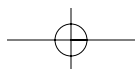
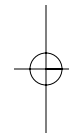
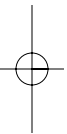
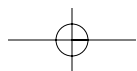
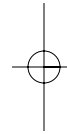
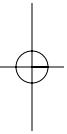


The Heavy Hand of History





The Heavy Hand of History: Interpreting Saskatchewan's Past

Gregory P. Marchildon

2005



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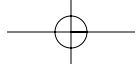
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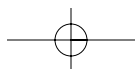
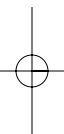
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Chapter 1: Why the Heavy Hand of History?

Gregory P. Marchildon

The centennial of Saskatchewan's birth as a province is a natural opportunity to reflect deeply on the province's history. Long-time observers of the province, the authors in this short book all address the question of what 100 years of history means in terms of Saskatchewan's present and future.

The heavy hand of history is a metaphor for the weight exerted by past events, decisions, institutions and attitudes on the present. To prepare for 2005, the authors in this volume were asked to write essays on their interpretation of the long-run historical factors that significantly influence Saskatchewan today and will continue to shape its future. They then presented their main arguments at a one-day session known as "The Heavy Hand of History" at the University of Regina in an event designed to kick off the centennial year. After the morning session, the authors appeared on a larger panel to speculate about the future of the province given its past.¹ After this stimulating day of reflection, debate and dialogue involving a diverse audience drawn from the broader community, including government and business as well as Aboriginal and voluntary organizations, the essays were revised into the chapters you are about to read.²

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As a professional historian and as author of Saskatchewan's centenary history, Bill Waiser has spent much of his life thinking about the province's past.³ His chapter focuses on the early emphasis of the decision-making elite of the province on one dominant culture, one dominant economic activity in one dominant region, and the permanent impact this would have on the history of the province. As Waiser illustrates, the British-Canadian cultural bias combined with a focus on the agricultural south marginalized Aboriginal people most of all, though it also affected other groups as well, as the historical experience of so many eastern European and Chinese immigrants attests. While these are no longer the province's defining features, the people of Saskatchewan continue to grapple with the legacy of this past, sometimes in very painful and public ways as illustrated by the recent judicial inquiry into the death of Neil Stonechild, a young Aboriginal man who was allowed to freeze to death after being dropped off at a remote site by members of the Saskatoon police force.⁴

An academic who has devoted most of his life to the study of party politics and political institutions, David E. Smith concentrates on the political history of the province, in particular the influence of Saskatchewan's two major governing parties —the Liberals and the CCF/NDP. For the first four decades, except for a welcome break during the trough of the Great Depression, the Liberals dominated Saskatchewan politics. After this, the CCF/NDP replaced the Liberals as the province's governing party. Smith's chapter examines the reasons for this major shift as well as the manner in which the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation transformed politics in Saskatchewan and influenced policy developments in the rest of Canada. As he points out, this was a party with purpose, a plan and a project that went well beyond the normal four-year electoral cycle.

The CCF/NDP rose like a phoenix out of the ashes of the Great Depression, and the chapter that follows Smith's examines the extent to which the lost decade of the 1930s is the major dividing line in the history of Saskatchewan. The economic and psychological impact of successive years of drought and low grain prices on a province that was almost entirely dependent on King Wheat is hard to exaggerate. Before this time, the wheat economy was proudly seen as responsible for the province's great boom, out of whose fertile soil would emerge the new

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giant of Confederation. After the Dirty Thirties, a far more modest outlook replaced the pre-Depression boom mentality, and every effort was made by successive provincial governments to diversify beyond agriculture.

Until recently, Dale Eisler was a journalist who worked for decades commenting on Saskatchewan politics. Now living outside the province, Eisler has had an opportunity to think about the relative position of the province and how Saskatchewanians define themselves. He zeroes in on what he calls the Saskatchewan myth: that the province is a special place that has produced special people whose collective future is destined to be much greater than the present or past. To summarize the sentiment of this myth in one simple sentence, Eisler quotes former Premier Grant Devine: "There is so much more we can be." According to Eisler, this myth, propagated by successive provincial governments, has been pernicious in preventing the people of Saskatchewan from being more realistic about the province's future and more diligent in addressing its many current challenges.

To be sure, these are all contestable interpretations of Saskatchewan's history. Moreover, they carry with them assumptions that demand to be questioned. The conclusions that emerge from each of these chapters are, and should be, controversial. At the same time, these arguments, and the historical evidence they rely upon, provide an excellent starting point for a debate about the future of Saskatchewan within the larger Canadian polity.

Saskatchewan is joined by Alberta in the 2005 centennial. However, were it not for some unique historical circumstances at the time of their creation, it might have been only one jurisdiction in the region now occupied by both provinces. Frederick Haultain, the Premier of the North-West Territories, wanted one single province, which he inelegantly called *Buffalo*, to govern all the lands between Manitoba and British Columbia. Haultain was convinced that there was "no necessity for dividing the country into two Provinces with the consequent duplication of machinery and institutions."⁵

But Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier disagreed. He feared that Haultain's *Buffalo* would turn out to be a giant mammoth, eventually dwarfing in size, population and perhaps in political and economic clout the provinces of Quebec and Ontario.⁶ Laurier not only refused, he

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made sure that the first lieutenant-governors and premiers of Alberta and Saskatchewan would be reliable supporters of the two-province concept. Thus, two provinces were created instead of one, like Siamese twins separated at birth.

This decision, however, has a significance that goes well beyond the facts of history and geography. It has an impact on the very way in which those who live in this relatively isolated part of North America see themselves. For residents of both Saskatchewan and Alberta, it is critical to their continuing sense of separate identity. In the typical stereotypes of these contrasting identities, Saskatchewanians are depicted as collectivist-inclined social democrats who emphasize security and egalitarian social development while Albertans are portrayed as entrepreneurial “small c” conservatives who are dedicated to the individualistic pursuit of liberty and prosperity.

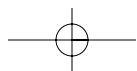
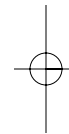
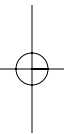
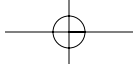
These may be crude, perhaps even misleading, portraits of provincial character but they are widely held by many inside and outside the region. Such stereotypes are simultaneously complicated and reinforced by the fact that so many of Alberta’s current residents have family roots in Saskatchewan. In addition, the dissidents in both societies—those who are opposed to the prevailing provincial political cultures—tend to identify with the assumptions underlying the political culture of the province opposite them. This has particular resonance in Saskatchewan because of its relatively small population and economy compared to Alberta. The word *relative* is key.⁷ Since the discovery of the Leduc oil fields in 1947, and the OPEC-induced boom of the 1970s, Saskatchewan residents have felt increasingly left behind by the blue-eyed sheiks of Alberta, despite the fact that Saskatchewan has, in objective terms, fared well relative to most other provinces in the federation on almost any index of prosperity with the exception of population.

Today, Alberta’s population is more than three times that of Saskatchewan. Thanks to oil royalty revenues, Alberta is the only province that does not charge sales tax. Parents throughout Saskatchewan regularly discover that their children are lured away by the youthful energy and bright lights of Calgary. The historical image of conjoined twins separated at birth is now outdated and has likely been replaced by a less flattering image, that of two closely-related cousins, one who is urban and rich, the other who is rural and poor. Naturally,

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Saskatchewanians are highly resentful of being seen as poor country bumpkins relative to Albertans. This is true even if they are also perceived, as Alberta author Aritha van Herk puts it, as having “more heart” than Albertans who simply have “more money.”⁸

In the circumstances, it is entirely predictable that some in Saskatchewan, particularly the minority that envy the political culture of Alberta, are fascinated by the idea of Saskatchewan being merged into Alberta as a single political unit. It is interesting that a recent study by the C.D. Howe Institute of Toronto generated such interest (in Saskatchewan, at any rate) in an idea that had seemingly been discarded in the trash bin of history a century ago.⁹ More importantly, given the difference in population size and clout, however, political union would be more akin to an acquisition rather than a merger. Given the real political, cultural and social differences that now distinguish each province, it is highly unlikely that political union would be sought by the majority in either province. The simple fact is that two distinctive and powerful identities have grown up since 1905 with concomitant loyalties and pride of place. The heavy hand of history guarantees that we cannot simply start over again as if the past century had never existed.



Chapter 2: Our Shared Destiny?

Bill Waiser

There could have been no better setting for the landmark agreement. On September 22, 1992, a perfect fall day in Saskatoon, 700 invited guests and dignitaries gathered at the new Wanuskewin Heritage Park just north of the city to witness the most important land deal in provincial history. For several millennia, Indians had been coming to this traditional gathering place along the South Saskatchewan River, where they sought shelter from winter's biting winds in the deep coulees and drove buffalo over the steep cliffs to be butchered below. Their descendants had now returned to the sacred spot to sign a Treaty Land Entitlement (TLE) agreement between the federal and provincial governments and the Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations (FSIN). In his remarks that day, Premier Roy Romanow used the occasion to remind the audience that Saskatchewan had to embrace its Aboriginal people or the province's future would be compromised, if not lost. "We have great reason to be proud—great reason to celebrate," he observed, "We're acknowledging our shared destiny."

These comments stand in sharp contrast to another provincial celebration at the beginning of the 20th century—the Regina party for Saskatchewan's entry into Confederation in September 1905. One of

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the highlights of the ceremonies was the mounted Indians, proudly decorated in traditional dress, riding at the head of the inauguration parade. But their placement that morning had nothing to do with honour or status. Instead, they symbolized a dark, pre-modern past that the new province wanted to put behind it, if not forget. "There they were," lampooned the *Moose Jaw Times*, "the remnants of a departing race ... peoples of an inferior civilization ... a motley crowd ... the true type of ... Indian as he is found today."² This conviction that First Nations were not to be part of Saskatchewan's future characterized the public's attitude for the first half of the 20th century. Indeed, if the province was to fulfill its great destiny, then Indians, like those in the inauguration parade, were expected to ride off into oblivion and never be heard from again.

This very different attitude towards Aboriginal peoples was only one of the many differences between Saskatchewan at the beginning and at the end of the 20th century. In fact, the province was a much different place a century ago. But what was particularly interesting about Saskatchewan in 1905 is that despite its fulsome ambitions and expectations, the future of the province was narrowly conceived or defined, even though the province never saw it that way. Let me explain by using another example.

Saskatchewan's Big Idea

A little more than four years after the Saskatchewan inauguration, Governor General Earl Grey was back in Regina, with a silver trowel in hand, laying the cornerstone for the new Legislative Building. The ceremony was no ordinary public event. Nor was it any ordinary public building. More than anything else, the elegant, domed structure, rising from the treeless prairie south of Wascana Creek, gave physical expression to Saskatchewan's resolve to become Canada's most powerful and populous province. The political leaders of the day not only believed that the future belonged to the province, but more importantly, that the province could decide and shape that future. The Saskatchewan government consequently embarked on an ambitious province-building program, determined to put the old territorial days and any lingering sense of colonialism behind it, while cultivating a new and separate identity as Canada's powerhouse prairie province.³ The Legislative

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Building was part of this consciousness, a symbol of Saskatchewan's central place in confederation and the ambitions and expectations that went along with that status. Even the governor general, who had a special affinity with the province, was struck by this sense of destiny at the cornerstone ceremony. "I do not think I have ever been so greatly surprised," he confessed during a candid moment later that day. "I realized for the first time how extremely dignified your new parliamentary and executive buildings will be ... and the big idea which they have ... given expression to."⁴

And what was this big idea? Saskatchewan was to be based on one dominant culture (Anglo-Canadian) engaged in one dominant economic activity (the production of wheat for the export market) in one dominant zone of activity (the southern half of the province). By such means, Saskatchewan was confident that it would fulfill its great destiny. Any deviation from this one culture and this one economic activity was regarded as a threat to the province's future. Saskatchewan had hitched its wagon to these key ideals and was not about to be diverted from its chosen path.

