their wage rates with a notation at the bottom which states that: "The above rates are based on the ruling of the Conciliation Board dated May 29th, 1948 and which have been increased from time to time to bring into line with the increased Cost of Living."¹¹⁴

The union continued its — by this time, obviously futile — efforts to get an agreement during 1952. Then, in June 1952, the McKenzie local was dealt a crushing — and perhaps — fatal blow when two of the key people — the Riley sisters — quit their jobs at McKenzies. The circumstances were described by Martha Stock in an undated letter to G. Robinson.

I guess you've probably heard we took Monday June 9th off on our own not intending to get paid off & next day we all got bawled out by McKenzie in fact he bawled out Grace Riley & picked on her so much that she quit & told him to keep his job, but any way she's got a good job at Eatons & Monday Mickey (Mildred Riley) quit on account of the raw deal Grace got which I don't blame her either & she has a job at Woolworths.¹¹⁵

Martha Stock recognized the significance of the loss of the Riley sisters to the union, in particular Grace, who had been president of the local since its inception, because she went on in her letter to ask Robinson to call a meeting for some time in July to find out "whether or not the girls still want to continue the union as I just have a terrible time collecting dues."¹¹⁶

¹¹³PAM, RWDSU Collection, Minutes of 1 March 1951, meeting of A. E. McKenzie employees, P. 3096, f. 6.

¹¹⁴PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from G. Robinson to Grace Riley, 20 September 1951, P. 3096, f. 6.

¹¹⁵PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from Martha Stock to G. Robinson, undated, P. 3096, f. 6. Grace Riley worked in the groceteria department at Eaton's for four months. She then worked in the china department at Brandon Hardware for fifteen years. Mickey Riley worked at F. W. Woolworth for almost a year. She switched to Sally Shop Ladies Wear where she stayed for over 30 years. They had no further involvement in trade unions. Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991.

¹¹⁶PAM, RWDSU Collection, Letter from Martha Stock to G. Robinson, undated, P. 3096, f. 6.

It is not clear whether or not this meeting was held. What is clear, is that the union ceased to function in 1952.¹¹⁷ A. E. McKenzie had won his war of attrition.

CONCLUSION

The significance of this story is that it demonstrates the fact that young women in minimum-wage jobs (many of them with little education) in a small, conservative city, were able to generate the solidarity and militancy necessary to wage a long — eight-year — struggle to establish their rights in the face of formidable obstacles — an employer, whose opposition to the union was relentless, a government, which refused to take responsibility for the actions of a corporation in which it held 90 per cent ownership, and government bodies, boards and courts, which seemed predisposed to favour the interests of employers over those of workers. In the end, the women lost their struggle, but even in losing they remained defiant, opposing their employer, and standing up for their rights. As well, the story reveals that, in contrast to many other situations, women were supported in their struggle — at least in the early phases — by male co-workers, by their union, and by male-dominated labour councils in Brandon and Winnipeg. The support of the men for unionization was motivated in part by a desire to gain some protection from the dictatorial — and often arbitrary — rule of A. E. McKenzie; but it was also motivated by a recognition that the women were “getting the short end of the stick,” and needed their support to get the situation rectified. Moreover, as Grace and Mickey Riley told me, the men — especially married men from Brandon who were dependent on their jobs with the company — bore the brunt of A. E. McKenzie’s intimidation tactics and reprisals — a strategy designed to isolate the women and undermine the union.¹¹⁸

The Riley sisters also said their union gave them solid support — especially when Bill White was the representative. “Bill White was really a fighter. He was a union man right to the backbone. He wanted fair to be where fair should be.”¹¹⁹ As well, they got strong support and encouragement from other unions in Brandon and Winnipeg.¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Janet Duff, Registrar of the Manitoba Labour Board, could find no record of a decertification of the Canadian Bakery Workers’ Union local at A. E. McKenzie Company, Limited. The records of the local end abruptly with Martha Stock’s letter, suggesting the local ceased operation.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991.

¹¹⁹ Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991.

¹²⁰ Interview with Grace and Mickey Riley, April 1991.

POST SCRIPT

The company continues to operate in Brandon under the name of McKenzie Seeds. In the 1970s and 1980s, the company took over some of its major competitors, increasing its share of the market to 75-80 per cent. As well, the government acquired the outstanding shares of the company and now has 100 per cent ownership.

Production workers at the company were unionized again in 1970 by the Retail Store Employees Union, Local 832. This time the local was entrenched and a practice of collective bargaining established. In 1984, the successor to the Retail Store Employees Union, the Manitoba Food and Commercial Workers, Local 832, organized the office workers at the company. This local too has been entrenched.¹²¹ Women members play a prominent role in the activities of their union locals.

Doug Smith steered me on to this topic when he was doing research for his book Let Us Rise: An Illustrated History of the Manitoba Labour Movement, (Vancouver 1985). I would like to thank: the staff of the Public Archives of Canada, and, in particular, John Smart, for providing me with material from PAC files on the A. E. McKenzie Company; the staff of the Public Archives of Manitoba for their help in locating documents, and Bruce Prozyk of the Retail, Wholesale, Department Store Union in Winnipeg, for giving me permission to access the material from the files of the Canadian Bakery Workers' Union, Local No. 1. As well, I would like to thank Grace Riley and Mickey Riley for telling me about their experiences at the A.E. McKenzie Company and for their helpful comments on a previous version of this paper. The research for the project was supported by a grant from the Brandon University Research Committee.

¹²¹This information was provided to me by Janet Duff, Registrar of the Manitoba Labour Board.

Part III

Shaping a Working-Class Culture

8 "To Rouse the Workers from Apathy and Indifference": The Educational Dimension of Unionist and Political Educational Practices in Brandon 1900-1920

Rosa del C. Bruno-Jofré and Tom Mitchell

IN BRANDON during the first two decades of this century, organized workers and political organizations along with middle-class reformers carried out political education practices, which were instrumental in shaping the political views and consciousness of workers in the city. In many cases, these practices represented the pedagogical dimension of workers' unionist and political practices.² In others, they took the form of formal political education. This paper examines the political education practices and discourses developed by the Brandon Trades and Labour Council, the Brandon Labour Party, the Brandon local of the Socialist Party of Canada (SPC), the People's Forum, the Dominion Labour Party (local), and the Brandon People's Church. Throughout, it is informed by the notion that the process of class formation is a cultural process shaped by material conditions, lived experience, and the constitutive power of discourse and human agency.³

¹This quotation is derived from A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto 1977), 60.

²Pedagogy and pedagogical refer to the underlying set of aims informing educational practices. This set of aims includes the attempt to transform consciousness and interrupt or alter a system deemed unjust. Three agencies were involved, the leaders, the members of the party, union, or church, and the knowledge they produced together. See David Lusted, "Why Pedagogy?," *Screen*, 5 (1986), 2-14.

³This formulation is derived from E.P. Thompson's observation that "Class formations ... arise at the intersection of determination and self-activity." As quoted in Marc W. Stienberg, "The Re-Making of the English Working Class," *Theory and Society*, 2 (April 1991), 173-199, and Antonio Gramsci's observation that "every relation of hegemony ... is necessarily an educative relation." As quoted in John

Brandon's emergent labour, political culture was rooted in the experience of British and European working-class immigrants as well as those from Canadian centres of working-class radicalism who arrived in the city during its historic expansion. In the years before World War I, the labourite Brandon Trades and Labour Council with the allied Brandon Labour Party, and the revolutionary Socialist Party of Canada local, both created by skilled British workers, developed political education practices associated with distinct political projects based on different conceptions of a just social order. The labourites worked within the categories of liberal capitalism and accepted its basic legitimacy while advancing the corporatist interests of workers within the established order; the cadres of the Socialist Party of Canada were determined to challenge the legitimacy of the liberal capitalist state in its entirety.

THE PEDAGOGY OF SOLIDARITY: LABOURISM IN BRANDON

Labourism emerged in Brandon with the creation of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council on Tuesday, 24 July 1906 and the appearance of the Brandon Labour Party in 1908.⁴ The original Council contained thirteen locals, including those of railway workers, sheet metal workers, plumbers and steam fitters, bricklayers, carpenters and joiners, cigar makers, printers, and barbers. By 1912, the Council contained 24 locals. Like the Trades Council, the Brandon Labour Party was created, not to destroy capitalism, but to advance the corporate interests of labour within the framework of a largely unregulated capitalism. As the Council and the Brandon Labour Party took the social identity of their members as skilled workers as the starting point for educational practices, these tended to reinforce the identity of workers "not as producers, but as wage earners, that is as creatures of the capitalist regime of private property, as sellers of their labour as commodity."⁵

Thus, while the activities of the labourites had the effect of creating a political space for labour, the moderate and practical character of the political education practices of labourites involving information gathering, debate and discussion, public lectures, and forums for electoral candidates, tended to recreate the hegemony of the city's business elite by acting as a

Merrington, "Theory and Practice in Gramsci's Marxism," *Socialist Register* (1968), 165.

⁴*The Voice*, 27 July 1906. On the Brandon Labour Party see, the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 17 April 1908. On Labourism in Canada see Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 45-76

⁵John Merrington, "Theory and Practice," 158.

force for cultural integration.⁶ For example, on 17 April 1908, the Brandon Labour Party was addressed by W. H. Reeve, Provincial Wage Officer, on the subject of unionism. Reeve explained to the assembled workers that through the solidarity of unions working men could gain "the advantages of shortened hours, increased wages, prevention of child labour, and other advantages."⁷ Brandon's labourites harboured no hegemonic aspirations. At no time prior to World War I did the Brandon Labour Party nominate candidates for public office. Still, it and the Labour Council served as agencies of political education to advance the citizenship of Anglo-Canadian skilled male workers in the city's paid labour force. Brandon's skilled male workers (not women) gathered to hear speakers and discuss topics of current interest.

One of the principal political education practices initiated by the Brandon Trades and Labour Council involved public forums during which the city's skilled workers interacted with candidates for public office in the city. In December 1906, just months after its creation, the Council began the practice of having candidates running for civic, provincial, or federal office appear at meetings organized by the Council.⁸ Candidates took the opportunity to address the Council on matters of concern to the city's skilled workers, to engage in discussion, and to respond to questions from members of the Council. Such encounters provided the city's organized workers with access to candidates for public office. These opportunities to debate and formulate positions on a broad range of public policy matters were an essential component of labourite political education practice.

Such occasions also provided the city's politicians with opportunities to chide the workers for their limited interest in civic affairs. For example, in October 1911, Alderman Crouch visited the Council and urged its members to make a special effort to attend a public meeting in the City Hall to express their opinion with reference to municipally owned street railway. In Crouch's view, members of the Trades Council did not take "enough interest in civic affairs but left the business and decisions of these matters in the hands of the business men and it was not right. They should take a share of the responsibility and work of the city."⁹ President Taylor of the Council promised Crouch that the Council would do everything in its power to encourage its members to take an interest in civic affairs and in particular the matter of the Street railway. He also made it clear that the Trades Council had discussed the issue, was on record for municipal ownership,

⁶This general interpretive view was derived from Joseph Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci," *Political Studies*, 1 (1975), 32.

⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 17 April 1908.

⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 December 1906.

⁹*Brandon Weekly Sun*, 12 October 1911.

and had been in touch with the Mayor of Calgary, who was willing to visit Brandon to explain how Calgary had managed the street railway with great success.¹⁰

The Council also sponsored addresses on various topics deemed of interest and value to its membership. Citizenship was a recurring theme in such addresses. On 24 April 1914, Rev. R.S. Laidlaw addressed the Council on the nature of democracy, the rights of citizens, and the qualities of a good citizen. In Laidlaw's view, the practice of good citizenship amounted to thoughtful and active participation in public life. Newspaper reports summarized Laidlaw's thesis in the following manner:

In this period of great building, the greatest was that of building citizenship. The greatest problem ... was to build a citizenship that would be of the greatest benefit to the universe. The genius of life was the absorbing of all good and the giving out of what was best for the whole community. This is the day of democracy, when men were at liberty to express their views, when common men had equal rights with their richer brothers.¹¹

Laidlaw's talk, in which women were invisible, constituted a vigorous endorsement of liberal democracy and the political rights of male workers within the established social order.

Just a month earlier Alderman W.H. Shillinglaw had addressed the Council on the topic of municipal government in Europe and North America. Shillinglaw stressed the central importance of effective municipal government in the lives of the city's workers. He praised British municipal government; it was the most progressive to be found: "There was nothing which the municipal governments in England did not do. They had schools, parks, police, and everything else ... under one body."¹²

Shillinglaw's audience did not require convincing that municipal government was important. The Council's principal political project following its creation had been the continuing advocacy of municipal reform on behalf of the city's skilled workers. In the years from 1906 to 1914 the Trades Council approved motions calling on City Council to provide self-supporting municipal swimming baths similar to those built "in the old country," municipal ownership of public utilities such as the street railway, hospitals, public baths, a municipal employment bureau, a fair wage clause in all civic contracts, home postal delivery, Sunday street car service, paid Saturday half-holidays, garden allotments, public works for the unemployed, and compulsory schooling for public school age children. Having access to information about the activities of the City Council was a principal

¹⁰*Brandon Weekly Sun*, 12 October 1911.

¹¹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 25 April 1914.

¹²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 27 March 1914.

concern of Brandon's labourites, since access to such information was viewed as essential for public enlightenment about City Council procedures and actions. In this regard, the Trades Council viewed information as power and the denial of public access to Council activities as a denial of democracy.¹³ Brandon's labourites also lobbied for a public library. The Labour Council's repeated efforts to secure City Council support for a civic library reflected the concern of the city's skilled workers for recreation and self-improvement for themselves and their families.

The Trades Council's political education practices of information gathering, debate, and political forums fostered a sense of solidarity among the city's workers as they worked together to bring about change and to assert their collective interests. Their meetings, which took place every other Wednesday, were well attended. The spoken word was the most important means of generating information, clarifying ideas and concepts, and communicating decisions. Rational argumentation and verbal rhetorical persuasion were highly valued. As well, the workers wrote petitions and used the print media to argue and claim political space. Trade unions were conceived as essential features of the industrial society; they allowed negotiation based on the rule of reason. The newspapers reported the meetings of the Council and activities of the various unions.¹⁴

An ethic of solidarity was at the core of the unionist work and related educational activities. Labourism allowed ample space for the development of social relationships and a sense of community. Annual suppers with toast speeches, music, and dance were important events in the life of the unions. For Brandon's labourites, Labour Day clearly symbolized solidarity and class pride and normally was celebrated with a parade, speeches, athletic contests, and children's and women's events.¹⁵

¹³For references to the activities of the Brandon Trades and Labour Council see the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 25 January 1907; 23 April 1907; 11 December 1907; 12 February 1908; 17 April 1908; 20 June 1908; 6 April 1909; 9 December 1909; 20 January 1911; 5 April 1911; 6 October 1911; 16 October 1911; 22 December 1911; 11 January 1912; 25 January 1912; 3 May 1912; 8 May 1911; 7 June 1912; 12 December 1913; 24 January 24, 1913; 28 February 1913; 11 April 1913; 18 April 1913; 9 May 1913; 13 June 1913; 26 September 1913; 14 November 1913; 28 November 1913; 23 January 1914; 25 April 1914. For addresses to the Trades and Labour Council see, *Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 February 1913; 27 February 1914; 27 March 1914; 11 April 1914; 25 April 1914; 24 June 1915. For Council attitudes toward access to the deliberations of City Council see the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 9 May 1913.

¹⁴Evidence on these points may be found in the references cited in the previous footnote.

¹⁵See for example the *Brandon Daily Sun*, 2 September 1911.

Yet, the unionist political educational practices and messages of the Council's and Brandon Labour Party had an exclusivist character. Ethno-centric and racial attitudes were evident in reports and published comments made during meetings of the Council. Brandon's labourites did not integrate the experiences or address the needs of the city's central and eastern European working-class workers. Labourites perceived themselves as a social class of higher standing than unskilled workers, particularly those of non-British origin. This exclusivity was evident in the Council's discussion of the need for a fair wage clause in all municipal contracts. No member of the Council raised the issue of the exploitation of new immigrants from eastern Europe, instead, the 1913 debate focused on the ethnicity of the cheap labour pool created by the city's non-English-speaking workers. C. Casey, President of the Trades and Labour Council, advised the Council that he had been informed by City Foreman Smith that when he was employing Galician labourers he would not pay the top rate of wages.¹⁶ G. Chapman stated at the same meeting that he had been informed that,

no white man needed apply for a job under the city officials. Mayor Fleming had secured his position through the vote of the Galicians and their employment was the natural sequel.¹⁷

When W.H. Marlatt, a labourite candidate for City Council, met with the Trades Council in the fall of 1913 he was asked if an English speaking man should have an equal chance of working for the City, "in the ditch with a Galician."¹⁸ Marlatt, true to his labourite creed, promised to see that there was no discrimination against anyone.

As was the tradition of the British working class, Brandon's organized labour movement was also a men's movement. Even after the war when women's participation in public affairs was noticeable, the Brandon Trades and Labour Council refused to accept women delegates named to the Council by the Sanatorium employees union, created in 1919.¹⁹ Gareth Stedman Jones has argued that such exclusivity may be explained by reference to language. He argues that,

¹⁶*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 April 1913. The centrality of ethnicity to the activities of labourites is discussed in Ross McCormack, "Cloth Caps and Jobs: The Ethnicity of English Immigrants in Canada 1900-1914," in Jorgen Dahlie and Tissa Fernando, eds., *Ethnicity, Power and Politics in Canada* (Toronto 1981), 38-55.

¹⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 April 1913.

¹⁸*Brandon Daily Sun*, 28 November 1913.

¹⁹Minutes of the sanatorium Attendants' Federal Union No. 27, 27 March 1919; 7 April 1919; 20 April 1919, in the authors' possession.

the linguistic construction of class [with its rhetoric of metaphorical associations, causal inferences, and imaginative constructions] made it inevitable (symbolically and actually) that men would represent the working class.

While Stedman Jones underlines the centrality of language in shaping a conception of the world and limiting social and political alternatives, the "linguistic turn" of which he is a central protagonist may also be criticized for asserting, "that notions of the economy, society and the polity lack 'overarching coherence' ... beyond their expressions in language and discourse."²⁰

It seems clear that the general impact of the political education practices of the Trades and Labour Council and the Brandon Labour Party were integrative rather than oppositional. Certainly, they did not have a revolutionary quality. Labourism was rooted in a discourse of democratic rights. As Craig Heron has explained, labourites were "the bearers of the natural rights traditions which flowed from the great democratic revolutions of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries." There is ample evidence that Brandon's labourites were quite prepared to negotiate political, economic, social, and educational rights as partners in a system of capitalist relations of production.²¹ They defended their place in the social order and sought extensions of basic education and the provision of technical education to secure a dignified standard of living. Their actions were rooted in trade union solidarity, which held within it the potential for political militancy in the framework of class antagonism when the perceived interests of the city's skilled workers were threatened or when traditional notions of economic justice or liberty were challenged.²² It would be a mistake to dismiss the results of the educational activities of the city's labourites as unambiguously conservative. They were an integral part of the development of class based political and economic action in Canada. Such a conclusion seems consistent with the findings by British labour historians that the basis for growth

²⁰Gareth Stedman Jones, *Languages of Class: Studies in English Working Class History, 1832-1982* (Cambridge 1983), 102. As quoted in Joan W. Scott, "On Language, Gender, and Working-Class History," *International Labor and Working-Class History*, 31 (Spring 1987), 3. For the criticism by Neville Kirk see, Neville Kirk, "History, language, ideas and post-modernism: a materialist view," *Social History*, 2 (May 1994), 235.

²¹See E. J. Hobsbawm, *Labouring Men* (London 1964), 371-387, for a sense of British workers' traditional notions of economic justice and liberty.

²²On strikes in Brandon from 1907 to 1914 see National Archives of Canada (NAC), *Records of the Department of Labour*, RG 27, vol. 295, no. 2936; vol. 297, no. 3214; vol. 298, no. 3366; vol. 299, no. 3405, 3432, and 3458; vol. 300, no. 3571; and vol. 301, no. 7.

and vitality of the British labour movement and the British Labour Party took,

strongest root in those communities in which the co-op, trade union, friendly society, the pub, football, ... and all manner of collective norms, habits and values were strong²³

The depression, which preceded World War I, damaged organized labour. Unemployment, and the departure of workers to the war undermined the Council's existence. By late 1915 it had been abandoned only to be reconstituted in the spring of 1917 when its reappearance signalled the beginning of an unprecedented upsurge of labour militancy in the city.

THE PEDAGOGY OF REVOLT: THE SOCIALIST PARTY OF CANADA

The Socialist Party of Canada was created in British Columbia in 1902. It evolved rapidly into a revolutionary socialist organization with affiliated locals across the West.²⁴ The Brandon local of the Socialist Party of Canada was organized in Brandon in the spring of 1909. It introduced a radical oppositional discourse characterized by an inclusive approach to the political analysis of working-class issues. Typical of the epoch, Brandon's SPC was irredeemably gendered in its preoccupation with class and its blindness to gender inequality.²⁵

The Socialist Party of Canada made its first public appearance in Brandon on Saturday, 15 May 1909, when members of the local made a public declaration of their political creed on the corner of Eighth and Rosser Avenue, and were dispersed by the police. The local presented the following petition to City Council demanding the right to engage in such public discourse:

Whereas

It is the custom throughout the English speaking world to allow free speech when same is conducted in an orderly seemly manner and

Whereas

There is no Bylaw in the City of Brandon prohibiting right of free speech

Therefore

²³Neville Kirk, "'Traditional' working class culture and 'the rise of Labour': Some Preliminary Questions and Observations," *Social History*, 2 (May 1991), 216.

²⁴For a history of the Socialist Party of Canada see, A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*.

²⁵See Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women For the Cause: Women, Labour, and the left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto 1998), 123-125.

We your petitioners respectfully ask that you may grant out perfectly legal and simple request.²⁶

The *Brandon Sun* reported the appearance of the representatives of the Socialist Party before the Council as, "a deputation representing a religious body, the 'Local Seven'."²⁷ Though Council deferred a decision on the petition it appears that the case advanced by the SPC was accepted for members of the Party were allowed subsequently to engage in public declarations of their faith on the city's streets.

The ideology of the Socialist Party of Canada was grounded in the Marxism of the Second International. This was a Marxism, which,

had lapsed into a mechanical materialism; it had come to accept a paralyzing and debilitating optimism, which led socialists to slight the consequences of either action or inaction. Capitalism, it was believed, would inevitable succumb to its internal contradictions.²⁸

Yet, this unimaginative interpretation of historical materialism did not prevent the Socialist Party of Canada from being involved in aggressive campaigns aimed at the creation of class consciousness. The role of the Socialist revolutionary was "to rouse the workers of the world from apathy and indifference ... to implant a hope of better things in every heart, to lead and [to] point the way to social salvation."²⁹

Such a message was anathema to Brandon's business elite. However, because the Party leadership was composed exclusively of skilled workers of British origin, it carried a credibility that was denied "alien" workers from central and eastern Europe. For example, Edmund Fulcher, the leading spirit of the Brandon SPC, had emigrated to Canada with his brother Harry in 1903 from Longstratten, Norfolk, England. Fulcher was a trained carpenter and bricklayer who had been influenced by the growing radicalism of the British labour movement.³⁰ Though Fulcher and other members of

²⁶Resolution to Brandon City Council from the Brandon Socialist Party, 17 May 1909. Brandon Registry office, Box 673, No. 540.

²⁷*Brandon Daily Sun*, 18 May 1909.

²⁸Joseph Femia, "Hegemony and Consciousness in the Thought of Antonio Gramsci," 28. See also Lewis A. Coser, "Marxist Thought in the First Quarter of the 20th Century," *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (1982), 173-201.

²⁹A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries*, 59-60.