One Dominant Culture

Perhaps the best place to start is with numbers. So many immigrants were pouring into western Canada in the early 20th century that Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier ordered a special census of the three prairie provinces in 1906 to serve as a kind of statistical snapshot of the phenomenal growth. The statistics told a remarkable tale of unprecedented growth. In Saskatchewan alone, the 1891 population (41,522) grew 127% by 1901 (91,279) and then another 182% just five years later (257,763). The immigrants effectively swamped the First Nations population. The 6,358 Indians counted in 1906 now represented less than 3% of Saskatchewan's population, down from just over 8% at the start of the century. The chief census officer predicted that Canada would never be bedeviled by "the native problems that affect South Africa and other countries in the British Empire."⁵ The provincial north also slipped into irrelevance, as less than one percent of the population lived in the region.⁶

One statistic from the 1906 census was particularly striking: that over 80% of Saskatchewan's population was rural. Clifford Sifton, the

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federal minister of the Interior, believed, as did many of his contemporaries, that agriculture was the backbone of all great societies. His department had consequently sought out immigrants who had a history of working the soil, settlers who not only possessed the determination and perseverance to survive on their own and bring the prairies under cultivation, but whose children and grandchildren could be expected to take over the homestead.⁷ This search for settlers with practical farming experience was not without its own set of problems—because of whom Sifton turned to. He not only continued to advertise western Canada in Great Britain, but significantly expanded and improved promotional efforts in the United States. His most controversial move, however, was his bold decision to seek people of peasant stock from central Europe, from what had traditionally been regarded as “non-preferred countries.” These groups, from Doukhobors to Russian Germans to Ukrainians, were exactly the kind of immigrants Sifton believed were best suited to the challenging task of turning the prairie wilderness into productive farms. And by the beginning of World War I, almost half the provincial population had been born in another country.

Not everyone shared Sifton’s appreciation of these non-Anglo-Saxon settlers. They may have made good farmers, but would they make good citizens with their unpronounceable last names, pauper-like appearance, strange customs, and different religious beliefs? Indeed, central Europeans at the time were popularly associated with poverty, crime, ignorance, and immorality. One newspaper likened their immigration to a “grand ‘round-up’ of European freaks and hoboes.”⁸ Critics of Sifton’s policies were genuinely worried that these foreign groups threatened to weaken, perhaps even ruin, the Anglo-Canadian fabric of the country.

Sifton, however, had a job to do—in his mind, a region to build—and any public doubts about the wisdom of his strategy were not going to divert him from settling the Canadian prairies. It would be a mistake, however, to portray Sifton as an advocate of a multicultural West. Although he aggressively pursued what might generously be described as an “open-door” immigration policy, he fully expected immigrants to accept and embrace the ways and traditions of their new country, to be “Canadianized” according to the popular terminology at the time. And the only way to bring about this transformation was to get them established on the land and interacting with British institutions. Settlement

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and assimilation, in Sifton's thinking, went hand in hand. Immigrant farmers, whatever their background, would eventually become valuable Canadian citizens.⁹ The ethnically diverse society, however, was totally at odds with the Anglo-Canadian ideal for the province. Saskatchewan was supposed to be a bastion of British values, traditions, and institutions, not some multicultural amalgam. Assimilation consequently replaced immigration as western Canada's new necessity. As Methodist minister J.S. Woodsworth argued in *Strangers within Our Gates*, "Language, nationality, race, temperament, training are all dividing walls that must be broken down."¹⁰ Many confidently assumed that the breaking down of these walls was not only desirable but possible, and that the newcomers would readily integrate over time. Little did they realize that Saskatchewan's spectacular settlement story jeopardized its Britishness.¹¹

Most overt discrimination before the war was directed at visible minorities, people like Indians, Blacks, and Asians. The Chinese were especially persecuted. Moving east from British Columbia along the railway across the prairies, they settled in places such as Swift Current, Moose Jaw, and Regina, where they generally lived in segregated areas and ran laundries, restaurants, and grocery stores. The Saskatchewan Chinese population numbered less than 1,000 in 1911,¹² but they were still reviled as a "yellow peril," a threat to the moral fibre of white Canada and the sanctity of white women in particular. Any white woman caught up in the clutches of a "Chink," it was imagined, would surely become a prostitute or opium addict. In 1908, Saskatchewan took the vote away from the Chinese. Four years later, in response to mounting public prejudice, the Scott government introduced "An Act to Prevent the Employment of Female Labour in Certain Capacities," which essentially forbade white women from working for an Oriental employer or visiting, except as a customer, any building owned or operated by an Oriental person. It was an unprecedented piece of racial legislation in Canada, one that was soon challenged by Quong Wing, a Moose Jaw restaurateur and naturalized Canadian who was fined for employing two white waitresses. Quong Wing decided to fight the legislation, first before the Saskatchewan Court of Appeal in 1913 and then before the Supreme Court of Canada the following year, but his conviction was upheld. According to the courts, the two races should be kept separate.¹³

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The coming of World War I brought the suitability of other immigrant groups into serious question. There had always been doubts about the suitability of immigrants from continental Europe and their ability and willingness to assimilate to the British-Canadian way of life. Elizabeth Mitchell who toured the prairies in 1913 sensed this unease when she asked,

Can Canada ... afford to base herself on an ignorant, non-English-speaking peasantry, winning a bare living by unceasing labour?... The immigration of the last few years has been really overwhelming and cannot be met with a careless "Everything will come right." The need for the moment is for a pause and time to think and rearrange.¹⁴

Before 1914, it was confidently assumed in Saskatchewan that the assimilation and integration of foreigners would proceed apace. But any generosity of spirit, any patience with the newcomers as they adjusted to their adopted home, eroded with the coming of the war. As one historian has aptly observed, an "angry atmosphere" had come to dominate public life.¹⁵ This tension was nowhere more evident than in the emotionally charged issues of language and schools which dominated provincial political life in the latter years of the war.

Concerns about the cultural makeup of the province also spilled over into the 1920s. Many residents of British origin had begun to regard the persistence of ethnic identities as a blight on the province's future and actively pushed for cultural uniformity. Some had even come to question whether the integration of continental European immigrants into the larger society was desirable, let alone possible, and called for an end to the kind of immigration that had helped make the province one of the fastest growing in the dominion. Saskatchewan may have had the most ethnically diverse population in Canada at the time, but it stubbornly resisted becoming a multicultural society. For many at the time, it seemed as if the province had reached an important fork in the road: one led to greatness as an Anglo-Canadian society, the other to certain ruin as a polyglot catch-all.

What really distinguished Saskatchewan in the 1920s was the new emphasis on the need for conformity. To speed up the assimilation of non-British immigrants, the provincial government appointed Dr. J.T.M

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Anderson as provincial Director of Education Among New Canadians in 1918. Anderson, who had come west from Ontario in 1908 to be a school teacher, had been taken aback by the ethnic makeup of his classroom. His subsequent work as a school inspector in the Yorkton district convinced him that the “foreign element” represented the greatest threat to Canada’s future well being, not necessarily because there were so many non-British immigrants, but because they were “deficient” or culturally inferior. It was therefore the special role of the English-only public school to serve as the training ground for Canadian norms, values, and institutions, to break the children’s attachment to their home cultures and traditions, and offer them a better, brighter future as Canadian citizens loyal to the British flag and the British Empire.¹⁶ In his 1918 book on the subject, *The Education of the New Canadian*, Anderson bluntly argued that Saskatchewan had reached “a critical period” in its history and that its destiny would be determined by how it responded to the great educational problem it faced. “They [foreigners] are endangering our national existence ... making us the laughing stock of enlightened peoples,” he gravely warned, “Let us insist upon the state exercising its right to see that everyone of these New Canadians obtains what in free Canada should surely be one’s birthright—a public school education!”¹⁷

This questioning of Canada’s immigration policy would become quite strident once prospective settlers began pouring into the province again in the mid-1920s. After the war, Ottawa initially concentrated on securing immigrants from Great Britain, the United States, and northwestern Europe. But the expected numbers never materialized, and the federal government, with the encouragement of the railways, once again turned to central and eastern Europe to fill the remaining vacant lands of western Canada. What was different from the pre-war period, however, was the preponderance of immigrants from so-called “non-preferred” countries. Only 31% of the immigrants in 1923–24 were British, whereas those from continental Europe represented 56%.¹⁸ What seemed to get lost in these statistics was that Saskatchewan, despite being the most ethnically diverse province in Canada, was still an Anglo-Canadian stronghold, whose political, economic, and social life was dominated by people from British backgrounds. Others vehemently disagreed. The new immigrants were accused of taking jobs from British labourers by

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working for lower wages and taking land away from better qualified settlers. They were also blamed for the increase in crime and for spreading communism. Their greatest sin, though, was destroying the Anglo-Saxon character of the province.¹⁹ It was one thing to see Saskatchewan by the end of the 1920s become the third most populous province (921,000) in Canada, but for many, it came at too heavy a cost. Non-British immigration had to be severely curtailed, if not completely halted, or the province and its once great future would be lost.

Into this charged atmosphere strode the Ku Klux Klan and its anti-immigrant, anti-Catholic message. The Klan ideology found a receptive audience in Saskatchewan by exploiting already existing prejudices and anxieties.²⁰ The Anglo-Protestant majority had always been uneasy about the settlement of “non-preferred” immigrants in the province, and the recent influx only made the situation more worrisome, if not alarming. Many were distressed by the changes that Saskatchewan society was undergoing and wanted comforting answers. These very real concerns helped end almost a quarter-century of uninterrupted Liberal rule in the province and put the first Conservative administration under J.T.M. Anderson into office. But the change in government did nothing to resolve the larger issue that the province faced at the end of the 1920s—namely, the place of non-British immigrants.

Indians were certainly not to be part of Saskatchewan’s future. Although First Nations remained the responsibility of the federal government (section 91 [24] of the 1867 British North America Act), the creation of Saskatchewan in 1905 meant that they had to contend, albeit indirectly, with another level of government which put the needs and interests of the province ahead of the Aboriginal population. Indians were readily identified with the region’s territorial past, a link that many newcomers sought to break in building the new Saskatchewan. There were also more direct, more immediate challenges. The thousands of homesteaders who poured into the region after the turn of the century began to plough and cultivate land that Indians had continued to use for traditional activities after the signing of the treaties. More than ever, then, Indians were increasingly confined to their reserves and the limited resources found there. Settlers also coveted reserve land in prime agricultural districts and urged the federal government to relocate the occupants to other areas—in other words, push them aside—

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or at the very least, reduce the size of the reserves. In 1902, for example, the residents of the Broadview district in southeastern Saskatchewan submitted a 200-name petition, calling on Ottawa to open up for sale a three-mile strip along the southern boundary of the Crooked Lakes reserves.²¹ These pressures undoubtedly heightened the Indians' sense that they had become outsiders in their own land and that their future was still as uncertain as it had been a generation earlier.

As agricultural settlement swept northwest across central Saskatchewan after 1905, wrangling over Indian land was unavoidable. The existence of a large number of reserves in the area, containing valuable agricultural land, was seen as an impediment to the emerging wheat economy. The number of land surrenders consequently accelerated, reaching a peak in 1909, around the same time that Ottawa began to worry that the rate of settlement would soon exhaust the available farm land. Interestingly, many of the buyers of the surrendered Indian land were not from the district, but were speculators who purchased the land by private tender and then resold it for a quick profit, sometimes for at least twice as much as the price per acre paid to the Indians. These speculators included Indian Affairs department employees and their families and friends, who used insider information and then hid behind the tender process to conceal their identity. James Smart, deputy minister of the Department of the Interior, and Frank Pedley, deputy superintendent general of Indian Affairs, were among them. A 1915 federal investigation of the land dealings, known as the Ferguson royal commission, found Indian Affairs officials to be in a conflict of interest. But the censure did not stop the land surrenders which continued until after World War I.²²

One of the reasons often given for reducing the size of the reserves was that the Indian population had declined significantly and that the amount of land originally awarded was no longer needed. Indian Affairs department records for the 1880s and 1890s grimly supported this conclusion. For the ten-year period from 1884 to 1894, the Crooked Lakes and Files Hills reserves lost 41% and 46% of their population respectively. Incredibly the situation on the Battleford reserves was worse. Here, Indian populations declined by more than half during the same period: deaths exceeded births by a two-to-one ratio. Grizzly Bear's Head, an Assiniboine reserve, had the distinction of having the highest annual

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mortality rate during the rebellion era: an astounding 305 per 1,000. The next highest was Thunderchild at 233 per 1,000. Quebec City, by comparison, had a death rate of 31 per 1,000 in 1890, the highest among Canadian cities.²³ Federal census data for 1901 and 1906 also lent credence to the notion that Indians in Saskatchewan were a vanishing race. In just five years, the total provincial Indian population slipped from 7,491 to 6,380 or almost 15%. This seemingly steady slide towards extinction, however, slowed during the second half of the first decade of the 20th century as Indian populations began to stabilize or show slight increases. The 1909 Indian Affairs annual report indicated that there were close to 8,000 Indians in the province. This reversal made no impression on the attitude and policies of Indian Affairs officials, who continued to see Indians as a filthy, disease-ridden people. Nor did they believe that their sorry state had anything to do with department policies, but instead attributed the poverty, the sickness, and the death to the inherent weakness of the race. It was imperative, then, to keep Indians away from the growing white population. No trespassing signs were erected at reserve borders, while any hint of a new infection often led to total quarantine for several months, even though most disease originated outside the reserve.²⁴

The other damning example of government interference in Saskatchewan Indian lives during this period was the attempt to stamp out their religious ceremonies. Government and religious officials maintained that Indians would always remain unprogressive and demoralized as long as they adhered to their traditional practices and beliefs. Their solution was to ban by law the religious dances and ceremonies, in particular those involving self-mutilation, that were at the heart of plains Indian culture.²⁵ This criminalization of Indian worship soon netted two prominent chiefs. In 1895, Piapot, one of the signatories of Treaty 4, was arrested and imprisoned in Regina for performing a Sun Dance, a solemn undertaking for renewal and thanksgiving, on his reserve. When Assistant Indian Commissioner A.E. Forget subsequently attempted to extract a promise from the elderly chief before his release that he would no longer perform the ceremony, Piapot replied through the translator, "Very well, I will agree not to pray to my God in my way, if you will promise not to pray to your God ... in your way."²⁶ He was jailed a second time in 1901 for participating in a Giveaway

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Dance and stripped of his chieftainship. His band protested by refusing to elect another chief until after his death in 1908.²⁷ The other treaty-era chief to run afoul of the dance prohibition was Thunderchild. He was charged in 1897 for his involvement in a giveaway ceremony and sentenced to two months. Vindictive officials also took away his treaty medal. Thunderchild would later become a driving force in a petition drive to have dancing and other ceremonies confirmed as treaty rights.²⁸

Indian officials tried to prevent bands from leaving their reserves to attend dances by means of vagrancy laws or more likely the pass system. Introduced during the 1885 North-West Resistance, the pass system was intended to regulate and control Indian movement by requiring individuals to obtain approval from the local agent in writing before leaving their reserve. Passes had no legal basis, and the North-West Mounted Police who were expected to retrieve violators knew it and soon refused to enforce the system. But Indian Affairs authorities continued to go through the charade of granting passes until the late 1930s in a continuing effort to suppress Indian religious activity and political organizing.²⁹ The Mounties were also regularly called upon by Indian agents to attend communal gatherings in order to intimidate participants and, if necessary, intervene in ceremonies; departmental policy forbade Indians from being on another reserve without permission. Many police were unhappy with this role. Commissioner James Macleod once likened the raid of a Sun Dance by his men "to making an arrest in a church."³⁰ The biggest obstacle to ending traditional dances was the Indians themselves who resisted, albeit non-violently, attempts to cut them off from their spiritual beliefs. They continued to argue at every opportunity that the performance of sacred ceremonies was a treaty right and how they simply wanted to enjoy the same kind of holiday privileges as white society. The Assiniboine bands at Moose Mountain, for example, repeatedly compared their traditional activities to the celebration of Dominion Day.³¹ This kind of persistence, in the face of official repression, prompted one Saskatchewan Indian agent to declare in frustration, "paganism is dying hard."³²

The negative attitude towards the province's Aboriginal peoples continued after World War I, despite the fact that Indians had come to expect better, more equal treatment thanks to their participation in and support of the war. Edward Ahenakew, a Cree Anglican priest from the

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Sandy Lake reserve, declared, "The part that we took in the war proved that we reached a stage of development that should allow us some freedom in the management of our own affairs."³³ But the Canadian government was not about to stop interfering in and controlling Indian lives; instead, federal assimilationist policies had to be accelerated if First Nations peoples were to take their place in the new, postwar Canada.

Saskatchewan Indians during the 1920s consequently remained an administered people, no closer to the rights they had valiantly fought to uphold during the war. Indian Affairs redoubled its efforts to stamp out traditional religious practices by turning down all requests to hold dances and instructing its agents to try to limit visiting between reserves through the strict use of passes. The mounted police were also regularly called upon to break up ceremonial gatherings, especially when off-reserve residents were involved. In 1922, in response to a rash of religious activity in the Battlefords area, the local Indian agent threatened Thunderchild with the loss of his gold braid, the symbol of his chieftainship, if the practices did not stop.³⁴ Indian economic initiative also continued to be handcuffed by the permit system, which forbade individual band members from selling any of their produce or acquiring livestock or farm implements without the written permission of the local agent. The sorry consequences were explained in the House of Commons in July 1924 by M.N. Campbell, a Saskatchewan Progressive who farmed in the Pelly area:

I remember, about twenty years ago, when I first visited the Cote reserve near Kamsack, that most of the Indians there were prosperous ... self-supporting. I regret that ... the Indians have become poverty-stricken ... degenerating, losing out in every conceivable way ... their individual efforts are controlled...they are not allowed to...do anything on their own behalf."³⁵

This control extended to Indian children, who continued to be sent away to a growing number of residential schools in the province. Parents who refused to co-operate by trying to keep their children at home faced new penalties that were added to the Indian Act in 1920. The schools by this time had become one of the federal government's key instruments of assimilation. Indian Affairs officials reasoned that children

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educated in the white culture were more likely than their parents to abandon their “primitive” past and integrate into the larger society.³⁶ But the learning environment was greatly compromised by limited funding, poor facilities, and abusive teachers. A nurse visiting the Muscowequan school in 1922 found the “floor thick with mud ... could hardly tell it from the outside.”³⁷ The following year, an Ottawa press gallery reporter was slipped a damning letter that Edward B. at the Onion Lake school had written to his parents. “I am always hungry,” the boy starkly recounted, “I am going to hit the teacher if she is cruel to me again. We are treated like pigs.”³⁸ These kinds of reports were all too common, but nothing compared to the horrific news from Beauval on September 19, 1927, when a late-night fire engulfed the boys’ wooden dormitory, killing nineteen young students, aged 7 to 12, and their supervisor, Sister Lea.³⁹

The Metis, on the other hand, were to be deliberately ignored as if they did not matter; it was as if they were supposed to just fade away. They were not counted as a distinct group in the census. Nor did Ottawa or Regina want to assume any responsibility for them. Left to fend for themselves, some congregated on the outskirts of towns and villages and tried to integrate as best they could. Others headed for remote areas, well away from settlement, where there was always hope of engaging in some of their traditional activities. Many more squatted in makeshift shacks along grid roads or on Crown lands—hence the name, “the road allowance people.” Whatever their circumstances, they were united by their neglect, poverty, and misery, all of which further contributed to their sense of identity.⁴⁰

One Dominant Activity in One Dominant Region

Saskatchewan also pinned its destiny on one dominant economic activity (wheat farming) in one dominant region (the southern half of the province). Indeed, the government’s gaze rarely extended to the northern half of the province, where it gladly abdicated any meaningful provincial presence in favour of the Anglican and Roman Catholic churches, the Royal Northwest Mounted Police, and the Hudson’s Bay and Revillon Frères fur trade companies. One provincial cabinet minister even called northern Saskatchewan “another country altogether.”⁴¹ This characterization of the region—and the decades of neglect that

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went along with the attitude—clearly contradicted Frederick Haultain's original vision of provincehood. When the territorial premier began pushing for autonomy, he argued that one large province, brimming with resources, would best guarantee the West's future prosperity. "We do not want a province made up of one big wheat field, or one big cattle ranch and coal mine," he insisted. "We want wheat fields, cattle ranches, and coal mines, and every other thing that goes to make up a big, rich country."⁴² Although Haultain's dream may not have been fully realized in 1905, the new province was certainly endowed with a diverse land base—ranging from open subarctic woodland and boreal forest in the north to aspen parkland and mixed grass prairie in the south. In fact, by setting the northern boundary at the sixtieth parallel—well beyond that advocated by Haultain—the geographical centre of Saskatchewan was about 100 miles north of Prince Albert, well into the boreal forest. It was 700 miles from Regina to the top of the province, double the distance from Regina to Winnipeg.

But instead of pursuing the economic potential of the provincial north, Saskatchewan concentrated its energies on growing wheat for the Canadian export market. It believed that this activity—and this activity alone—would be the means to greatness for the province and help realize its ambitions within Confederation. The statistics behind this activity are truly remarkable. As the vast network of branch lines and grain elevators spread over the southern Saskatchewan landscape in the early 20th century, the wheat economy took root and flourished. The number of farms in the province jumped from 13,380 in 1900 to 55,971 six years later. Not surprisingly, the number of cultivated acres jumped as well during the same period, from 654,931 to 3.3 million acres. Perhaps the most startling figure was the amount of wheat being produced. In 1900, Saskatchewan harvested 4.3 million bushels of wheat. Five years later, the total climbed to 31.8 million bushels. And then only one year after that, it topped an astounding 50 million bushels (with an average yield of 23.7 bushels per acre). This total, almost half the western wheat production in 1906, would probably have been higher if farmers had not devoted almost a million acres of land to the production of oats, in part to feed their work horses.⁴³

Farmers made a conscious decision to grow wheat because it was "more profitable and practical."⁴⁴ Whereas mixed farming required

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considerable investment, wheat did not cost as much money to produce and provided a comparatively better return than dairying or raising cattle. In other words, it was seen as an easier, quicker route to wealth, despite fluctuations in the wholesale price from year to year. Wheat farmers also got outside help when they needed it most. Every August the railways sponsored what were known as harvest excursions, bringing thousands of migrant workers to the prairies at reduced rates to help bring in the crop. Nearly 17,000 men made the trip west in 1905; a record 27,500 were recruited three years later.⁴⁵ Farmers also grew wheat for the simple reason that Saskatchewan's settlement and development had been organized around its production. The homesteads, the railway branch lines, the country elevators—even the harvest excursions—were all part of a grand design to supply wheat to the international export market.