³⁰*Our Past and the Future: Rapid City and District* (1978), 235. Fulcher was involved in the Brandon Trades and Labour Council from its earliest years and was an unsuccessful candidate for the SPC in Winnipeg in the 1910 provincial election, and in Macleod, Alberta, during the 1911 federal election. Fulcher was appointed the Brandon correspondent for the *Labour Gazette* in 1908. Following the demise of

the Brandon SPC were members of the labourite Trades and Labour Council, they rejected any association with moderate reformist political parties. When controversy erupted over the refusal of the SPC in Winnipeg to support moderate labour candidates in the 1910 provincial election, one member of the Brandon local explained that, "those who would lead us into the bog of Parliamentarism are but doing the work of the master class by attempting to further confuse us."³¹ The emancipation of the working class from the rule of capital could be achieved only through seizing the reins of government. Political education was the principal means used by the party to fashion such a revolution.

The Brandon local developed a number of strategies to educate the "wage slaves" of the city irrespective of trade, craft, or ethnic origin; gender does not appear to have been a matter of concern to the SPC, its "wage slaves" inevitably wore trousers. Members of the local prepared educational materials, organized a library, developed an outreach program, sponsored classes in the local, offered study sessions, and secured guest speakers (the local referred to those sessions as speakers classes) from various places.³² For example, in 1909, W.D. Haywood, a central figure in the struggle between miners and mine owners in Colorado, visited Brandon and spoke to the city's Socialists.³³ In 1911, C.M. O'Brien, Socialist member for Rocky Mountain in the Alberta Legislature, delivered an address on labour matters and the advantages of socialism to Brandon workers.³⁴

During the summer of 1910, the local organized numerous "propaganda meetings," and in the fall of 1910 produced a leaflet designed to bring its views before the workers of Brandon. The authors of the leaflet explained to the city's workers that "if we can get you to study this subject, you will be with us."³⁵ The leaflet set out the goal of the SPC which was "the transformation as rapidly as possible of capitalist property in the wealth of means

the Brandon local of the Socialist Party of Canada, Fulcher associated himself with the Labour Representation League and the Dominion Labour Party. See *Brandon Weekly Sun*, 7 September 1911; *Brandon Times*, 7 September 1911. Also, Ernie Chisick, "The Development of Winnipeg's Socialist Movement," MA Thesis, University of Manitoba (1972), 78.

³¹H.T. Bastable, Secretary, Socialist Party of Canada (Brandon) in a letter to the *Western Clarion*, 20 August 1910.

³²Tom Mitchell, "'A square Deal for All and No railroading': Labour and Politics in Brandon, 1900-1920," *Prairie Forum*, 1 (Spring 1990), 48-49.

³³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 29 September 1909.

³⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 12 April 1911.

³⁵*Western Clarion*, 22 October 1910.

of production into the collective property of the working class."³⁶ A copy of the leaflet was delivered to the door of "every wage plug" in the city.³⁷

By January 1911, the local had a headquarters containing a reading room and a lending library containing over 200 volumes on "Socialism, Science, and Sociologic subjects." The membership held regular economic classes — the text used was titled *Value, Price and Profit* — and heard speakers on a variety of topics. When J.S. Woodsworth came to Brandon in the spring of 1915 to address the Brandon Women's Club, he recalled that, on a trip to Brandon in 1911, he had visited the Socialist Hall on Rosser Avenue. At the time, Woodsworth recalled, it was "the only night school teaching higher mathematics ... and the only public library in Brandon."³⁸

The local also contributed to and distributed the *Western Clarion*, the paper of the Socialist Party of Canada, published in Vancouver. On 1 April 1911, a special "Brandon Edition" of the *Western Clarion* was distributed to the homes of Brandon's "wage slaves." The lead article, which was titled *Education Being Dealt Out Assiduously in Prairie City*, reflected the local's central priority of shaping a class conscious militancy among the city's workers. In this process the *Western Clarion* was viewed by Brandon's Socialists as an instrument "of working class emancipation."³⁹ The special Brandon Edition was intended to motivate its readers to think about their position in the city's social order as members of a victimized working class. The edition also advertised titles of papers and pamphlets that could be obtained in the local's reading room. These included *The Manifesto of the Socialist Party of Canada*, *A Proletarian in Politics*, *Socialism*, *The Slave of the Farm*, and *Wage, Labor and Capital*.

Public debates were also employed as opportunities to educate the workers and disseminate the ideas of the Socialist Party of Canada. On 17 January 1912, Edmund Fulcher and A.T. Higgins engaged in a well attended debate with two Brandon solicitors at St. Mary's Anglican Church on the question, "Will Socialism Solve Our Industrial Problems?" Unfortunately for the Socialists, the judges decided against them because, in the view of the judges, they had not shown convincingly how socialism would work. Still, the event provided Fulcher and Higgins with an audience and newspaper coverage for their views.⁴⁰

Such exposure was not always available. Though the *Brandon Sun* reported the activities of Edmund Fulcher as a candidate for the Socialist Party of Canada in other centres, and monitored the political activities of the

³⁶ *Western Clarion*, 22 October 1910.

³⁷ *Western Clarion*, 22 October 1910.

³⁸ *Brandon Sun*, 22 April 1915.

³⁹ *Western Clarion* (Brandon Edition), 1 April 1911.

⁴⁰ *Western Clarion*, 19 February 1912.

Party, it refused to print some of the views of the local. For example, in early March 1912, Edmund Fulcher sent a letter to the *Brandon Sun* commenting on a story printed in the *Sun* detailing the privations suffered by the granddaughter of Charles Dickens. In his letter, Fulcher compared the rather comfortable circumstances of Cecile Dickens — she was struggling along on ten dollars a week — with the condition of the real poor in Britain. Fulcher noted that some of Britain's poor, in families of ten, subsisted on less than three dollars a week, "and when these people strike in an endeavour to improve their condition all the forces of government are used to hold them down."⁴¹ The *Sun* declined to print the letter; Fulcher sent it to the *Western Clarion* where it was published.

The Party languished with the onset of the pre-war recession and the departure of many of its adherents from the city. Still, in July 1913 members of the local were still holding street meetings "to talk about the struggle for existence and to make plain to the perspiring wage slaves the blood-red footprints of the murderous competition that prevails."⁴² At the end of December 1913 the local retained its headquarters and continued with economic classes for a dozen workers every Wednesday and Sunday night. In August 1913 SPC cadre H.T. Bastable explained in the pages of the *Western Clarion* that "the only way to gain our ends is by educating the workers to their slave position in society."⁴³ With the onset of the war organized propaganda efforts, on the part of the local, ended.

During its brief period of activity in Brandon, the Socialist Party of Canada local initiated a number of class-based political education practices. Each placed emphasis on the written word, on reasoning and understanding, and on reading historical reality from the perspective and experience of the working class. Through these political education initiatives the city's workers were exposed to a radical political discourse, which focused on questions of social class and political power. For members of the Socialist Party of Canada education was the means to develop a collective consciousness to carry out an alternative political project. The terms of its revolutionary project and the militant masculinity that typified the movement blinded the SPC to the gender bias at the heart of its existence. The legacy of the Brandon local was the dissemination among the city's workers of a radical political discourse.

⁴¹*Western Clarion*, 23 March 1912.

⁴²*Western Clarion*, 20 December 1913.

⁴³*Western Clarion*, 2 August 1913.

BEYOND DOCTRINARY RATIONALITY: THE PEOPLE'S FORUM

In the first years of World War I a number of community based organizations initiated principally by middle-class reformers influenced by the social gospel and social democracy and concerned with shaping the consciousness of the city's workers appeared in the city. Of particular note in these developments was Reverend A.E. Smith who arrived in Brandon in 1913 to become the Minister at the wealthy First Methodist Church. In October 1913, Smith was appointed to the Brandon Trades and Labour Council as the first delegate of the Brandon Ministerial Association to that body.⁴⁴

From the beginning of his career as a Methodist minister in the West, Smith had been an unrelenting critic of the established order. As early as 1903 Smith had urged his congregation to take a role in the reform of society, characterizing some churchgoers as "moral cowards" who overlooked the fight against "wickedness and vice."⁴⁵ Smith believed that Christ regarded the Kingdom of God as a "social entity" and that Christ had called for the reconstruction of "society on the principles of Brotherhood." Entrance into this Kingdom was not through "individual salvation" as it was commonly understood, but through serving your fellow men in this world.⁴⁶ It was Smith's view that the church had to recognize that "manhood was superior to machinery, to profits in business, or to material success." The church especially, "could not remain silent in the disputes between capital

⁴⁴*Brandon Daily Sun*, 24 October 1913. The Rev. A.E. Smith had a lengthy career in the Methodist Church, beginning in the last years of the century. In 1913, he became Minister of First Methodist, one of Brandon's wealthiest churches. As an active supporter of church union, Smith was chosen President of the Manitoba Conference in 1916 and 1917. He was elected to the Manitoba provincial legislature as a Labour candidate in the 1920 provincial election and defeated by a "fusionist" candidate in 1922. Smith left Brandon in 1923 and settled in Toronto. In 1925 he joined the Communist Party. Smith recalled his varied career in his autobiography *All My Life* (Toronto 1949). In his article on Smith, "From Clergyman to Communist: The Radicalization of A.E. Smith" *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 4 (Winter, 1978-79), J. Petryshyn ignores the central importance to Smith's radicalization of his involvement in the Brandon labour movement and the Brandon labour strife of 1919. See also Ramsay Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto 1985), 223-227. For a discussion of Smith's career as a Communist see William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International* (Toronto 1968), and Ivan Avakumovic, *The Communist Party in Canada* (Toronto 1975).

⁴⁵Lorry W. Felske, "Science and the radical Social Gospel in Western Canada," MA Thesis, University of Calgary (1975), 74.

⁴⁶Felske, "Science and the radical Social Gospel," 79.

and labour," and in some cases, "it was the duty of the church to take sides."⁴⁷

Throughout his career as a Methodist minister Smith was committed to various forms of adult education. During his stay at McDougall Methodist Church in Winnipeg, beginning in 1902, Smith had organized a forum on public affairs and invited reform-minded speakers including Salem Bland, C.W. Gordon, and Arthur Puttee to address the forum. In Dauphin, from 1909 to 1911, Smith sponsored a men's club, which organized debates and heard addresses from, F.J. Dixon, R.A. Rigg, A.W. Puttee, and others.⁴⁸

In Brandon, Smith continued his career as an advocate of social transformation and as a practitioner of adult education. He used his pulpit, the press, and his Men's Union Social Study Class to communicate his views on labour and social change. In February 1914, in an address given under the auspices of his Men's Class, Smith explained to 200 workingmen that the wage system fixed the hours of labor for purposes of profit rather than for the development of life. Shorter hours were necessary, in his view, for the people's moral, physical, and mental well being and advancement. Smith's presentation was the third of a series; all were favoured with a large attendance.⁴⁹

Smith's Social Studies class was not the only forum organized during World War I for the political education of the city's workers. In the summer of 1915, the People's Mutual League came into existence. The League provided a forum for the consideration of working-class issues. The League met on Sunday afternoons in King George School in the city's working-class East end to hear speakers and discuss issues of the day. For example, on Sunday afternoon, 23 August 1915, the subject of discussion was, "Is Thrift Beneficial to the Working Class at the Present Time?"⁵⁰ The format for the discussion was a debate between railroad worker T. Hanwell and former realtor and city alderman S.C. Doran.

The People's Mutual League was replaced by a People's Forum, likely modeled after the People's Forum organized by J.S. Woodsworth in Winnipeg in 1913. Woodsworth, a native of Brandon, had shared his student years with A. E. Smith at Wesley College. Like Smith, Woodsworth had an abiding interest in adult education and had hoped to establish a Workers' Educational Forum in Winnipeg. While he did not succeed in this, he was successful in initiating the People's Forum, a movement which spread to other cities in western Canada including Brandon. The purpose of the Forum, in Woodsworth's view, was to bring people together irrespective of

⁴⁷Felske, "Science and the radical Social Gospel," 87.

⁴⁸Felske, "Science and the radical Social Gospel," 76-77, 94.