The wheat economy would not have been established so quickly and efficiently if not for the active encouragement of the federal and provincial governments and the investment in the region by large, powerful companies.⁴⁶ In particular, since assuming office in 1905, Premier Walter Scott had governed with one eye on the interests of the agricultural community, knowing full well that farmers exercised considerable, and growing, political clout in the province. The annual meetings of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, for example, had been nicknamed the "farmers' parliament," largely because of the organization's considerable influence on government policy. A prime example was the creation of the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company in 1912, a measure that only strengthened the ties between the provincial Liberal Party and the province's farmers.⁴⁷ Over the next three decades this close relationship between the Saskatchewan government and farmers would shape and influence provincial life almost to the exclusion of other groups, activities, and regions. Wheat was king, and any provincial government knew better than to dispute it.

Saskatchewan farmers and their families, for their part, were anxious to improve their agricultural practices and living conditions and put their pioneer days well behind them. This desire was part of an overall transition to large-scale commercial agriculture, which had been pushed along, if not accelerated, by World War I. If Saskatchewan farmers were going to meet the great demand for food, especially wheat, then they

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had to work larger parcels of land, employing the best and latest dry-farming techniques for the semi-arid prairie environment. Farm acreage statistics for the province document this transformation. In 1911, 95,000 farms had on average 125 acres in field crops. Ten years later, there were not only more farms (120,000), but they had on average more land in crop (209 acres).⁴⁸ This larger rural population, together with the steadily growing importance of agriculture, made farmers an even more dominant force in provincial life. The 1916 Saskatchewan electoral riding redistribution, for example, continued to favour rural areas at the expense of urban centres. Moose Jaw, Regina, and Saskatoon had only one representative each in the enlarged 59-seat Legislature even though they collectively represented 10% of the provincial population.⁴⁹ Farming mattered. Next to winning the war, it was most important activity in Saskatchewan at the time.

Saskatchewan's movement to commercial agriculture, away from pioneer operations, had a downside, in that it made the provincial economy more vulnerable, more susceptible to pendulum-like swings in fortune. Before the war, people like Dean Rutherford of the Saskatchewan College of Agriculture had been actively extolling the benefits of mixed farming—raising animals, not just field crops—and how it would provide greater stability in the long term. He even predicted in 1914 that “extensive wheat farming is only a passing stage.”⁵⁰ His boss, Walter Murray, agreed, flatly dismissing those who grew only grain as foolish and shortsighted. “This province cannot afford to put all its eggs into one basket,” he once warned.⁵¹ But the wartime demand for wheat and the high prices that went along with it proved too seductive for prairie farmers, especially when it was understood to be patriotic. Wheat acreage in the three prairie provinces consequently shot up from 9.3 million acres in 1914 to 16.1 million at the end of the war. It had also become the crop of choice; wheat accounted for two-thirds of the entire prairie field crop by 1919.⁵² Most of this crop was grown in Saskatchewan, not a surprising statistic since the province boasted almost two-thirds of the prairie wheat acreage and produced on average at least 60% of the wheat grown in western Canada during the war.⁵³

The dominance of wheat continued into the 1920s, thanks to the revolution in Saskatchewan farming precipitated by the adoption of heavy trucks, tractors, and other new agricultural implements. This

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labour-saving machinery enabled the province's farmers to get their crop planted and harvested in a shorter period of time and thereby lessen the threat of frost damage. It also strengthened the trend toward larger farm size. Individual farmers could not only handle bigger farms, but found it more economical to operate the machinery on more fields. The province's farmers consequently sowed as much wheat as possible. Almost 2.5 million *more* acres were devoted to wheat in 1925 alone. Total production increased as well and averaged 236 million bushels from 1925 to 1927. The bumper year, though, was 1928. An astounding 321.2 million bushels of wheat were harvested, with an average yield of 23.3 bushels per acre. The crop, representing 60% of the wheat produced in the three prairie provinces, was the largest ever produced by any province or state in the world.⁵⁴

This dependence on a single crop also influenced urban growth in the southern half of the province. The tens of thousands of prospective farmers who poured into the West after 1900 required the services of villages, towns, and cities if they were going to transform their homesteads into viable commercial operations. They needed a place to handle their grain, secure agricultural equipment and other supplies, buy consumer goods, get a loan to cover their expenses—even pick up that last bit of merchandise before heading out to their land for the first time. It was this new rural demand, precipitated by the record number of settlers, that fueled a town-building frenzy the likes of which have never been seen again over the past century. No less than 600 towns and villages with a population of at least 100 found their way onto the map of the three prairie provinces by the start of World War I in 1914.⁵⁵ In particular, Saskatchewan may have had one of the fastest growing farm populations at the time, but urban areas grew even faster. Between 1901 and 1911, the urban population increased 9.4 times (from 14,000 to 131,000), almost double the rural rate. This change was reflected in the rural/urban breakdown. Whereas 13% of Saskatchewan's population was classified as urban in 1901, the proportion had increased to 27% ten years later.

What is sometimes misunderstood, though, is that this kind of urban growth was entirely dependent on the wheat economy and that Saskatchewan was first and foremost a rural province where three out of every four residents lived in the country.⁵⁶ Several cities learned this

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fundamental truth about Saskatchewan life in the years before World War I when they embarked on a wild building frenzy and ignored the fact that they essentially existed to meet the needs of the farming community. Places like Saskatoon and Prince Albert overreached their true potential with tragic consequences: depressed land values, abandoned property, mounting tax arrears, and crippling debt. They had grown too much, too fast, and faced an uncertain future of decline and consolidation after 1912–13 before they were walloped again by the Great Depression.

The obsession with growing as much wheat as possible during the first few decades of the 20th century also came at the expense of a more diversified economy that involved all regions, especially the northern half of the province. In 1920, the William Martin government had created a Bureau of Labour and Industries to encourage exploitation of Saskatchewan's natural resources and lessen the dependence on agriculture. Most of the bureau's energies were initially devoted to commercial development of large lignite coal deposits in the Estevan-Bienfait area. The bureau also sent exploration parties north in the early 1920s to examine mineral deposits in the Lac la Ronge district.⁵⁷ But these activities were hampered by the post-war recession and generally took a back seat to wheat production, especially once prices recovered. Large corporations also investigated the resource potential of the province. An Imperial Oil geological party, for example, conducted a brief survey in 1919, but left without drilling a single test hole. The return of prosperity in the mid-1920s sparked new exploration, especially in the Unity-Vera area, but all wells came in dry.⁵⁸

Mining showed more promise. As early as 1914, prospectors, working out of Prince Albert, found gold on Amisk (Beaver) Lake along Saskatchewan's northeastern boundary. The small boom was eclipsed the following year when Tom Creighton discovered copper, silver, and gold on the Manitoba side of the border at Flin Flon.⁵⁹ Teams of prospectors swarmed the region, using airplanes and outboard motors to investigate a greater range of territory. The Regina *Leader* even predicted that northern Saskatchewan was "on the eve of great development."⁶⁰ But the drop in base metal prices in 1920 put a damper on what companies were willing to spend in the region to bring mines into operation.

The lumber industry limped into the new decade as well. Wartime

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demand had hinted at a different fate. In 1916, the Prince Albert Lumber Company confidently reported that it was “cleaned out of every stick of lumber as fast as it runs through the mill.”⁶¹ In fact, during the winter of 1917–18, the company hauled over half a million logs from the forest south of Red Deer (Waskesiu) Lake in present-day Prince Albert National Park. This intensive cutting, however, quickly exhausted trees in its southern timber berths. And the more northerly berths that had been set aside by the federal government were too distant from Prince Albert. The company consequently announced in October 1918 that it was suspending operations in Prince Albert in favour of establishing a smaller mill closer to the timber stands at some future date. Then, disaster struck. A fire, fed by the brush of old logging slashes, burned a large stretch of the forest south of Red Deer Lake in the spring of 1919. The roar of the blaze was heard as far away as Montreal Lake and left the region covered in ash. Estimates of the damage varied: government cruisers reported that 50% of the timber had been fire-killed, whereas company representatives put the figure at 90% to 100%. Although federal forestry officials were anxious that the remaining good timber be culled as soon as possible, the Prince Albert Lumber Company decided to relocate its operations to northern Manitoba. It instructed the federal forestry branch to cancel its remaining timber berths and do what it pleased with thousands of logs that had been left behind in the bush or along the Spruce River. That left the Big River Lumber Company as the only major player in the region, but it too soon closed its mill and forfeited its timber berths. Smaller lumber companies with portable saw mills continued to cut trees through the 1920s, but provincial production was one-seventh of what it had been in 1912.⁶²

The commercial fishery was the only northern resource activity that really thrived during the period. Moving steadily north, companies like the Northern Saskatchewan Fish Company, Waite Fisheries, Johnson Fisheries, and the McInnis Fish Company, claimed the best lakes in the region and heavily fished them each winter. There was no catch limit. In 1921, sixty-nine men working for Waite Fisheries of Big River netted over 400,000 pounds of fish (mostly whitefish) on Red Deer, Little Trout, and Big Trout Lakes. The annual catch, as well as the size of the labour force, fluctuated over the next few years, but production was nonetheless staggering: over two million pounds of fish were pulled from

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the three lakes and hauled to Big River over five seasons.⁶³ This insatiable demand took its toll on northern lakes, especially since fish grow slowly in cold water. Waste was not uncommon. There was at least one instance of a company, Johnson Fisheries, leaving over 100,000 pounds of fish to rot along the shores of Peter Pond and Churchill lakes when spring came early in 1924.

Commercial fishing also directly interfered with the subsistence activities of the Cree and Dene population and led to considerable hardship when traditional fishing sites were exhausted. In 1929, Father Riou at Stony Rapids in the northwest corner of the province pleaded with the federal government to prevent commercial companies from working nearby Black Lake. The local Royal Northwest Mounted Police corporal countered that the Fond du Lac Dene band did mostly hunting and trapping, and that the commercial fishery should have a free hand in the area. This dismissal of Indian interests, despite the provisions of Treaty 10, was not the first time that Aboriginal access to a traditional source of food was compromised. In 1917, Ottawa had explicitly forbidden Indians from splitting and drying fish for the winter to ensure that there was no competition with the larger commercial operations. The federal government also later assigned Indians a few protected lakes, including Bittern south of Montreal, while reserving the majority of the northern lakes for commercial purposes.⁶⁴

Indian trapping and hunting were also increasingly threatened by non-native competition. High fur prices at the end of the war enticed hundreds of white trappers to move into the region, first along the Churchill River and then as far north as Cree, Wollaston, Reindeer, and Athabasca lakes. There was good money to be made. Buyers for Revillon Frères, the Hudson's Bay Company's major competitor in the region, were ready to pay cash for quality furs. These newcomers disrupted Indian trapping activities, but as long as prices were high, most prospered. One local trapper, Tommy Clarke, arrived at an HBC post with \$4,000 worth of furs after only two months on his trap line south of Wollaston in the fall of 1919.⁶⁵ The collapse of prices in 1920, however, staggered the fur industry. Revillon Frères began a retreat from the region that ended in eventual bankruptcy, while more than half the HBC posts in the Saskatchewan district reported losses for 1922. The downturn led to over-trapping and over-hunting as Indians, Métis, and

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whites scrambled to earn a living. The HBC, meanwhile, reduced employment opportunities at posts in order to trim operating expenses. It also balked at providing relief to its loyal Aboriginal customers as it had done in the past.⁶⁶

Owning the Future?

These, then, were the defining features of the province a century ago—one dominant culture, one dominant crop in one dominant region. Together, they would pave the way to Saskatchewan's future as Canada's powerhouse province. It was an extremely narrow vision—at times, a "heavy handed" one. But it was a vision that was readily embraced by the political leaders of the day. The great expectations for the region led Prime Minister Laurier to tour the province in 1910 and see first-hand how Saskatchewan had grown and more importantly, soothe farmer anger over federal agricultural policies. In fact, a strong Regina-Ottawa connection quickly developed in the first half of the 20th century. Saskatchewan's first two premiers, Walter Scott and William Martin, served their political apprenticeship on the Liberal back benches in the House of Commons. Ottawa also came calling and recruited two serving Saskatchewan premiers, Charles Dunning and Jimmy Gardiner, for the federal cabinet. By the 1920s, it seemed that the political stars were in alignment for the province, when Prime Minister Mackenzie King sought a safe seat in Prince Albert. These arrangements ensured that the interests of the province were not ignored or neglected and that Saskatchewan enjoyed some real political clout.

This sense that Saskatchewan was on the verge of something great was nowhere more evident than at the Canadian Confederation diamond jubilee celebration in Regina in 1927. Like many other communities across the country, the Queen City hosted an afternoon parade through the downtown streets, led by serge-clad Royal Canadian Mounted Police on horseback. At Wascana Park, 2,000 singing school children opened the official program, followed by several short messages of congratulations and a reading of some of the speeches by the political leaders who helped bring about Confederation in 1867. Although the official theme was Canada's achievements over the past sixty years, Premier Jimmy Gardiner was clearly thinking of the future and what it held for the province. At his fulsome best, he alluded to the

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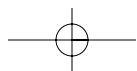
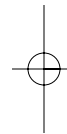
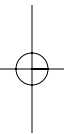
Saskatchewan success story, noting how Canada's founders had made possible "this great Province, already the third Province of the Canadian Confederation."⁶⁷ Gardiner's remarks were backed up by a full-page government ad in a special edition of the *Regina Leader*. An impressive list of statistics confirmed Saskatchewan's place as the third wealthiest province, in addition to being the granary of the world. There was no mistaking the undercurrent. The day may have belonged to Canada, but Saskatchewan owned the future.

This sentiment about Saskatchewan's special place in Canada had been borne out during the 1920s. By the end of the decade, the province was rapidly closing in on a million residents. There was also no disputing Saskatchewan's claim as the "wheat province" or that wheat was king. In fact, farm land had been settled at such a pace that the Anderson government decided to discontinue homesteading following the natural resources transfer. The triumph of wheat, however, had made the province something of an anomaly. While Canada was increasingly becoming an urbanized, industrialized country, Saskatchewan had more than two-thirds of its population living on the land and at least 85% of the provincial work force dependent on agriculture. The singular devotion to the production of wheat was also shortsighted, even reckless, in the world that Saskatchewan farmers woke up to after World War I. Any significant drop in prices, as experienced during the nasty post-war recession, could have devastating consequences for producers and the provincial economy no matter how much wheat was harvested. The warning signs were already there in 1927 when the price of wheat slipped below a dollar and dropped even lower the following year. What was not apparent at the time, though, was the size of the economic calamity that awaited the province in the 1930s.

Saskatchewan's chosen path would create problems during the Great Depression and in the following decades. Indeed, the insistence on one dominant culture and one dominant economic activity in one dominant region would compound the problems that the province faced in the post-World War II period—from the precipitous decline of rural Saskatchewan and the domination of a few large cities, to the marginal contribution of agriculture to the economy and the need for new skill-based jobs in other sectors, to the role and place of a younger, growing

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Aboriginal population. What is remarkable, though, is how Saskatchewan has responded to the challenges—some might say, opportunities—to reach the point where Premier Romanow could talk about a “shared destiny” at Wanuskewin in 1992. But the province still has a long way to go to deal with history’s “heavy hand” from the early 20th century.



Chapter 3: Path Dependency and Saskatchewan Politics

David E. Smith

The year 2005 marks the centenary of the provinces of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Created by statutes of the Parliament of Canada, they were originally part of the North-West Territories, itself created by Parliament in 1875 and from which today's three northern territories (Yukon, Nunavut and the present Northwest Territories) later emerged, Saskatchewan and Alberta represented the fulfilment of the Confederation dream of a transcontinental nation in the northern half of North America. In the phrase of the day, "provincial autonomy" signalled the fruition of the National Policy, that combination of protective tariff, railway and immigration initiatives begun thirty years earlier by the government of Sir John A. Macdonald. As it turned out, the explosive growth, for which these federal policies were preconditions, was only about to occur. The decade between 1905 and the outbreak of World War I witnessed a surge of population and institutional and economic activity unparalleled in Canadian history. For European immigrants and for Ontarians and Maritimers, Canada's future lay in the Prairie West. The same could not be said for French-speaking Quebecers, whose expectations of what today would be called a bilingual and bicultural

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West disappeared when Manitoba legislated English as its official language and ended public support for denominational schools.

The story of Saskatchewan and Alberta's remarkable growth has been told before and new interpretations can be expected for the centenary celebrations.¹ It is not the purpose here to cover that ground again. Nor is the intent to compare the historical development of the two prairie provinces. That too has been done, although perhaps not to the extent one might have expected in light of their contrasting fortunes. For instance, Saskatchewan, which within a decade and a half of autonomy had become Canada's third largest province (after Quebec and Ontario), a position it maintained until the 1951 census, is now number six, while Alberta, which until the 1951 census trailed Saskatchewan, is now the country's fourth most populous province and three times the size of Saskatchewan. The contrast is more than just striking: it exercises a profound influence today on Saskatchewan's economy and politics as well as its residents' self-image. Tantalizing evidence suggests that notwithstanding shared geography and settlement experiences, contrasts have long existed. Scholars have noted, for instance, different immigrant influences, more Americans in Alberta, more British in Saskatchewan.² How important such factors have been in accounting for the different paths the two provinces have followed is a subject for another chapter. Here the subject is Saskatchewan, with references to its neighbour made only in order to highlight the distinctiveness of Saskatchewan's development.

And it has been distinctive. This is not simply an assertion but a common observation of journalists and academics who study Canada's provinces. Saskatchewan is usually placed in the "distinctive" provincial category, along with Quebec and Newfoundland. Doubtless, the classification is unscientific, the very term "distinctive" being too diffuse to measure with confidence. For the latter two provinces, language, or in the case of Newfoundland, linguistic patterns, along with history and geography, are signal features. For Saskatchewan, however, the origin of distinctiveness is politics, and, more particularly, the influence of a socialist party, originally the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation but since the late 1960s the New Democratic Party. At its most basic, Saskatchewan's reputation for distinction rests in its being the birthplace of Medicare, a policy the CCF committed itself to introduce on

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coming to power in 1944 and which promise it fulfilled in 1962. Later the same decade, the federal Liberal government of Lester Pearson made Medicare a national program, one which has become, according to public opinion polls, the single most popular program in the country. More than a policy to provide publicly paid medical treatment, it has been attributed a national unifying role analogous to the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway more than a century ago. En route, it has secured hagiographic status for its chief advocate, Saskatchewan's first CCF premier, T.C. Douglas.

The CCF-NDP came to power in 1944 and it remains in power sixty years later after only two sojourns in opposition (1964–71 and 1982–91). But partisan longevity in government is not the reason for this study: such tenure is a regular feature of provincial politics in Canada, and the CCF-NDP does not hold the record. Rather, the question to be explained is, first, the reasons for the CCF's coming to power (the first socialist government in North America and, lest it be forgotten, a year in advance of the Labour party's first majority victory in Great Britain) and, second, the choice of policies it pursued once in office. The answer to the last question would be unrewarding if asked of most provincial governing parties (the major exception being the Parti Québécois which formed its first government in 1976). By contrast, it is fundamental here because, as already noted, the CCF-NDP experience is seen to set Saskatchewan apart from the other provinces, and because the CCF was from the beginning a programmatic party. Other parties had platforms, but the CCF had a program, that is, an elaborate set of policies, many of which radically transformed existing provincial institutions and practices, and not all of which could be implemented at the same time. Programs require priorities, and priorities in a democracy where governments are elected and, especially, in a parliamentary system where election dates are not fixed, place a high premium on timing. As a result, there is a linearity about decision making by socialist governments which is absent in governments formed by their opponents.

To recapitulate: Saskatchewan will celebrate its 100th birthday in 2005. The atmosphere at its beginning was one of great promise (according to sociologist Peter Li, "all the pieces were in place for greatness").³ At the beginning of the centenary, these expectations remain unrealized or, at the very least, the province's economy and population

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lag far behind those of its twin, Alberta, which for the first 40 years of their histories trailed Saskatchewan. In the same decade as Alberta overtook Saskatchewan in these indices of growth, the CCF formed its first government. It has held power for 42 of the last 60 years. Although their political adversaries have maintained otherwise, there is no necessary connection between growth in Alberta and its small “c” conservative governments, on the one hand, and its absence under the Saskatchewan CCF-NDP governments on the other. On the contrary, this chapter will argue that the significant association to note in explaining the condition of modern Saskatchewan is not Alberta’s present but Saskatchewan’s past condition, that is, before 1944. All governments make choices, those composed of programmatic parties make them more consciously. Yet all governments, even the most self-aware, are captive to some extent of their inheritance, especially when they set out to repudiate it.

The Liberal Bequest: Unreformed Politics

The Saskatchewan CCF came to power more than a decade after the founding of the national organization. Its platform was infused by the values and ideals that permeated the “Regina Manifesto” (1933): collectivism, planning, social ownership and the institution of public health services are among the best known objects sought. This might be termed an inheritance, but that would be a misnomer: the men and women who swept to victory in Saskatchewan in 1944 were directly or indirectly participants in founding the national CCF. They had been present at the creation. The true inheritance, the one that proved determinative in directing CCF actions, was the regime of unreformed politics bequeathed to them by the Liberal party which had governed the province for thirty-four of its then thirty-nine year history.

Barring the ravages of the 1930s drought, but not the Depression for which the CCF held a flawed capitalist economy responsible, Saskatchewan in 1944 was a Liberal creation.⁴ The five years (1929–34) of coalition government, composed of Conservatives, Progressives and Independents, under the leadership of J.T.M. Anderson, left no permanent imprint on the province; all incumbent supporters of that government were defeated in the election of 1934. The Liberalism of the governments after 1905 is a point worth emphasizing, for while obvious it constitutes one of the most distinguishing contrasts with the CCF. The

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Saskatchewan Liberals were the provincial wing of a national party, and after the 1921 redistribution Saskatchewan occupied the third largest number of seats in the House of Commons. The Liberals in Regina and in Ottawa saw their electoral fortunes as entwined. More than that, provincial Liberals implicitly believed that the influence of their province in national politics depended upon their strength in the governing party's caucus. For this reason the Liberals looked beyond Saskatchewan as often as they looked to interests within when evaluating and designing policies.

Still, their fortunes federally depended in the first instance upon their successes provincially, and in time, the Saskatchewan Liberals became synonymous with intensive (their opponents said ruthless) party organization. The ingredients of that organization have been described elsewhere. In broad terms they may be summarized as close ties with the organized farmers, which for most of the first twenty years meant the monolithic Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, and solicitude for the large and dispersed population of immigrant settlers. Quebec was the eastern base of Canadian Liberalism, and the party's sensitivity to language and religion there served to attract the non-English, as immigrants were often called, in Saskatchewan. The farmers and the non-English provided the twin pillars of Liberal dominance. Later success of the CCF in provincial elections would depend upon their capturing and retaining (for four decades) these bastions of support.

Because in national elections Ontario voters in these years divided their support between Liberals and Conservatives, Liberal victories in Quebec and Saskatchewan were essential to the formation of national Liberal governments. But in matters of policy Saskatchewan Liberals considered the Quebec wing conservative and themselves, by contrast, progressive. The adjective was often used by Saskatchewan Liberals to describe their policies, be those in the area of medical care, such as support for municipal doctor and union hospital schemes, or for the Saskatchewan Anti-Tuberculosis League, which in 1929 provided the province's residents with the first free tuberculosis treatment in the country; or in the formation of the Local Government Board to oversee municipal borrowing, or the creation of the first Department of Municipal Affairs in North America. In Liberal eyes, the core value of their progressivism lay in the sponsorship of local control.