⁴⁹*Brandon Daily Sun*, 16 February 1914.

⁵⁰*Brandon Daily Sun*, 21 August 1915.

race, ethnicity, or class for general educational and cultural activities. Woodsworth viewed the Forum as a kind of "People's Church."⁵¹

Early in 1916, a Forum was active in Brandon. Its educational activities were based on a non-formal, popular, adult education practice that combined reflection and action. A request for special funding made by the YMCA to the City Council became a central issue for the Forum when, in February 1916, a delegation representing the YMCA, headed by C.S. Maharg, Superintendent of CPR operations, appeared before City Council and requested that Council issue debentures in the name of the city in the amount of \$33,000. The People's Forum provided an organizational focus for opposition to the YMCA's proposal. Newspaper reports of the Forum's proceedings and letters to the editor, critical of the Y proposal, were printed in the *Brandon Sun*. These criticisms provoked public reaction against the proposal and it was eventually withdrawn. This involvement of the Forum in the discussion of the YMCA proposal constituted an alternative, class-based, non-formal, adult educational practice, based on a conception of democracy as moral democracy.⁵²

Maintaining the People's Forum as a regular feature of community life was a continuing challenge and its organizers had to seek support and legitimacy from various quarters within the city. In September 1917, a deputation consisting of James Skene, the director of Manual Training in the Brandon schools, and labourite Alderman J.A.G. Grantham, a city contractor, met with the recently revitalized Brandon Ministerial Association to explain the goals of the Forum and to urge support for it. Skene explained that the Forum was a non-sectarian, non-political organization which, in his view, supplemented the work of the churches. A.E. Smith moved a motion expressing support for the Forum. The motion called for the appointment of representatives of the Association (most surely Smith was nominated) to work with representatives of "labor organizations and educationists of the city" in the work of organizing the People's Forum.⁵³

The Forum seems to have lapsed into inactivity from time to time, only to be revived and revitalized by Smith, Skene and others. For example, in January 1919, James Skene wrote to City Council, on behalf of the education committee of the Dominion Labour Party, requesting the use of the City Hall for Sunday afternoon meetings of the Forum. Skene explained that "at a meeting held in Brandon on Sunday last the audience of some 500 persons were unanimous in their desire that these meetings should be

⁵¹Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1959), 44. For Woodsworth's interest in supporting the organization of "forums" in other centres, see Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics*, 70.

⁵²*Brandon Daily Sun*, 14 February 1916; 16 February 1916; and 21 February 1916.

⁵³*Brandon Daily Sun*, 25 September 1917.

continued." He included a list of the Forum's proposed speakers and their topics for the coming months. These included noted Winnipeg radicals and progressives Mrs. Winona Dixon, Dr. Salem Bland, G. Soltis, F.J. Dixon, Arthur Beech, J.S. Farmer, E.K. Marshall from Portage La Prairie, and Brandon's A.E. Smith. Topics to be explored by the Forum included "Women and Work," "Religion, Its Place in the Work of Reconstruction," "Democracy and Education," and "The American Labour Movement." At the time of Skene's request for the use of City Hall, Salem Bland, F.J. Dixon, Beech, and Farmer had not identified the focus of their addresses to the Forum. City Council granted the request for the use of City Hall at the regular rate of \$25 per Sunday.⁵⁴

Brandon's People's Forum continued to function throughout World War I and laid the basis for the Brandon People's Church, a labour church, created in June 1919. The Forum's principal legacy was to advance a political educational discourse that went beyond an ideological party and promoted a strategy based on a coalition with other forces. The Forum's non-formal popular education practices combined reflection and action and laid the basis for the transition from an oppositional culture to a social movement.

THE PEDAGOGY OF INSURGENCY: THE CONFEDERATE

In the last years of World War I, financial austerity, combined with spiraling inflation, the imposition of conscription, and the outlawing of various labour and labour political organizations, incited a growing militancy among Brandon's workers. This militancy was evident in the reorganization of the Trades and Labour Council which had been inactive since some time in 1915, and the formation, as a result of an initiative of the revitalized Council, of the Labour Representation League, and, in the summer of 1918, the Brandon local of the Dominion Labour Party.

The Dominion Labour Party was designed to provide a basis for collective political action by the city's working class and its allies leading to, "the transformation of capitalist property with the production for use instead of for profit."⁵⁵ The Constitution of the party required the creation of an "educational and propaganda" committee. Through its Education Com-

⁵⁴James Skene to the mayor and gentlemen of Council, 16 January 1919. In possession of the authors.

⁵⁵Dominion Labour Party Constitution, Brandon and District Branch, *Salton Collection*, PAM, MG7, F8. On the formation of the Brandon local see, *Dominion Labour Party Winnipeg and District Minutes*, PAM, MG10A, 14-2, Box 2, F5, May 2, 1918. The original executive of the Dominion Labour Party in Brandon included Jas. H.

mittee, the Party offered organizational support for the continuation of the Brandon People's Forum and the creation of an alternative paper, a labour newspaper, *The Confederate*. These educational forums were used by the Party to promote a collective consciousness among Brandon's workers of the need to reconstruct the economic and social order.

Clearly, it was anticipated that the content of *The Confederate* would provide a counterpoint to the conventional world view advanced by the *Brandon Daily Sun*. The *Sun* had been created in 1882 by members of the city's business elite.⁵⁶ Since 1912 it had been the organ of the city's Conservative Party. It legitimized the established order and allowed the city's business elite to shape the agenda of civic debate. In 1919, the *Sun* was the only source of news and opinion published in the city. As an instrument of the business community's hegemony, the *Sun* shaped a civic culture through the dissemination of a public discourse which, to borrow the language of T.J. Jackson Lears, made "some forms of experience readily available to consciousness while ignoring or suppressing others."⁵⁷ In January 1919, the dominance of the *Sun* was challenged when the Dominion Labour Party, in conjunction with the Brandon Trades and Labour Council, began the publication of *The Confederate*. *The Confederate* was characterized by its editorial committee as labour's "first considerable undertaking in public propaganda."⁵⁸ *The Confederate* provided a medium in which a radical discourse, which had existed on the boundaries of received opinion, could challenge the world view advanced in the pages of the *Brandon Sun*.⁵⁹

The Confederate began as a weekly publication; by the fall of 1919 it had become a monthly one. It ceased publication at the end of 1920. During its short life, it made available to the city's workers a distinctly proletarian perspective on the affairs of the city, province, and nation. Articles about

Skene, a teacher; Rev. Jas. Savage, a Presbyterian minister; George Ayers, a section foreman; Wesley Rosebrugh, a railway machinist; W.H. Stringer, a retired carpenter; J.A.G. Grantham, a realtor; W.G. Darvill, a school janitor; Robert Bullard, a CPR shopworker; Tom Mellor, the Brandon School Board attendance officer; J. Coplestone, CNR shopworker; Herb Ingham, a letter carrier; J.H. Hines, manager of the Hanbury Hardware Company; David Baker, a machinist; R.T. Smith, a CPR conductor; Sid Broomhall, a shoe store clerk; Charles Page, a CPR shopworker; D. Wood, a school janitor; and CPR employee W.B. Parkes. *Henderson's Directory* (Brandon), 1919.

⁵⁶ Martin Kavanaugh, *The Assiniboine Basin* (Survey: 1966), 229-30.

⁵⁷ T.J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review*, 3 (June 1985), 577.

⁵⁸ *The Confederate*, 9 January 1919.

⁵⁹ *The Confederate* was edited by a committee named by the Dominion Labour Party and the Brandon Trades and Labour Council.

the labour movement in Britain, Europe, Australia, and the United States were staples of *The Confederate*. Developments in revolutionary Russia were reported on sympathetically. Articles from the *Christian Guardian*, *Social Welfare*, *The Survey*, and other progressive publications appeared regularly in its pages. Not surprisingly, *The Confederate's* editorial content was informed by the conviction that labour's cause was just, and that,

the capitalist system, with its profiteers, its wage slaves, its long hours of drudgery and toil for the multitude for a bare living and its confirmed practice of injustice upon the weak, has outlived ... its usefulness....⁶⁰

This critique of the conventional apologist view of the social order proved especially compelling in the tumultuous period following World War I. At that time, industrial action, at the point of production, and direct political action by the city's workers challenged the hegemony of the city's business community. *The Confederate* played a central role in legitimizing this insurgency through the promotion of informal social learning among the city's workers. Its principal impact was in the cultivation of a critical self-consciousness among the city's workers.

The growing challenge to the hegemony of the city's business elite evident in the creation of the Dominion Labour Party, the revitalized People's Forum, and the publication of *The Confederate* was given a practical form in Brandon's extended industrial relations crisis in the spring of 1919. In the spring of 1919, a series of dramatic strikes, including a Civic Employees' Union strike in April 1919, a Sympathetic Strike during May and June associated with the Winnipeg General strike, and an abortive General Strike at the end of June 1919, took place. These developments reflected a state of unprecedented class antagonism in the city.

During the Sympathetic Strike a series of Strike Bulletins were published. Informed by a radical critique of the established order, the Strike Bulletins mediated the workers' experience of the crisis, provided orientation for further action and, with *The Confederate*, contested the *Sun's* interpretation of social and political reality.

The content of the Strike Bulletins suggests that the principal authors of these documents were A.E. Smith, Fred Baker, chair of the Strike Committee, and Henry Bartholomew. Baker had emerged as a radical voice in the reconstituted Brandon Trades and Labour Council. He was one of the Brandon delegates to the Calgary Conference of western labour in the spring of 1919 and was named to the Manitoba organization committee for the One Big Union. He was an advocate of direct action in the work place to advance the cause of labour. H.M. Bartholomew, a native of the British

⁶⁰*The Confederate*, 11 April 1919.

Isles, was a propagandist for the Socialist Party of Canada. Beginning in 1915, he was a frequent contributor to the *Western Clarion*. His was the language of inclusive working-class solidarity and class warfare. Bartholomew quickly became a leading figure in the strike leadership in Brandon. While not holding any formal position in the city's organized labour movement, his voice was influential in labour councils, on public platforms and through the *Strike Bulletins*. Bartholomew was characterized by Inspector F.H. French, commander of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police in Brandon, as "one of the ablest labour men in Western Canada."⁶¹

The content of *Strike Bulletin* No.3 issued on 23 May 1919, was typical of the general character of these documents. It attacked the editorial subservience to the city's business community of the *Brandon Sun*:

The master class has no better servant in Manitoba, so far as the opportunity permits. The Sun goes as far as it can, not, however, with the effect of the great orb whose name it bears; for, wherever The Brandon Sun appears, there is deeper darkness and greater confusion. It is reactionary, the very apostle of reaction; nevertheless, it is true, the shadow of Tenth street deserves well of the master class for the simple reason that their desire is to keep the people in darkness and bondage and to diffuse a reactionary spirit in the community.⁶²

While the *Strike Bulletins* were generally polemical in tone and substance, they also stressed the importance of careful analysis and thorough understanding of issues facing the city's workers. Solidarity in support of the Sympathetic Strike was

not a cause of demanding blind loyalty to a poorly understood issue. It is not the result of the leadership of the mob by wild agitation: It is the class movement of a body of thinking men and women who have studied the issue and become convinced.⁶³

⁶¹Tom Mitchell, "Brandon 1919: Labour and Industrial Relations in the Wheat City in the Year of the General Strike," *Manitoba History*, 17 (Spring 1989), 8-9. In the spring of 1920, Bartholomew unsuccessfully sought the nomination to run in the provincial election as a Brandon Labour Party candidate. He settled in Winnipeg and in 1922 joined the Workers' Party of Canada and remained an active Communist until his death in 1931. See Ivan Avakamoic, *The Communist Party in Canada*, 24; and William Rodney, *Soldiers of the International*, 51n, 66n, 113n.

⁶²*Strike Bulletin* No. 3, 23 May 1919, Salton Collection, MG7, F8, Box 1, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM).

⁶³*Strike Bulletin* No. 1, 21 May 1919, Salton Collection, MG7, F8, Box 1, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM).