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In their first years in power Liberal governments designed provincial and municipal institutions, many of which a century later remain unaltered. Despite two attempts, first by the CCF in the mid-1950s and then four decades later by the NDP, to consolidate local governments into larger units, both failed and the rural municipal system in 2005 remains essentially the one recommended by the province's first Royal Commission in 1907. The rapid growth of the largely rural population demanded prompt provision of numerous services, for instance, schools and roads. While authorities in Regina played important coordinating and supervisory roles in these endeavours, operational and maintenance responsibilities lay with communities and local residents. One variant of localism could be seen in Liberal government encouragement and support of farmers as they set out to bend the private grain industry (the exchange, elevators and railways) to serve their interests. Loan guarantees enabled farmer co-operatives to flourish. The government was adamant, however, that it would not become directly involved through public ownership. The significance of localism has been assessed by Seymour Martin Lipset in *Agrarian Socialism: The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan*.⁵ He notes that the highly developed rural associational life, where "the officials of the rural municipalities, local school boards, and cooperative committees were [as well] members of the farmers' organization," provided a ready base for the political mobilization by the CCF in the 1930s.⁶ That observation is well-known; less commented upon is the consequence of mobilization for what in 2005 would be called "civil society."

The members of the local co-ops and pool, the councillors and trustees constituted a large part of that civil society. The localism at the heart of Liberal policies sustained civil society; the partisanization of the same society, as community leaders became CCF supporters and leaders, undermined it. This is a large and controversial claim, but one the Liberals made repeatedly after 1944: "The CCF," they said, "knew no limits ... they campaigned twenty-four hours a day." In reply, CCFers said, as every non-Liberal in the province had said for decades, that the Liberals were ward-heelers and machine politicians, their vaunted electoral organization dependent upon patronage, and the merit principle as a basis for the public service foreign to their conception of government. In answer, the Liberals did not deny the charges, but professed not to

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understand the indictment. This was the way politics worked: individuals were rewarded, groups and interests placated. And yet there were boundaries beyond which they said they would not go in pressing their political cause: another CCF violation of traditional norms after 1944, in Liberal eyes, was the appearance alongside the provincial civil service of a coterie of expert policy advisors of unblemished political loyalty to the government.

Patronage was the Liberal way of interweaving the personal and the political so as to provide a link between the centre and the local communities. The much-cited Liberal electoral organization made sense only in the context of Saskatchewan's extensive and complex rural associational life.⁷

This was the setting of Saskatchewan's era of unreformed politics, at least at its height before the drought and Depression took their toll. Yet the picture is incomplete in several important respects. First, it says nothing about the economy, especially that the grain economy upon which Saskatchewan depended was also Canada's principal export. This dominance continued for a time into the post-World War II period but then precipitously declined. The mutual economic interest of the provincial and federal governments created by grain, and the horizontal link between Saskatchewan and central Canada through transportation and banking ties in support of grain, for example, have all but disappeared. In its place as bond between centre and prairie "periphery" has appeared a complex system of federal-provincial agreements and transfers, scarcely a hint of which existed in the era of Saskatchewan Liberal governments. Another underdiscussed economic factor—of vast importance today but slight in the Liberal era—is natural resources. Under the Saskatchewan Act, as in its Alberta and earlier Manitoba counterparts, Parliament retained possession of the province's resources, on the grounds that settlement and development of the region could most effectively be handled by one—the central—government. The resources were transferred to all three provinces in 1930 just as the effects of the Depression and then drought came to occupy the attention of the prairie governments. The Liberals in Saskatchewan never did anything with the resources; that remained a field for the CCF to develop.

It is a subject for speculation what the Liberals might have done with

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the natural resources had they had the opportunity to turn from the omnipresent concerns of relief, drought and, then, war. There is no archival record to guide such speculation, nor is it really required in order to conclude this section of the discussion on unreformed politics. What requires emphasizing, because it stands in sharp contrast to the CCF era to follow, is that the Liberals were not a party given to planning. To govern is to choose, or so it is said. For the Liberals the criterion of choice was the implication of action for the next election (federal as well as provincial). The Liberals were not unfeeling, or unintelligent, or uninformed when it came to governing. But they were unmotivated. When it came to the long view there was never a problem to overcome, just problems. As a result, their policies tended to be diffused rather than focused. Because the Liberals had no program in the sense the CCF did, they never thought or spoke in terms of a project or overcoming a problem. With the Liberals there was no sense of sequence or, as is said in path-dependency literature, of temporality.⁸ Paradoxical as it might sound in the case of the Saskatchewan Liberals, there was no sense of progress either. Each step was never more than the first step.

The CCF-NDP and the Transformation of Politics

In CCF eyes the Liberal inheritance was one of diversity bordering on disorder, and heterogeneity without purpose, the pieces held in place by self-serving patronage politics. The CCF goal, as evidenced in its manifestos and election platforms, was to replace “unregulated private enterprise” with order achieved through “continuous research,” a commitment to planning and regulation, and the use of commissions and boards. Like the province itself, which came into being as a constituent part of Canada on September 1, 1905, the CCF could also point with calendrical certainty to its arrival as an unparalleled political force in Saskatchewan: June 15, 1944, when it won 47 of the 52 seats (with 53% of the popular vote). This was the first occasion since 1905 that the Liberals had been defeated by another party. In 1929, they had won more seats and more votes than any other party. It had taken a coalition of parties to replace them, and even then it was (and is) believed that absent the appearance of the Ku Klux Klan and its campaign against “permissive” education policies in the matters of religious practices and

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the language of school instruction, the Liberals would have survived the contest.

The Depression and drought ended minority rights as an issue in Saskatchewan politics, and the drastic decline in farm incomes allied Roman Catholic and Protestant, English- and non-English-speaking farmers against the Liberals. Party de-alignment continued throughout the decade. As the 1944 election approached, the CCF maintained that the Liberals were an unworthy alternative to lead the province. Such accusations were common between Saskatchewan parties. What was original and what set the CCF apart from previous Liberal opponents was the CCF's use of temporal analogies and metaphors: there were "lessons to be learned from the past," and "for the future"; certain success in the forthcoming election paralleled inevitable victory in the war, and set the stage for provincial reconstruction. Federal wartime government had made planning and organization—often with the object of distributing scarce resources efficiently and fairly—familiar to all Canadians. That experience gave CCF concepts a plausibility they did not previously enjoy. Unlike the Liberals, the CCF offered a competing vision of Saskatchewan, one that encompassed politics, the economy, society and culture. The Liberals, whose organization had deteriorated after their key men were co-opted into organizing victory loan drives and managing wartime agencies, failed to recognize the CCF as an unprecedented challenge. Leading Liberals, like James Gardiner a former premier and now federal minister of Agriculture, persisted in seeing CCFers as latter-day Progressives (ironically, CCF leaders repudiated the old Progressive ideal and its supporters because of their inattention to organization).⁹ It was the fatal mistake of the Liberals to treat all challenges as the same challenge.

The CCF had a purpose, a plan and a project. This last attribute might better be stated in the plural, for over the years the CCF and its successor maintained multiple short- and long-term goals. The distinctive and crucial question for the CCF (and later, NDP) era, when compared to what had gone before, was how the socialist government would set its policy priorities. The "Regina Manifesto" (1933), the Saskatchewan CCF platform of 1944 (as well as the work done by party conventions in the months before electoral victory), and the explosion in legislative activity that followed (the output of the fall session of

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1944 was matched only by that of the province's first legislative session in 1906), set out a public agenda still visible 60 years later. That agenda constituted a promise to the people of the province, but also to the members of the party. There could be no backsliding, no temporizing, at least not without controversy as much within the party as outside. That is the nature of a programmatic party: its program is both a stimulus and a brake. It is also in its nature to marginalize its opponents: the Liberals had claimed to be inclusive and progressive, but language and religion had disappeared as issues in Saskatchewan politics, while the CCF's social and economic plans undermined any Liberal claim to being progressive.

The CCF had goals, the problem was how to achieve them and, in light of limited resources, how to establish priorities. Saskatchewan's innovative social policies required in the first instance provincial administrative capability to design, implement and sustain the selected policies. Administrative innovation was an essential component of policy innovation. The creation of executive-centred bodies like the Economic Advisory and Planning Board and the Budget Bureau, the first of their kind in a Canadian province (and later imitated) has attracted scholarly study.¹⁰ Usually omitted from this analysis is reference to the restraint such agencies may have on political (i.e. ministerial and governmental) independence.

Jimmy Gardiner was fond of saying that these agencies constituted a non-constitutional wing of the executive, one that in his words undermined responsible, representative government. As a defender of patronage and limited government Gardiner was treated as a political dinosaur in the postwar world, by many federal Liberals (he sought but lost the leadership of the national party in 1948) as well as by CCFers. And his analysis of advisory bodies was hardly sophisticated by modern public policy standards. Still, there was an element of truth to his charge, and it was this: administrative innovation of the kind the CCF introduced in Saskatchewan lengthens time horizons beyond the electoral cycle. By any definition planning occurs in stages, but the agencies quoted above and the Health Services Planning Commission (HSPC) to be discussed below dealt with enormously complex issues, far beyond anything government had experienced before. With policies of the breadth of Medicare to be introduced, there was no alternative.

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Here, perhaps as much as in the introduction of a merit-based public service or rehabilitated and extended Crown corporations, lay the reform that marked the end of Saskatchewan's initial era of unreformed politics.

An early and documented example of the origin, work and influence of an advisory body is found in Malcolm Taylor's study *Health Insurance and Canadian Public Policy*.¹¹ In a chapter on the Saskatchewan Health Services Plan (SHSP), subtitled "The Policy Decision To Go It Alone," he recounts one step on the road to Medicare, the introduction of the provincial hospitalization scheme.¹² The CCF had come to power committed to providing publicly financed and administered medical care. That was the promise: but how to implement it? The constraints of revenue and personnel were obvious. In an approach that would be repeated over succeeding decades, the Douglas government appointed a Commission "to provide a series of objectives and priorities." The goal the Commission set for the province was "to provide complete medical services to all the people of the province." In furtherance of that objective, it recommended creation of a permanent agency (HSPC) to carry out the work required to put the hospital plan in place. The details of the SHSP are not relevant to this discussion. What is important is that this essential early component of Medicare was to be administered by an agency of experts. These were a number of reasons for the government's adopting the Commission's recommendations—the complexities surrounding the SHSP's implementation being one of them. But there was another: the government had no bureaucratic alternative. The civil service the CCF inherited did not possess the required expertise, nor did anyone in government: "Only eight [of the fifty-member CCF caucus] had ever been in the legislature and none had ever held a cabinet post."

To these concerns there was another that arose out of the political system the CCF now dominated. Normally, elections occur every four years in Saskatchewan. All governments are conscious of that political rhythm. Socialist governments, that is, those with a program, are more conscious than most. The constraint of time dictates what can be done, and when. For the Liberals, who never had a program, the calling of elections was far less problematic. Taylor summarizes what was at stake:

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Given that it would be a pioneering experiment, serious mismanagement or failure of any part of the program could lead to electoral disaster... In addition, the highest stake of all—political survival to achieve other and equally important objectives—lay in the balance.

As it transpired, the SHSP did come into operation in 1947, a year before the next election. In that contest the CCF lost votes and some seats, but there was no question that the results endorsed the CCF and its policies, which in the context of the government's priorities meant an endorsement of health care. As Taylor says, it was "only a matter of time" until Medicare was achieved.

Terry Grier, a former member of Parliament and once NDP federal secretary from 1962 to 1966 under T.C. Douglas, has written of Saskatchewan after 1944 that

no North American government ever made more creative use of the powers of the state to change the social and economic circumstances of its citizens. In time, its example changed the expectations of Canadians toward their governments.¹³

Few observers would dissent from that assessment, and most today would applaud the CCF's initiatives in health care. Near unanimity would be less easy to achieve, however, when the question concerned evaluating the economic policies of the same governments. Ideology did not influence the way the CCF saw health care—it determined it. The need for experts to plan and guide universal health care programs, as well as the use of advisory boards to help integrate the work of politicians and public servants—that strategic model is recognizable with minor modifications sixty years later in the field of health care. Also familiar is the public involvement. Health care is individually delivered and everyone avails him- or herself of the service. And everyone has an opinion: debate over the quality and administration of health care is unceasing in Saskatchewan as it is elsewhere in Canada.

Economic development, however, did not lend itself to the universalist perspective that CCF ideology encouraged decision makers to adopt. The special case of agriculture will be treated below; for the

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moment attention will focus on the CCF's plans for improving the province's economy. And in 1944 it needed improving. Drought and depression had taken their toll, but wartime prosperity and the return of soil moisture appeared to redress these immediate disasters. More endemic was Saskatchewan's one-crop economy and the income fluctuations that came from dependency on world markets for grain sales. The rapid extension of public health care services compounded rather than modulated the income problem. One reason the Douglas government co-operated with Ottawa in federal-provincial relations was the need to secure funds from the more prosperous central government. There was another—the achievement of the program, in this case health care, was viewed as more important in Regina than the protection of provincial autonomy. Shared cost programs made health care possible.¹⁴

As the “Regina Manifesto” and later party platforms made explicit, the CCF sought to transform the economy to make it serve “the welfare of the people.” Economic development was always seen as second in the order of priorities after the achievement of social policy. The meaning of that phrase varied over the years, and the critics (more in than out of the party) noted a moderation in tone. Whatever the founders intended, once in power in Saskatchewan, the CCF government accepted that it could not replace private enterprise. In this opinion it was, according to one historian, taking “advice from the EAPB” rather than following “official government policy.”¹⁵ Illuminating was the reason the EAPB (Economic Advisory and Planning Board) offered: “[I]f we allow the standards of living in Manitoba and Alberta to outstrip ours in Saskatchewan we will be accused of failure.”¹⁶ In health care Saskatchewan set the standards; in economic development its neighbours did. Thus, ideology had a differential impact depending on the subject under study.

Health care was a universal and individual value, economic development provincial and collective. With the Crown Corporations Act of 1945 providing the template, “eleven Crown corporations [were] established ... during little more than a year and a half.”¹⁷ From today's perspective, when the province's Crowns are criticized for their international and interprovincial activities, the original public enterprises seem almost hermetic, rooted in the province. A large part of the explanation

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for the contrast lies in the constraints planners face, chief among which is jurisdiction.

In the interests of diversifying the economy and providing economic security on a par with social security, the government looked to development of natural resources, which either because of the war, the Depression or, before that, federal retention, had remained largely unexploited. Potash, petroleum, mining and natural gas were components of the new economy the CCF sought to develop, directly or indirectly in co-operation with private enterprise, for the benefit of the province. Larmour makes clear that expert advice through EAPB blunted ambitions for wide-scale public ownership of the economy. And the reason for that advice, as she notes, was that the “social objectives were costly, and could only be obtained through more rapid development of the economy than was possible by the government itself.”¹⁸

Compromise perhaps, but not concession of the principle of public enterprise. Indeed, the visibility Saskatchewan Crown corporations grew as the Canadian government itself experimented a quarter-of-a-century later with policies of economic nationalism that affected taxation within and marketing of natural resources outside provincial boundaries. In their comparative study of the Alberta and Saskatchewan economies in the 1970s, John Richards and Larry Pratt attribute what they call “the revival of the socialist planning” in Saskatchewan to such federal policies.¹⁹ The (by-now) NDP adopted a stance on Crown corporations that combined proprietary stake and protective interest. Path-dependency theory maintains that, on the one hand, there is an inevitability, “the slow unfolding outcome of earlier policy choices,”²⁰ and on the other, a resistance to countenance change. The experience of the CCF-NDP in Saskatchewan offers a variant on that theory. In the field of Crown corporations, the CCF originally may have needed to moderate its ideological commitment to an economy of public enterprise, but four decades later it was the NDP’s opponent, then the governing Progressive Conservatives, who because of strong legislative and public opposition to its plans in 1989 to privatize one “Crown,” SaskEnergy, did not proceed. Similarly, in the election campaign of 2003, the NDP government made the plans of its principal opponent, the Saskatchewan Party, with regard to privatizing Crown corporations, a central campaign issue. The CCF-NDP may not have prevented private enterprise from operating in

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the provincial economy but it has established itself (in the eyes of its supporters and even, more remarkably, its opponents) as the arbiter of whether to transform existing public enterprise into its market equivalent. Successful resistance on these occasions, as earlier resistance to deterrence fees on health care utilization introduced by the Liberal government of Ross Thatcher in the late 1960s, has reinforced CCF-NDP (and public) confidence in the rightness of its program.

For a time the same might have been said of its agriculture policy. But only for a time. Between 1934 and 1944, the CCF captured the farmers' electoral support and came to power as a result. After 1971, the NDP lost the farmers' support, but still remained in power. The contrasting fortunes of the two periods tell something important about the changing nature of Saskatchewan and the NDP. To begin with, once the federally appointed Canadian Wheat Board secured a monopoly over the marketing of Canadian grains, wheat and other crops disappeared as an issue in provincial politics. Saskatchewan governments of all partisan stripes are expected to speak on behalf of the grain farmers, but income failures and related industry problems have long been deemed federal responsibilities. At the same time, grain sales declined drastically as an index of national economic prosperity. The great sales to China of the 1950s and 1960s, which helped seal John Diefenbaker's Progressive Conservative hold on prairie voters, have no equivalent today. Wheat defined rural life on the prairies—the location of railways, elevators and towns; its decline along with technological change has had a similarly great, although this time unsettling, effect as a consequence of, among other developments, rail-line abandonment, the replacement of local by mainline elevators, and the privatization and decline of the once pervasive Wheat Pool.

Once in power the CCF indicated its determination to improve the quality of life of rural Saskatchewan by pressing ahead with the creation of larger school units (a policy the Liberals had long resisted because of its implications for the maintenance of separate schools), a system of grid roads to make access to consolidated schools and services easier for the farm population, rural electrification, a publicly owned provincial bus company, along with numerous other initiatives. The principle here, as with the provision of health services, was to equalize access and to assure provincial standards for all. Uniform treatment and thereby social and

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economic security inform all policies introduced by the CCF after 1944. It is a subject for debate whether these policies altered rural life to such an extent that the values and commerce that once made it distinct have disappeared. It is also debatable whether modern communications and the modern economy would have accomplished the same end regardless of what the government did. Richard Hofstadter's epigram about 20th-century America applies equally to present-day Saskatchewan: "The United States was born in the country and has moved to the city."²¹

How many moved became clear in the 1971 census, when for the first time the urban population outstripped the rural, 53% to 47%. Concern about rural decline was not new: it could be heard in testimony expressed in 1930 before the provincial Royal Commission on Immigration and Settlement.²² Twenty-five years later, the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life offered evidence of further depopulation, as seen in the increasing size but dwindling numbers of farms.²³ Succeeding studies confirm the decline of rural communities and the consolidation of services in the largest cities and in a dozen or so towns, such as Humboldt in east-central Saskatchewan and Swift Current in the southwest.²⁴

The internal combustion engine in the form of the automobile (among the provinces Saskatchewan had the second highest number of registered vehicles in the 1920s),²⁵ the mechanization of agriculture after 1945 when supply of farm equipment could meet pent-up demand, and the technological revolution in communications paralleled transformations in grain-handling. Together these developments undermined the economic, social and political assumptions that informed the initial definition of the province. The phrase "last best West," favoured in historical accounts of Saskatchewan's early settlement, stresses by implication the adjective "best," when it would be more accurate in any examination of present-day Saskatchewan to reflect upon the word "last."²⁶ Prairie society and economy envisioned horse-drawn transport; elevators were so located that farmers might haul grain to a delivery point and return home within a day. Distance, so much a part of early prairie calculations, was confounded by the arrival of horseless locomotion. The move to town followed, although not at a uniform pace for all communities; ethnic settlements responded at a different rhythm but the destination remained the same.

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Drought, depression and war, and, then ironically, post-war prosperity aided by income stability achieved through the operations of the Canadian Wheat Board, delayed the impact, even the realization, of what was happening. It also disguised an important economic truth: the grain economy which in good years had once brought prosperity for all of Saskatchewan offered limited choices for the future when change was required.

Path Dependency and Provincial Pluralism

A year after its return to power following seven years of Liberal rule, the NDP (the renamed CCF) responded to the farm problem by creating a Land Bank Commission “to assist in the establishment and maintenance of family farms, and to increase opportunities for owners of farm land ... to dispose of their land.” The following year it introduced legislation to limit “foreign ownership of land.” Acreage limits placed on non-resident ownership were set at 160 in 1978 but were reduced to ten in 1980.²⁷ In 1982, the party suffered its second defeat since coming to power in 1944, this time at the hands of a rejuvenated Progressive Conservative Party. The magnitude of the electoral rejection, with the NDP winning only nine seats to the Progressive Conservatives’ fifty-five, testified to the political transformation. The direction of the change was affirmed in the 1986 election, when the NDP won twenty-five seats to the PCs thirty-eight, only two of which were outside the major cities or the far north. For the first time in the province’s history, the government-opposition dichotomy in the legislature reflected a societal cleavage, that is, rural versus urban.

The NDP, and the CCF before it, was always more socialist than agrarian in its interests and policies. The province provided the stage for their programs and administrative energies, one that was applauded by voters tired of the local constituency orientation of the Liberals. As long as agriculture prospered the interests of rural Saskatchewan could be met by provide-wide initiatives, such as larger schools, better roads and improved medical care. The NDP’s platform in the 1971 election, “A New Deal for People,” gave prominence to agriculture, but its pledge to “give first priority to public ownership of Crown corporations” in the natural resource sector, stood in contrast to its promise to protect land ownership and farmers’ rights. Whatever originality lay behind the

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concept of a Land Bank and whatever energy the government devoted to it, the sense of the future lay with resources.

The Progressive Conservatives came to power in 1982 unprepared to govern. Like the Liberals before 1944 they had no program, only interests. Their rural base, a premier who was a farmer and agricultural economist, and a Progressive Conservative federal government willing to accommodate a provincial political ally, ensured that agriculture would be their pre-occupation. The federal government responded with massive infusions of capital to shore up farm incomes increasingly vulnerable in international markets where their principal competitors were highly subsidized. PC farm politics did nothing to reverse the rural decline however, while a mounting debt and a late and poorly planned policy to decentralize provincial government departments throughout the province solidified urban opposition, particularly from public service employees.

In 1991 the NDP vanquished localism in Saskatchewan politics for a second time. And again, as in 1944, the NDP resorted to the administrative mechanisms it had pioneered nearly five decades earlier. The crisis it faced—and it interpreted its task to the public in this dire vocabulary—was to rescue Saskatchewan from near bankruptcy. The old linear language returned but for new purposes. Saskatchewan's creditors in New York saw to that. As Janice MacKinnon, the minister of Finance through much of this period, recounts in her book *Minding the Public Purse*, banks lengthen time horizons in politics.²⁸ Reducing the debt drove all other policies before it. And as the actions of earlier federal governments (King, St. Laurent and Trudeau) had added new complexities to the province's health care and natural resources policies, so the fiscal policies of the Chrétien government moulded Saskatchewan's response in the 1990s.