The *Bulletins* reflected the dramatic changes that were taking place in the working-class culture of the city during 1919. For example, unlike the traditional exclusiveness of the Trades and Labour Council, the language of the Strike Bulletins was inclusive, advancing a radical ethic of solidarity. Clearly reflecting Bartholemew's influence, Strike Bulletin No. 1 announced that "The cause is the call of Brotherhood: There is no need for threats and scowls, and frowns and defiance, there is need for hope and high idealism."⁶⁴ By generating greater working-class solidarity among the city's workers, the *Bulletins* helped to diminish the social and political isolation of Brandon's workers of central and eastern European origin. Before the war, these workers had remained largely unorganized and outside the city's labour political activities. While evidence exists to suggest that animosity towards "alien" workingmen continued to exist among segments of the city's English-speaking working class, the cause of working-class solidarity in the city was advanced by the determined efforts of the strike leadership to foster labour solidarity through the publication of strike bulletins and the organization of strike rallies and parades in which a significant portion of the participants were Brandon workers of "alien" origin.⁶⁵

The experience of the labour crisis also helped to integrate women into Brandon's labour movement. Female telephone operators and civic employees were among the city's striking workers during the spring strikes. In 1969 Beatrice Brigden and Edith Cove, two long-standing members of Manitoba's labour political movement, recalled that their association with the labour movement dated from their involvement in the Brandon labour crisis of 1919 and the provincial election of 1920.⁶⁶

THE PEDAGOGY OF REGENERATION: THE PEOPLE'S CHURCH

One of the principal developments of the Strike crisis was the creation of the Brandon People's Church in June 1919. The People's Church, a labour church, was created on 8 June 1919 under the leadership of A.E. Smith. It was designed to provide a forum "where the gospel of social Christianity could be fearlessly propounded."⁶⁷ Expressed in a slightly different way,

⁶⁴*Strike Bulletin No. 1*, 21 May 1919, Salton Collection, MG7, F8, Box 1, Provincial Archives of Manitoba.

⁶⁵Tom Mitchell, "Brandon 1919," 8.

⁶⁶*Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 August 1969.

⁶⁷"The Peoples' Church, Brandon, Manitoba, (A Tentative Proposal)." United Church Archives (Toronto), *Notes on the Labour Churches*, File 22, Box 7, Evangelism and Social Service Branch. The Peoples' Church was also the base for the organi-

the People's Church was dedicated to the task of challenging the cultural viability of the existing civil society and gradually constructing an alternative cultural formation in the city. The idea of creating the Church had originated with the organizing committee of the People's Forum. The Sympathetic Strike in Brandon was "the occasion, not the cause to be sure for the organization of such a church."⁶⁸ Smith had hoped to remain within the Methodist Church while leading the People's Church. However, in June 1919, the unusual refusal of the Manitoba Conference of the Methodist Church to allow Smith to be left without station so that he could undertake work with the People's Church in Brandon resulted in his resignation from the Methodist ministry.⁶⁹

Predictably, the original congregation of the People's Church, consisting of more than 400 women and men, was predominately working class with a heavy representation of the families of East end railway workers. Still, the ethnic and congregational origins of the new Church's membership were diverse. In celebrating this diversity, Beatrice Bridgen, one of the leaders of the Church, wrote in July 1919:

In one sweep of the eye, I saw three men — one who had served time for attempting to murder his wife — second an influential Jew — third an Austrian Greek Catholic who bears the nickname of "King of the Austrians," on the flats he holds the key to every Austrian home — all three men were eager and susceptible so far as I could judge.⁷⁰

zation of the Brandon Defense Committee. *One Big Union Bulletin*, 20 September 1919.

⁶⁸Beatrice Bridgen to Dr. T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919. *Brigden Collection*, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), MG14, C1 4. Beatrice Bridgen was born in Ontario in January, 1888 and raised on the family homestead near Deloraine, Manitoba. She was educated at Albert College in Ontario, Brandon College, and the School of Expression in Toronto. In 1913, Brigden was recruited to work for the Evangelism and Social Service branch of the Methodist Church by T.A. Moore. She returned to Brandon in 1919 and quickly became involved in the activities of the Peoples' Church and the political career of A.E. Smith. Brigden continued throughout her life to be involved politically in the Independent Labour Party, the CCF, and the New Democratic Party. Brigden was also active in support of a variety of other progressive causes. See *Brigden Collection*, PAM, MG 14, C19. See also Joan Sangster, "The Making of a Socialist-Feminist: The Early Career of Beatrice Brigden, 1888-1941," *Atlantis*, 1 (Fall 1987), 14-28; and, Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto 1991), 72-74.

⁶⁹On Smith's experience at the June Conference see Lorry W. Felske, "Science and the Radical Social Gospel," 117-118; and Eugene Pirie, "Rev. A.E. Smith," Unpublished paper, University of Manitoba Archive, 48-50.

⁷⁰Beatrice Bridgen to Dr. T.A. Moore, *Brigden Collection*, Provincial Archives of Manitoba (PAM), MG14, C14, Brigden to T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919.

The People's Church brought new elements to the development of an oppositional culture and to the very concept of non-formal political education. The plan of services was described by Bridgen as follows:

A meeting Sunday morning for Religious Education following the plan of Dr. Soars and others connected with Chicago University using Dr. Coe's text books. The evening service for the discussion of the Social Gospel. There are people from every denomination on the membership role. The Ways and Means Committee have good hopes for securing the Congregational Church for Sunday morning and week night meetings. A downtown hall will be necessary to accommodate the Sunday evening crowds.⁷¹

The use of Coe's texts brought to the People's Church an educational approach highly influenced by progressive education. In fact, the Social Gospel movement, and in particular its most radical exponents, were vigorous advocates of progressive education. In his texts, George Coe integrated Social Gospel doctrines with progressive ideas in education. Coe, a Methodist, a member of the American Social Service Federation and a student of John Dewey, dedicated his book, *A Social Theory of Religious Education*, published in 1917, to "Harry Ward who sees and makes others see."⁷² Harry Ward was an American Methodist minister described as "the most active clerical participant in secular organizations of any of the prophets."⁷³

Coe's approach to religious education was consonant with Smith's understanding of salvation. As Richard Allen has explained,

in the place of redemption of sinful man by Christ's sacrifice ... [Smith] preached a social redemption whereby man's ills would be overcome by fruitful work and equitable distribution.⁷⁴

Coe believed, "that our social experience ... [was] a sphere of communion with God, that here children can share religion with adults and grow in religion without any forcing whatever."⁷⁵ Education, in Coe's view, was not only society's supreme effort at self-preservation; it was also society's supreme effort at self-improvement.

⁷¹ Beatrice Bridgen to Dr. T.A. Moore, *Brigden Collection*, PAM, MG14, C14, Brigden to T.A. Moore, 26 July 1919.

⁷² R. Bruno-Jofre, *Methodist Education In Peru: Social Gospel, Politics and American Ideological and Economic Penetration, 1888-1930* (Waterloo 1988), 135-136.

⁷³ Bruno-Jofré, *Methodist Education in Peru*, 136.

⁷⁴ Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada 1914-1918* (Toronto 1973), 166.

⁷⁵ Bruno-Jofré, *Methodist Education in Peru*, 136.

Smith had been familiar with these ideas for some time. In 1918, in a report on the activities of the Manitoba Methodist Conference, Smith explained that the work of religious education, as it was carried out through the Sunday School and Young People's Societies, was in line with "the modern principles of pedagogy and psychology." Beatrice Bridgen, Smith's principal assistant in the People's Church, had extensive training and experience as an educator. Like Smith, she was committed to a modern pedagogy based in a psychological approach to experience and learning.⁷⁶

Continuing a tradition he had initiated at the beginning of his career as a Methodist minister, Smith invited a wide range of radical speakers to address the congregation of the People's Church in Brandon. These included fellow former Methodist ministers William Ivens and J.S. Woodsworth. In the first year of its existence the congregation of the People's Church heard addresses on the Winnipeg General Strike, Economic Democracy, Proportional Representation, Production and Hours of Labour, Jesus the Communist, and Leon Trotsky and his Theories.⁷⁷ Each was followed by questions and discussion. Smith viewed such assemblies as instruments,

to enlighten our minds, to give strength to our wills on righteousness, to develop increased faith in ourselves and in the cause of truth, to fortify against evil, to create charity and forbearance and to exert spiritual compulsion in us and strive for the coming of the Kingdom of God amongst men.⁷⁸

Women had a strong presence in the educational work of the Church. Beatrice Bridgen played a central role in developing educational programs for all members of the family. The Church was active many evenings of the week with suppers, festivals, recitals, lectures and discussions, and general meetings on Wednesday and Friday evenings.⁷⁹

The existence of the People's Church, its radical message, and Smith's efforts in the spring of 1920 to spread the People's Church movement to other western centres drew a hostile reaction from the Methodist Church, the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and the Federal Department of Labour. The Methodist Church came to view the labour church movement in the West, initiated principally by Smith, as a threat to its congregational integrity. A liaison developed between Dr. T.A. Moore, Director in the Methodist Social Service and Evangelism branch, and Lt. Col. C.F. Hamil-

⁷⁶On Smith, see *Brandon Sun*, 28 October 1918. On Bridgen's ideas see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 72-74.

⁷⁷See, *Notes on the Labour Churches*, United Church Archives, University of Toronto. File 122, Box 7, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Methodist Church.

⁷⁸Eugene Pirie, "Rev. A.E. Smith," 52.

⁷⁹Pirie, "Rev. A.E. Smith," 51.

ton of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police. Their mutual hostility to the labour church movement resulted in their cooperation in the collection of information on the labour church movement in the West and the production of a report on the labour church movement in the region.⁸⁰ This report was likely the basis for an assault on the Brandon People's Church in the summer of 1921 when it was denounced as an organ of Russian propaganda in a publication of the Department of Labour entitled, *Information Respecting the Russian Soviet System and Its Propaganda in North America*.⁸¹

The Church's emphasis on questioning the structural basis of the social order laid the basis for a more radical conception of education than that expounded by progressive educators or embraced by the Methodist Church. Smith's understanding of social change soon moved beyond social reconstruction and its pragmatic philosophical basis. Shortly after leaving Brandon, Smith wrote a very strong radical critique of formal education entitled, *Education OF the Working Class, BY the Working Class, FOR the Working Class*, as a brochure of the Canadian Labour Party, Toronto Branch.⁸² In the brochure, Smith advanced the view that the labour movement from its inception had been an educational one. The originality of this document resides in the class analysis of education, and, in particular, the understanding of schooling as an agency to create and reproduce, "the habits of thought and action, induced by the poisoned education of the owning class imposed during the years of impressionable youth by the schools and during later years by the economic and industrial system."⁸³ Knowledge was, in his view, the source of power and children were handicapped through compulsory attendance at the public schools, "where they are being indoctrinated into the delusions of the master class."⁸⁴

⁸⁰See the correspondence between Moore and Hamilton in The Board of Temperance and Moral Reform, Methodist Church Files 122, 123, Box 7. United Church Archives, University of Toronto. See in this correspondence the report *Notes on the Labour Churches*, File 122, Box 7, Board of Evangelism and Social Service, Methodist Church. See Richard Allen, *The Social Passion*, 170-171, for a discussion of the duplicity of T.A. Moore, head of Evangelism and Social Service for the Methodist Church, in collecting information for the RNWMP concerning the labour church in Brandon and other points in western Canada.

⁸¹*Information Respecting the Russian Soviet System and Its Propaganda in North America*. Canada Department of Labour, August 1920. NAC, Records of the Department of Labour, RG 27 Vol. 168, file 613.04:1. For Smith's reaction to this publication see *The Confederate*, 3 September 1920.

⁸²A.E. Smith, *Education of the Working Class by the Working Class for the Working Class*. The Canadian Labor Party Toronto Branch. Published by The Forum Committee, Labor Temple, Toronto, Ontario, January 1924. R.S. Kenny Collection, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, University of Toronto.

⁸³Smith, *Education of the Working Class*.

⁸⁴Smith, *Education of the Working Class*.

CONCLUSION

The development of political education practices in Brandon in the years from 1900 to 1920 was based in an implicit recognition that consciousness and ideas were material forces in shaping the social order. Labourite political education activities had the effect of integrating skilled workers together as a class. These activities provided a process for the examination and articulation of their corporatist interests within the context of prairie capitalism, while reinforcing the social identity and class solidarity of the workers. Brandon's labourites used the official press to create political spaces and relied on the spoken word to foster and reinforce an ethic of solidarity. The discourse informing their educational practices had an exclusivist tone. It was ethnocentric and patriarchal.

The Socialist Party of Canada developed a radical political-educational discourse with an inclusive approach. Class was the overriding category in the analysis of the socio-economic situation of the working class. The question of power was at the centre of the pedagogical discourse. It permeated all the political education activities of the Brandon SPC. For the SPC, education was the means to develop a collective consciousness in order to carry out an alternative political project. There was emphasis on the written word, on reasoning and understanding, and on reading historical reality from the perspective and experience of the working class.

The People's Forum articulated a political educational discourse that went beyond an ideological party. The Forum organized political educational work having, as point of reference, a strategy based on a coalition with other forces. The clarification of historical reality was geared to action. The combination of reflection and action was at the core of the educational work. The Forum's work took the form of informal popular education practices. The Forum set the basis for the movement from an oppositional culture to a social movement.

The Dominion Labour Party worked very closely with the Forum, breaking party boundaries. Most importantly, it put emphasis on the need to have an alternative press capable of challenging the hegemony of the *Brandon Sun*. The *Confederate* and *Strike Bulletins* played a vital role in mediating the workers' experience of the post war crisis by providing an opportunity for informal social learning experiences and by contesting the received interpretation of reality disseminated by the *Brandon Sun*.

The People's Church developed a political education, which had many of the characteristics of a political front. The principal condition for membership in the Church was a belief "in the need for, and the responsi-

bility for a better day for human society."⁸⁵ The Church's intense educational work was not limited to adults; there was an intense involvement of families. The mode of education was not limited to dry political events but included artistic and cultural expressions of the people. Nor were these activities limited to the written word or to formal speeches; informal social interaction was valued. Perhaps the most original contribution of the People's Church was the introduction of progressive education concepts in political education.

The election on 29 June 1920 of A.E. Smith, the candidate of the Brandon Labour Party, and the first labour candidate ever nominated in Brandon to contest a provincial election, to the provincial legislature as the MLA for Brandon, suggests that the varied political educational practices mediated the development of a vigorous labour political culture in the city.

⁸⁵"The Peoples' Church, Brandon, Manitoba, (A Tentative Proposal)." United Church Archives (Toronto), *Notes on the Labour Churches*, File 22, Box 7, Evangelism and Social Service Branch.

9 The Making of the East End Community Club

Errol Black and Tom Black

AFTER THE DEFEATS in the strikes of 1919, Brandon's working class became fragmented, and resistance and struggle tended to manifest itself along sectional and neighbourhood lines. Moreover, when the Great Depression hit, workers found themselves powerless to resist the onslaught of unemployment, wage cuts, speed ups, and the generalized degradation of working and living conditions. Consequently, they became preoccupied with trying to salvage what they could out of these conditions, and their struggles were diverted into activities that would provide immediate and needed benefits for their families and their neighbourhoods. These new forms of struggle were manifested in all parts of the city, but much of the impetus and leadership was provided by the people of Brandon's East end.¹

The East end emerged as a distinctive working-class neighbourhood in Brandon in the first decades of the 19th century. This distinctiveness was partly a matter of geography. The East end is bounded on the West by First Street (a main thoroughfare bridging the Assiniboine River), on the North by the River and the Canadian Pacific Railway yards, and on the South by the Canadian National (before 1919, the Canadian Northern) railway yards. To the East there was, until comparatively recent times, little else but prairie and gravel pits; now the area contains a Manitoba Hydro steam generating plant, a fertilizer complex owned by J.R. Simplot, and a "half-assed" chemical plant owned by Hooker Chemical.

But it was also, and mainly, a matter of people. The people who moved into the East end from 1900 to 1930 were primarily immigrants, and the sons and daughters of immigrants from England, Scotland, and Ireland. These people had much in common. The majority of them were Protestant. Most of them worked at manual jobs on the railways, in the wholesale

¹This account draws on the following publications: G.F. Barker, *Brandon: A City—1881-1961* (Brandon 1977); Mary Hume, *Brandon: A Prospect of a City* (Brandon 1982), in particular, the prologue by Tom Mitchell; and W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians* (Brandon 1982).

houses, in the hospitals (the General Hospital in the East end and the Mental Hospital on the north hill), in the manufacturing establishments, and on construction sites. (See appendix for occupations of people living in the East end in 1930-31.) Moreover, they shared certain attitudes and values which were at odds with those held by the dominant elements in Brandon, in particular a deep suspicion of authority and a healthy resentment of vested interests.

This combination of geography and people gave the East end, in Tom Mitchell's terms, a "garrison mentality."² At the same time it fostered progressive and oppositional politics — class politics.

The politics of the East end was manifested in two ways. First, it was reflected in traditional electoral activities. Thus, East enders opposed temperance in votes in 1914 and 1916. In 1918, they succeeded in blocking city council from granting a twenty year exemption on local taxes to the McKenzie Seeds Company for an addition to its plant. In 1916, they helped to elect J.A.G. Grantham, whom the Sun described as one of Brandon's "strongest socialists," as the alderman from Ward One. They consistently supported Harry Cater, self-styled "workingman's candidate," in mayoralty elections. And they contributed to the election of progressive MLAs in 1920, the Reverend A.E. Smith for the Dominion Labour Party, and in 1943, Dr. D.L. Johnson for the CCF, who was subsequently expelled from the CCF as a "fellow traveller."³

Secondly, the people of the East end contributed much of the leadership and support in the struggles for local reforms, and in the creation of institutions to serve neighbourhood interests. This form of activity was especially evident in the 1930s when people from the East end helped to organize a Hospital Sweepstakes, to raise funds for the financially strapped General Hospital, led campaigns for the establishment of dental and health clinics in the schools, and built a community club.

This particular story focuses on the latter project; namely, the building of a community club. The story merits telling both because it is indicative of the capacity working-class people have to build institutions, which enhance life in their neighbourhoods, and because the community club, at least in the form it finally took in the East end and other working-class areas in Brandon, has many of the characteristics of a socialist institution.⁴

²Tom Mitchell, "East End: From Frozen Ponds an Affectionate Local History," *Brandon Sun*, 22 July 1982.

³Much of this is documented in W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians*, 178-83.

⁴The core of this story was provided by people who were involved in the affairs of the East End Community Club in the 1930s and the early 1940s.

FROM FROZEN PONDS

In the East end's early days, people found their recreation where they could. They swam in the Assiniboine River, and in the winter they skated on it and the surrounding ponds. So long as adults were present the children swam and skated in relative safety. But because of the long hours worked by the men, and the burdens of domestic work in the home, the opportunities for adults to share these activities with their children were extremely limited. Consequently, the children would sneak off on their own. This naturally proved to be a constant source of worry to parents.

This worry spurred parents on to find ways to provide children with safer places for recreation. These efforts bore some fruit in 1928 when a rink was established on the grounds of the General Hospital. The Hospital provided the ground for the rink for the benefit of families in the East end, on the understanding that it could be used by student nurses and other staff of the hospital.

The site for the rink was levelled by Sheriff McGregor and a crew of inmates from the Gaol. The shack and the lights were put up by volunteers. And a janitor, Mr. McCormick, was hired to look after the facility. There was a membership fee for use of the rink of two dollars per family per season and fifty cents for a single membership. The proceeds from the sale of memberships were used to pay McCormick and cover the expenses of the rink.

This rink, which lasted until 1931, took the children off the river and frozen ponds and gave them a place to skate in safety and comfort. Also it established a tradition of voluntarism and co-operation, which has characterized the operations of the rink ever since.

UNDER THE TANK

In August 1930 Brandon City Council authorized construction of an Elevated Tower and Water Tank on a square block area in the East end, a site with the Provincial Gaol (built in 1885) to the East, Rideau Park to the North, King George Elementary School to the South, and a few houses to the West. Horton Steel Works, which had received the contract for a bid of \$262,000, constructed the tower in 1931 and 1932.

With the construction of the Tank, the rest of the site became unsuitable for most other purposes. Some of the people involved with the first rink recognized that this land would be ideal for a rink. At a 9 June 1931 special meeting of City Council, Alderman Hughes presented an oral request from the East end Community Club for the City to level the South part of the

block for this purpose. After some discussion of the request, Aldermen Young and Davis moved:

That the matter of grading and levelling the Southern portion of the Tank Block be left in the hands of the Chairman of the Property Committee to get the work done in co-operation with the Parks Board as a relief measure, at a cost not to exceed \$200.00.⁵

The grading and levelling was done before the start of winter 1931. Before the rink could be flooded, however, it was necessary to provide a shelter where people could change into their skates and warm themselves. Therefore, on 7 December 1931, Sidney Broomhall appeared before City Council with another request from the Community Club, specifically, the use of one of the buildings located at the bathing beach on 16th Street North at the rink during the winter months. Broomhall assured Council that the Community Club would pay the cost of transporting the building to the rink and would return it in good shape to the beach in the spring. With these assurances, Aldermen Patterson and Oglesby put the following motion: "That one of the dressing rooms at the Bathing Beach be loaned to the East End Community Club for the winter months, the same to be moved by the City at the expense of the Club."⁶ Council approved this action.

With the land ready and shelter secured, the Community Club hired Bob Johnston as manager at a salary of \$25.00 a month. Then, in early January 1932, representatives of the Community Club approached the School Board to seek funds for flooding the rink. The School Board funded the flooding and, in addition, provided coal and wood to heat the shelter.

That same winter the Club built a toboggan slide on the hill to the North and West of the Tank. This was probably the first community toboggan slide in Canada.

When the ice went out in spring 1932, the Club was faced with the prospect of returning the shelter to the beach. Broomhall and his associates apparently realized that the arrangement with the City for the use of the beach house was not very satisfactory, and on 6 June 1932, Broomhall went before the City Council to inform its members that if they insisted that the shelter be returned to the beach, the Club would have to close the rink. When Broomhall concluded his presentation, Aldermen Oglesby and Spafford responded by moving: "That if the East End Community Club will supply lumber required to erect a new building for the beach, at a cost not exceeding \$75.00, they be allowed to retain the building loaned to them."⁷

⁵Brandon City Council Minutes, 9 June 1931.

⁶Brandon City Council Minutes, 7 December 1931.

⁷Brandon City Council Minutes, 6 June 1932.

Council endorsed the motion, but there was more to come. F.R. Longworth of the Kiwanis Club was due to speak on another matter after Broomhall had been dealt with. When his turn came, Longworth told Council he thought the East end rink was a worthwhile project and that the "under-privileged boys' section of the Kiwanis Club would furnish the \$75.00 referred to by the previous speaker."⁸ Thus, as a result of some judicious scrounging and a bit of luck the East end Community Club ended up with a permanent rink, complete with a first rate shelter.

MAKING DO IN HARD TIMES

The 1930s were, of course, hard times for many people in Brandon and in the East End. Some businesses closed their doors permanently. Other major employers such as the two railways laid off many employees and put the rest on half-time. As the jobs disappeared, many families were forced on relief. W. Leland Clark notes that at least 10 per cent of Brandon families were on relief by 1932. Since relief payments were barely subsistence, many families, and not just those on relief, sought to stretch their incomes by "borrowing" coal from the CPR and ice fishing on the river.

Food was cheap; in fact, farmers went from door to door selling eggs at six cents a dozen and fresh pork at six or seven cents a pound. But even at these prices many families could not afford them. Instead, they saved money and watched for specials on meats and other items. Occasionally, they would pick up a pig's head at 25 cents. This was a real bargain as many families made their own head-cheese and one head would yield several meals.

Soup bones were also much in demand; indeed, the butcher shops in the area were ranked according to the price and quality of their soup bones. Often the results were disappointing. One old timer recalls being in a butcher shop when a woman ordered a soup bone. When she saw the bone she exclaimed, "But there's no meat on it!" The butcher replied, "Well madam, didn't you ask for a bone?" The by-now-agitated woman said, "Yes, but you didn't have to skin it first."

Most families also had to be frugal with their clothing expenditures. Many women purchased cotton flour and sugar bags when they were on sale. These would then be soaked to remove the print. If there were girls in the family, the bags would be made into cotton dresses. Otherwise, they would be converted into pillow cases, bed sheets, and tea towels.

Needless to say, by the time the rent and the bills were paid, and the family clothed and fed, there was little money, and probably little energy, left for other things. Under these circumstances, the Community Club led

⁸Brandon City Council Minutes, 6 June 1932.

a "hand-to-mouth" existence. The fees that had been in effect at the old rink were retained, although the family rate was reduced to \$1.50, as a means of raising money to cover Johnston's wages and other expenses. Many people apparently had difficulty coming up with the fees. There is no record, however, and no recollection of anyone ever being prevented from skating or using the toboggan slide because their fees had not been paid. Other bits of money were raised through Whist Drives and Concerts held in King George School and through Moccasin Dances and the annual carnival held at the rink.

THE "BOYS"

As the old adage says, "It's an ill wind that blows no good." Some of the "good" of the Depression came to the Community Club in the form of a group of young, unemployed men who used the Club as a gathering place. These men, affectionately called the "Boys," helped with repairs to the building, cleaned and flooded the ice, helped the small kids tie their skates, assisted with the hockey teams, and coached the older children in the fine art of speed skating. They also provided the labour to build a toboggan slide and fence, and to convert an old box car into two change rooms. On Saturday nights after the rink was cleaned and flooded, Johnston and the "Boys" sat down to a feed of hot pork and beans and buns prepared by Mrs. Johnston.

Throughout the 1930s, the personalities involved in running the Community Club and rink were constantly changing. Johnston was called back to his old job and had to give up his position as manager of the rink. Jim Purser, one of the "Boys," took his place, at a salary of \$30 per month. Moreover, the composition of the group of fellows who made the rink a kind of "home away from home" also changed. Some of them gained jobs or "hit the road," but there were always others to take their places.

THE LINK WITH KING GEORGE SCHOOL

From the outset, there was a close link between the Community Club and King George School. This link was a natural. King George School was the one school that every child in the East end would attend for at least a few years. As such it became a focus for the activities of children and parents alike. Along with the things that the school was required and expected to do — teach children discipline, punctuality, deference, and the "three R's" — it also served as a centre for social activity in the community and introduced the children to organized sports.

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When people in the East end first became involved in forming a Community Club they held their meetings at the school. W.A. Wood, then Principal, not only made the school available for the meetings, but also participated in the formation and subsequent activities of the Club. The creation of a rink under the Tank was a great boon for the school hockey program, because it provided a place to practise. At the same time, the rink was perceived by school staff as providing other children with the sort of recreation that would keep them out of mischief in out-of-school hours and help them to develop the healthy bodies that were needed to nurture healthy brains.

The link between the school and Community Club was cemented with the practice of having the Principal automatically on the Club executive. Under other circumstances, and with other individuals, this might have turned out to be simply a procedural matter, an acknowledgement of support from the school. This was not the way it turned out. Wood (and his successors, Bill Peden, 1934-41, and Henry Nordin, from 1941 on), not only showed up at the meetings, but also provided valuable advice, took on executive responsibilities, and contributed time and labour to the work bees.

Indeed, for part of the 1930s, the Principal and staff of the school took over major responsibility for operation of the rink and toboggan slide. This came about as a result of a meeting held in the school on 27 October 1933. The details of the meeting and the plans for 1933-34 were spelled out in a newsletter, which was sent home with the pupils at the school. Apparently, this change in organization was prompted by financial problems. Thus, the financial statement for 1932-33 (included in the newsletter) showed a shortfall of \$23.28 on the total expenditures of \$217.11.⁹ The newsletter goes on to say:

We hope to operate this year without a deficit. This can be done only by selling three hundred or more season tickets at .50 cents each. This, together with the proceeds of a carnival, will assure enough money to operate the rink for the season.

Season tickets will be on sale in a few days. The pupils of King George School will be calling on you. They are counting on your support. Money is needed previous to the opening of the rink and slide. We have the best Community rink in the city, and the only Community toboggan slide in Canada. Let us give it the support it deserves. If possible, buy some extra tickets for children who cannot buy them.¹⁰

The financial problems were sorted out, and the rink and other facilities became entrenched as a part of the East end.

For notes 9 and 10, please see next page.

COME THE END OF THE THIRTIES

At the end of the 1930s the Community Club was in sound condition. The financial statement for 1938-39 shows revenue of \$410.27 for the year and expenditures of \$333.35. This left a surplus of \$76.92, no mean sum for the depression era. The main source of revenue continued to be the sale of memberships. Thus, of the total revenue taken in in 1938-39, \$226.80, over

⁹The financial statement provides detail on the sources of revenue and the expenditures of the Club:¹

Receipts		Expenditures	
Subscriptions	\$86.60	Caretaker (\$1.00 per day)	\$120.00
Carnival	39.37	Lights	31.22
Whist Drives	51.92	License	10.00
Concert	11.35	Gramophone	12.50
Moccasin Dances	4.59	Printing and Advertising	4.96
		Hardware	24.00
		Lumber and repairs	11.88
		Miscellaneous	2.55
		Fuel and Water supplied by the School Board	
Total Receipts	193.83	Total Expenditures	217.11
Deficit paid by Community Club	23.29		

¹⁰King George School Newsletter, October 1933.

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50 per cent, came from the sale of memberships.¹¹ The Carnival was another important source of revenue, netting \$107.62. Socials, in contrast, were not especially effective at raising money. For example, at the first social of 1939, held in January, \$15.55 was collected at the door. Out of this, the Club paid the orchestra \$1.00 for taxi fare, refunded the artist \$.25 for bus fare and bought \$2.40 worth of canned goods for bingo prizes. The net take, therefore, was \$11.90.¹²

Financial considerations aside, the significant thing was that, thanks to the efforts of the people living in the East end and the people working at King George School, the Community Club came out of the Depression firmly established as a vital element in the lives of people living in the East end. Mrs. Bob Allen, President of the Community Club in 1939, referred to the spirit which characterized the Club in her thank you letter to the people who worked with her:

I wish to thank you most sincerely for your co-operation and work during the past season. Our meetings have been well attended during the year. The spirit of good will and the desire to make the rink a success for the children was apparent at these meetings.

¹¹Members of the Club in 1938-39 were provided a membership card with the following format:

EAST END RINK AND TOBOGGAN SLIDE	
2 SEASON TICKET 1938-39	
Name	_____
Address	_____
(Write Name and Address in ink)	
This ticket is not transferrable and must be shown on request at Rink and Toboggan slide.	
SCHOOL PUPILS (Yellow Ticket).....\$.75
ADULTS (Pink Ticket).....	1.00
FAMILY TICKETS.....	2.00
No Tickets required for Children under School Age	

¹²The financial statement for 1938-39 and the details on the financial aspects of the social were provided by Ester D. Allen whose mother was President of the Club in 1938-39.

Mrs. Allen also noted the contribution of the "Boys:"

The young men working at the rink render a service to the community which very few of us living in it realize These young men have been raised in this district and have enjoyed the community rink in bygone days; and are now helping to carry it on for the younger boys and girls, which testifies to its worth in the community.¹³

A NEW DEAL FOR YOUTH

With the outbreak of war in 1939, the conditions with which the Community Club had been faced in the previous seven years changed dramatically, creating new problems. A lot of the young men from the East end went into the armed forces. Other residents were recalled to their jobs or absorbed into essential industries; indeed, not only were the unemployed put to work, but people who in "normal" times would never be considered for jobs such as married women and old-age pensioners suddenly found themselves welcomed into the city's workplaces.

These changes were felt by the Community Club. The "Boys," who had kept the facilities in good repair and cleaned and flooded the rink, were gone. Members of the executive found that with all the overtime they were required to work it was difficult to stay on top of the problems of the rink. Hiring a manager was almost impossible. With the limited amount of money available, the only people interested in the job were old-age pensioners seeking to supplement their meagre pensions. A succession of pensioners operated the rink, but many of them found the job too physically demanding. These problems were temporarily and partially resolved by having volunteers at the rink in the evenings to organize the children, clean the ice, and keep the fire going.

The staff at the school did their bit as well. They kept the hockey teams going; and when there were heavy snowfalls, the older children were let out of school to clean the rink.

As a result of these makeshift and stop-gap measures, the rink kept operating. By spring 1943, however, it was apparent to members of the executive and the school principal, who was being leaned on by the school division administration for spending too much time on Community Club affairs, that something would have to be done to get more people involved in the activities of the Club. Consequently, the executive convened a special meeting in the King George School auditorium to discuss its future. The children were given a special newsletter, "A New Deal for Youth," to take home, which detailed the problems of the Club and called on parents to

¹³A copy of this letter was provided by Ester Allen.

think about what needed to be done to take care of the recreational needs of their children. On the night of the meeting, the auditorium was packed.

School principal Henry Nordin set the stage for discussion with a review of the Club's problems. He stressed, in particular, that there simply were not enough volunteers and concluded his presentation with an impassioned plea for more participation. As soon as Mr. Nordin was done, a number of people volunteered to assist with the operation of the rink during the winter of 1943-44. The discussion then shifted to the longer-term objectives of the Community Club. After much free-wheeling debate which touched on virtually all aspects of recreation, those present at the meeting approved the following plan:

- (1) Construction of a modern Club house with washroom facilities, a full-size basement that could be used for meetings and bingo, and a canteen.
- (2) The provision of two full sheets of ice, one for skating and one for hockey.
- (3) The creation of a softball diamond, horseshoe pitches, and tennis courts.
- (4) The construction of a paddling pool, and, in the more distant future, a swimming pool.
- (5) The terracing and landscaping of the hill side.

No doubt some of those at the meeting thought that this plan was a "pipe-dream." Here you had a group of people with no land (all the Club had was the right to use the corner of the block on which the rink and shack were located), and no money, talking about a major recreational project. The one asset these people did have, however, was the resolve to seek to bring about the realization of their dream.

In any event, once the plan was agreed on, the meeting set up a six-member Building Fund and Property Committee with authority to expand and get as many people involved in the project as possible.¹⁴

¹⁴The six members of the Committee and their occupations were as follows:

Tom Black, Carman, CNR, President

Frank Pickering, Trainman, CPR, Vice President

Henry Nordin, Principal, King George School, Secretary

Sid Roberts, Bookkeeper, Brandon Hardware, Treasurer

Jack Seymour, Attendant, Brandon Mental Hospital, Chairman of Recreation

Bob Judd, Fireman, CPR, Hockey Coordinator

RAISING THE MONEY, SECURING THE LAND

At its first meeting the Committee laid plans for a major fund-raising drive. The East end was divided into blocks for canvassing, and a captain was placed in charge of each block. It was left to the captains to recruit the canvassers and to explain to them that each household in the East end would be visited and asked to contribute to the building fund. As part of the pitch for funds, the canvassers were instructed to tell families in detail how the monies collected would be used to improve recreational facilities for their children.

The canvass was enthusiastically received. Every family gave what they could afford. In total, approximately \$1,200 was collected. In addition, funds were raised through teas and bake sales held in the school and in other parts of the City.

Then, in February 1944 the Committee approached City Council to seek use of the square block of land on which the Tank was located. City Council advised the Committee that this land had been turned over to the Parks Board and it was from this body that approval for the use of the land would have to be obtained. The Committee attended the Parks Board meeting on 27 March 1944. The following excerpt from the minutes of this meeting explains what transpired:

A delegation from the East End Community Club comprised of Messrs. Black (Chairman), Strang and Moore appeared before the Board asking permission for the East End Community Club to have the use and control of the block of land on which the overhead tank is situated.

Mr. Black stated the Club wished to erect a permanent club building 40' x 12' [sic] with a full size basement, have two sheets of ice and a soft ball diamond on the South end of the block and ... hope to construct an open air swimming pool at the base of the hill.¹⁵

The request was referred to the Parks Committee for an evaluation. Subsequently, this committee approved the request and recommended that it be referred back to City Council for appropriate action. City Council complied with the recommendation of the Parks Board and the Community Club acquired control of the block of land.

¹⁵Brandon Parks Board meeting, 27 March 1944.

A BIT OF INGENUITY, MANY HANDS, A LOT OF SWEAT

The Committee was now in a position to push ahead with construction. At a meeting held in May, Jack Strang, who worked for the Good Roads, informed the committee that he would be able to have the Good Roads equipment, that was overhauled during the winter months, tested out and levelling the grounds for the ice surfaces and excavating the basement for the new building. Jack Coates offered to draw up plans and blueprints for the new club house with the aid of his father who had been a builder. The Committee also decided at this meeting to seek someone to organize and supervise construction of the building; someone who was capable, but would not demand top wages.

Shortly after this meeting there was much activity on the East end grounds. The Good Roads equipment moved in and did the levelling and excavation, and groups of children picked the surface area clean of the rocks that were turned up.

Joe Pilchar was hired to supervise construction. His was to be the only paid labour involved in the project. Pilchar laid out the work for the volunteers that reported for work each evening and on Saturdays. When the cribbing was ready for the basement, the mixer was brought in and a large gang of men showed up to help with the pour.

This was, of course, only the beginning. In the next few weeks, the floor went down and the framing was put up. Meanwhile the Committee was busy scrounging help with other phases of the work. Pete Sigurdson, who had been a plumber before getting a job on the railroad, helped with the layout of the plumbing. A chat with Tommy Smith, a small electrical contractor, proved rewarding. When he learned of the Club's plans he volunteered to help detail the electrical circuits and supervise installation. Jack Tait, an electrician on the CPR, worked along with the other volunteers to make sure the wiring was done right.

At one point in the early stages of construction, some boys were observed fooling around on the site. Some of the people living close by were concerned that they might get hurt and do some damage, so they contacted Tom Black, Committee Chairman. Of course, when Mr. Black and one of his colleagues showed up the boys scattered in every direction. Mr. Black recognized one of the boys and called him over. The boy was scared stiff, but Mr. Black told him the cops would not be called and his parents would not be informed, if he and his friends showed up the following evening at 7:00 with hammers. Well, they showed up alright; indeed, there were so many of them additional adults had to be called out to supervise their labour.

THE GRAND OPENING

Labour Day 1944 was set as the date for the official opening of the new Club house. A full slate of activities was scheduled, including a softball tournament, a country fair, bingo, horse shoe competitions, and children's races. Brandon Mayor Les McDorman was invited to do the official opening honours.

Labour Day turned out warm and sunny, and there was a massive turnout. When the time came for the opening ceremony, all of the East enders, and especially those who had given so much time and effort, looked on with justifiable pride. The *Brandon Sun* report on the next day described the opening in the following terms:

A community venture which promises health and happiness for both children and adults in the east end of the city, was formally opened on Monday evening. The East End community club's ambitious program to provide healthy recreation for the children of that section of Brandon got a big send-off from a large crowd of citizens who visited the site opposite the King George School. An entire city block is being devoted to recreational features, and more than \$2,000 has already been placed into the plan.

Mayor L.H. McDorman, who officially opened the club last night, saw in the centre a "great asset to the health and happiness of the community." He said that while not all persons living in the east end belonged to the same church or the same lodge, they all belonged to the same community.

COLLECTIVE OWNERSHIP, COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

After the official opening there was a brief respite, but then it was back to the job of finishing the fences and making other preparations for the winter season. As part of these preparations, a general meeting was held to set principles and rules for the Club and create an on-going executive and committee structure.

The meeting laid down a series of principles, which would guide the activities of the Club, among them:

- (1) All residents of the East End would be members of the Club;
- (2) Membership fees and membership cards would be abolished;
- (3) Nobody would be barred from using the facilities of the Club, so long as they complied with the rules.

These principles recognized that virtually everyone in the East end had contributed in one way or another to the new facilities. In short, the new

facilities were the product of a collective effort and, therefore, should be held, or owned collectively. When people moved into the East end they would acquire a claim to the facilities and the right to participate in its activities; when they moved out of the East end, they would relinquish them, although they could still use the facilities. At the same time, residents of the East end took on an obligation, namely, the obligation to care for the facilities and to pass them on to subsequent generations in as good or better condition than they found them.

In short, the East End Community Club had been reconstituted along the lines of a socialist institution.

EAST END COMMUNITY CLUB

OPERATED BY COMMUNITY OF THE EAST END

RULES AND REGULATIONS

1. THE COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE FOR RINK SUPERVISION AND MANAGEMENT IS HEADED BY THE PRESIDENT.
2. THE SUPERVISOR IS RESPONSIBLE FOR RINK SUPERVISION AND MANAGEMENT AND HAS FULL AUTHORITY TO DEAL WITH ANY OFFENDERS OR INFRACTIONS OF RULES AND REGULATIONS AS OUTLINED BY EXECUTIVE. WHERE DISCIPLINARY ACTION BECOMES NECESSARY SUCH ACTION WILL BE TAKEN BY THE COMMITTEE UPON ANY MATTER REPORTED BY THE RINK MANAGER.
3. ANY PERSON DAMAGING OR DESTROYING RINK OR SCHOOL PROPERTY OR EXHIBITING RUDE OR NOISY BEHAVIOR WHICH SHALL BE DEEMED OFFENSIVE BY THE EXECUTIVE AT ANY FUNCTION IN KING GEORGE SCHOOL OR AT THE PLAYGROUND CENTRE, SHALL BE BARRED FROM FUTURE ATTENDANCE AND FROM PARTICIPATION OF ANY PRIVILEGE IN CONNECTION THEREWITH WILL BE SEVERELY DEALT WITH.
4. PRIVILEGE MAY BE SUSPENDED FOR A CERTAIN PERIOD FOR INFRACTIONS OF FOLLOWING OFFENCES:
 - (A) BAD LANGUAGE.
 - (B) DISOBEDIENCE OR DISRESPECT TO RINK MANAGER IN CHARGE.

- (C) ANY UNNECESSARY INTERFERENCE WITH SKATERS.
 - (D) LOITERING ON OR ENTERING ANY CLASS ROOM AT KING GEORGE SCHOOL WITHOUT PERMISSION DURING FUNCTIONS.
5. NO STICKS OR OBSTRUCTIONS ABE ALLOWED ON SKATING ICE AT ANY TIME.
 6. ALL SKATERS OF PUBLIC SCHOOL AGE BE OFF ICE BY 9 OO P M. WARNING LIGHT SIGNAL WILL BE GIVEN, EXCEPT FRIDAY AND SATURDAY NIGHTS.
 7. MINORS ARE PROHIBITED FROM SMOKING ON ICE OR IN CLUB HOUSE AT ANY TIME.
 8. PERSONS CAUSING ANY DELIBERATE OR WILLFULL DAMAGE SHALL BE HELD. RESPONSIBLE FOR REPLACING SAME.
 9. ALL GENERAL SKATING AND HOCKEY MUST CEASE BY 10 P.M. UNLESS AUTHORIZED BY THE EXECUTIVE.
- (THE EXECUTIVE) *Rules and Regulations, 1946*

A LEGACY

The people of the 1930s and first half of the 1940s who were involved in the making of the East End Community Club created an important legacy for the people of the East end. There were, of course, the physical facilities, but there was more to it than this. They also passed on a tradition of collective action and effort to create things that would improve conditions for their community, their children and themselves, and a sense of community, a sense of being part of something bigger and more important than yourself.

Despite significant changes in the character and population of the East end in the post-war years, and especially since the 1950s, this tradition and sense of community remain rooted in the fabric of the East end. Evidence of this abounds.

Completion of the rest of the vision, which had emerged from the "A New Deal for Youth" meeting in King George School in 1943, took some time, but it was realized. The Paddling Pool was built in 1946, using volunteer East end labour. A hall, half an army hut, was added to the Club house in 1952. And a swimming pool went in at the base of the hill in 1967, with financial and other support from the East end.

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East End Community Centre, ca 1946. Photo courtesy of Errol Black.

Recently, a Reunion picnic and tea were held in Rideau Park and the East End Community Club facilities, in conjunction with City of Brandon centennial celebrations. This project ended up involving 100s of people, baking, distributing newsletters, organizing fund-raising dances, etc. On the day of the picnic over 2,500 people showed up to talk about old times.

Moreover, the East end remains at the core of progressive politics in the City of Brandon. The current alderman for the East end ward, Riverview, is Ross Martin, President of the Brandon District Labour Council. Martin is the only progressive individual on Council. Len Evans, NDP MLA for Brandon East Constituency since 1969, has a solid nucleus of support in the East end. And the struggles for local reforms still derive much of their inspiration, leadership, and support from the people of the East end.

This paper is adapted from, *From Frozen Ponds: The East End Community Club*, (Brandon, 1982).

APPENDIX

OCCUPATIONS OF FATHERS OF CHILDREN ATTENDING KING GEORGE SCHOOL, 1930/31*

Occupation	Number of Fathers	Per cent	Number of Children Attending King George School	Per cent
Railway Employees	109	46.0	161	45.2
Firemen/Engineers	31		48	
Conductors/Trainmen	15		22	
Switchmen	12		13	
Carman/Machinist/Blacksmith/ Stationary Engineer/ Carpenter	18		29	
Shop Employees	10		12	

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Occupation	Fathers	Per cent	Children	Per cent
Storekeeper/Freight Handler/Express worker	8		14	
Yardmaster/Foreman	4		5	
Helper/Labourer/Sectionman	5		12	
Other Railway workers	6		6	
Post Office Workers	3	1.3	6	1.7
Hospital Workers	9	3.8	15	4.2
Street Railway Workers	5	2.1	9	2.5
Gardeners/Farmers/Farm Labourers	7	3.0	9	2.5
Grocer/Butcher/Storekeeper/ Dairyman/Coal Dealer/Flour Miller	11	4.6	18	5.1
Utility Worker	3	1.3	4	1.1
Drivers/Teamsters/Draymen	10	4.2	20	5.6
Skilled Occupations—other	24	10.1	36	10.1
Helper Labourer/Other Manual				
Worker Occupations—other	26	11.0	42	11.8
Sales/Insurance/Managerial/ Clerical Occupations	9	3.8	12	3.4
Turnkey/Fireman	2	0.8	3	0.8
Presbyterian Minister	1	0.4	1	0.3
Governor Brandon Gaol	1	0.4	1	0.3
Moving Picture Operator	1	0.4	1	0.3
Elementary School				
Principal	1	0.4	1	0.3
Pensioners	2	0.8	2	0.6
Father Dead	3	1.3	3	0.8
Housewives	4	1.7	6	1.7

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Occupation	Fathers	Per cent	Children	Per cent
Not Specified	6	2.5	6	1.7
TOTALS	237	100.0	356	100.0

*Information on the occupations of the fathers of children was recorded at the time children first enrolled in King George School. Since individuals changed occupations, and because the unemployment rate for male wage earners twenty years of age and over was approximately twenty per cent in June 1931, the data does not provide an accurate reflection of people's occupational situations in 1931. The data does, however, confirm the working-class character of the East end.

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The author's careful analysis of labour and working-class organizations in Brandon is aimed at reconstructing and disclosing aspects of the history of class and class relations. While other western Canadian cities, Winnipeg, for example, have received much deserved attention by historians, studies of other cities, such as Brandon, in the early 20th century help to provide a more well-rounded understanding of working-class life in Canada during this period. In the tradition of the new labour history Black and Mitchell pay close attention to the unique development of class relations in the community of Brandon, while placing that community in a broader, national context. This work includes a careful consideration of the working class in Brandon, the particular obstacles and challenges workers there faced, and makes an important contribution to our understanding of class relations in Canada.

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