In its determination to balance the provincial budget, the Romanow government equalled those of Douglas and Blakeney in commitment, program and organization. The fiscal emergency concentrated its mind. But unlike the 1940s and 1970s, the 1990s were bad times; reduction not the introduction of services was the order of the day. Public opposition to cutbacks was predictable; less anticipated was the strength of public service resistance. A major policy innovation of the Douglas government had been the Trade Union Act, 1944. That legislation bound

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the Crown, like every other employer, and thus granted public servants the right to bargain collectively long before comparable rights were granted elsewhere in Canada. A 1947 issue of *Saskatchewan News*, the government's weekly news bulletin, depicts as harmonious these parallel streams of business and labour reforms that would in time experience conflict. In an article devoted to the establishment and operation of a new Crown corporation, the Government Insurance Office, the author notes tangentially that "the 60 hard-working members of the office staff are members of their own union ... which is chartered by the Canadian Congress of Labor."²⁹ Half a century later in less expansive times, the focus of attention had shifted from the program (in this case, government insurance) to what had been of secondary interest at the outset, its deliverers. Like the Devine government, which encountered stiff opposition from the public service to its Fair Share Saskatchewan program of administrative decentralization, the Romanow government found the network of political-bureaucratic obligations formed over half a century formidable to overcome.

Saskatchewan's distinctiveness, a large part of which was attributable to its innovative public policies, acted as a brake on change. Notwithstanding economic arguments for improving the structure of grain-based agriculture or administrative arguments for revising a century-old system of local government, political arguments to implement fundamental change went unheeded. Refusal to adapt did not stop change from happening. The economy, whether farm- or Crown corporation-based, was less territorial figuratively and literally. Energy through pipelines in North America, rather than grain in elevators, box-cars, and ships overseas, characterized the economy at the beginning of the province's second century. Where once grain had provided economic harmony to the province, both rural and urban, because the province was seen only through prairie eyes, now there were multiple Saskatchewanans, only some of which prospered.

A part that was not prospering was the fast growing Aboriginal population. Nothing has been said of Aboriginal people in this chapter. The reason for that omission is that the CCF public agenda introduced in 1944 and, it is argued here, still in place ("affordable living" as an NDP platform objective in 2003 is not so very different from "Security for the People" in 1944) gave no place to Aboriginal matters. Practically,

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Aboriginal people lived overwhelmingly in the North, had no vote and fell under the jurisdiction of the federal Department of Indian Affairs. But even had this geographic and administrative segregation not existed, the universal programs of the CCF had no place for racial distinctiveness just as they could offer no preferment despite their predominance to agriculture and rural life.

The increase in the Aboriginal population is the only sign of growth today in an otherwise demographically static province. Immigration, either from overseas or from other provinces, is slight; still the complexion of Saskatchewan, and its cities in particular, is being substantially altered. Although Aboriginal demographic projections are not new, their magnitude, and the policy implications flowing therefrom, have only recently attracted the attention of government. Here again is a challenge with a long-term perspective, but this time not one of any government's choosing. Scholars of path dependency stress persistence as one of the theory's major features. Persistence has been a feature of CCF-NDP policies and policy perspectives for sixty years. But does history matter in the case of responding to Aboriginal population growth? For that matter, and more generally, how does the provincial-territorial focus of the past adjust to economic and political changes that are global in character and reach?

As many commentators have remarked, and no doubt will note again as Saskatchewan and Alberta celebrate centenaries, the two provinces are politically very different. What fewer have said, is that Alberta today is different politically from Alberta of the post-war period. The same cannot be said of Saskatchewan. One explanation for the contrast may be found in this concluding observation:

By shaping expectations, collective ideas have an irreducible role in change. Thus similar societies with different dominant ideas will evolve differently in reaction to the same experiences or environmental pressures.³⁰

Chapter 4: The Great Divide

Gregory P. Marchildon

The Depression and drought of the 1930s is the great divide in Saskatchewan history. Before the 1930s were the boom decades of settlement and immigration, the hegemony of King Wheat and the Liberal Party, and a seemingly unlimited optimism about the province's future. After the 1930s came decades of slower population growth, diversification out of wheat and agriculture into oil, potash and uranium, the CCF-NDP as the governing party, and a less optimistic—some would say realistic, others would say pessimistic—view of the province's future.

What is it about the Great Depression and the Great Drought that so changed the province? And does it still shape the way we manage the present and view the future? These are the central questions addressed in this chapter. Before assessing the impact of the 1930s on the collective psychology of Saskatchewan, however, we must begin with the predominant mentality of the province prior to the Great Depression and the Great Drought.

Years of Boom and Optimism, 1905–1929

At its birth, the new province of Saskatchewan was the embodiment of the spirit and dynamism of the New West. In the same way that Prime

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Minister Wilfrid Laurier believed that the 20th century would belong to Canada, it was easy to believe that the future within the Confederation belonged to Saskatchewan. On the day of its creation, Saskatchewan was already poised to become the third wealthiest and third most populous province in the country, growing at an unprecedented rate as immigrants poured in from Europe and North America.¹

Laurier himself had often pondered what this might mean in terms of the future of the country. He was so concerned about the extent to which the juggernaut of settlement and expansion in the western prairies might eventually upset the delicate balance of population, religion, language and ethnic identity in the two central Canadian provinces that he decided to divide the region into Alberta and Saskatchewan rather than permit one behemoth province to emerge out of the West. Frederick Haultain, the long-serving and well-respected premier of the North-West Territories, had wanted only one province, arguing that two provincial jurisdictions would not only be administratively more expensive but “would split the ‘political individuality and identity’ of the territories.”² As a Conservative and a proponent of the one-province concept, Haultain was brushed aside by Laurier, and Walter Scott, a Liberal and a supporter of the two-province concept, became the province’s first interim premier.

Walter Scott would quickly become the province’s greatest booster. Soon after taking office, he wrote: “The province has as yet less than half a million souls and there is plenty of room for at least ten million.” In a subsequent letter, he became even more ebullient about the potential of the province: “Just as sure as the sun shines there will be within this Province alone some day a population running into the tens of millions.”³

Agreeing with Disraeli’s assertion that “nothing more completely represents a nation than a public building,” Scott devoted his early years of premiership to building the structures that would soon define the province. He viewed the construction of the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon as essential in satisfying the educational and intellectual aspirations of a rapidly growing population. As the provincial capital, however, Regina required a great building that would reflect the weight and dynamism of one of the country’s most important political actors, and Scott spent considerable time ensuring it achieved the grandness he felt the province so deserved. Constructed

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on an enormous site of 168 acres, the building was 167 metres (542 ft) long, 94 metres (308 ft) wide and 56 metres (183 ft) high. When completed in 1912, the Legislative Building and its striking dome towered over the burgeoning city of Regina. The elegant interior drew on the Palace of Versailles and was decorated with 34 types of marble quarried from all over the world. In Scott's mind, nothing was too good, too expansive, or too expensive—the actual cost of \$1.8 million by 1912 was double the original estimate—for the province of Saskatchewan.⁴

These new edifices were being built on the wheat economy. Along with the majority of Saskatchewanians, Premier Scott believed that wheat was, and would remain, the engine of the province's prosperity: "Saskatchewan is essentially an agricultural province, which is no misfortune. Agriculture is the basis of the business of the world. Farming is the foundation of civilization."⁵ To emphasize this fact, the new College of Agriculture became a mainstream part of the University of Saskatchewan's academic program, the first time such status was accorded the subject by a university in Canada.⁶

The respect shown agriculture was hardly surprising given that Saskatchewan was at the epicentre of wheat-growing in the Prairie West. From July 1, 1905, until June 30, 1906, fully two-thirds of all homestead entries in Canada were concentrated in Saskatchewan. Wheat replaced all that went before it. Even in southwestern Saskatchewan where cattle-ranching had become the mainstay before 1905, an army of wheat farmers invaded in the aftermath of a killer winter in 1906–07 that had devastated the existing ranch operations.⁷

All wheat farmers in the province benefited from new technical developments, including tilling and seeding machinery especially designed for dryland conditions and the introduction of a high quality milling wheat called Marquis that could ripen quickly in the short prairie growing season. An immense transportation and storage infrastructure was erected in a few short years. Grain elevators—towering prairie sentinels—were built at, and rail branch lines extended to, countless distribution points throughout the prairies. In 1906, Scott established a new department of railways and during the first session of the Saskatchewan assembly, five new railways were incorporated.⁸

By the census of 1911, the population had grown to almost 493,000 souls, well over five times what it had been just a decade before, and

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about 118,000 more than Alberta and 100,000 more than British Columbia.⁹ Only Ontario and Quebec had larger populations.

An elaborate municipal system was erected to provide an array of basic services for farm and town dwellers throughout the province. In 1908, the Scott government had passed legislation setting out the organization, powers and responsibilities of village, town and city governments, with villages being between 50 and 500 people, towns between 500 and 5,000, and cities defined as 5,000 or more residents. Rural municipalities came a year later with the division of the province into units of nine townships each, with local ratepayers deciding whether to become rural municipalities with expanded powers or to remain local improvement districts largely run by the province. By 1914, Saskatchewan would have 295 rural municipal governments, as well as 288 village, 71 town and 7 city governments in place.¹⁰

Many settlers, some of whom had never had the opportunity to participate in the democratic process, leapt at the opportunity to have their influence felt and their beliefs and preferences reflected in the decisions that most affected their families and communities. With so many farmers already involved in advocacy organizations such as the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association, it was a small step to local government office and the responsibilities that went with it. The time, energy and commitment expended in these organizations earned the province a reputation as the most politically engaged in the country. Out of this democratic hothouse in Saskatchewan would emerge the most vigorous co-operative movement in the country and, eventually, the core of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).¹¹

Everyone understood the extent to which the province was dependent on the cultivation and sale of wheat on international markets. Yet few were concerned about the implications of this extreme dependence on a single commodity until the 1930s, despite some prominent early warning signals. The first came with the worldwide recession of 1913 that drove down the price for wheat along with a crop failure in southwestern Saskatchewan the following year. The impact was short-lived as World War I would soon create food shortages and rising wheat prices. Rain and good weather not only restored the dry southwest but delivered a bumper wheat crop throughout the province in 1915. This cut short the nascent diversification that had begun in 1913 in response to

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the recession, and wheat farming expanded into even more unsuitable parts of the province.¹²

Stating that the war had “been the economic salvation of Saskatchewan,” the provincial treasurer (and future premier) Charles Dunning claimed following the war that the “people of the province were more prosperous now than ever before.”¹³ Dunning was right. The world price for wheat stayed high following the armistice, crop yields were good and exports continued to grow. By the 1920–21 season, however, another global recession had begun to bring down wheat prices. Having built up significant debt in their headlong dash to mechanize and increase holdings, farmers saw their futures threatened. They blamed the Winnipeg Commodity Exchange and the elevator companies for purposely pushing wheat prices down. But this too would turn out to be a very temporary setback.

In 1922 and 1923, bumper crops choked rural elevators throughout Saskatchewan.¹⁴ The railway companies did not have enough cars to get the glut of wheat to saltwater ports. Farmers demanded a government Wheat Board to help get their grain to market in an orderly fashion. When refused, many came together to establish the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.¹⁵ By 1925, the province was experiencing a full-fledged boom that was spreading beyond the wheat farms to the province’s growing towns and cities.¹⁶ The next four years would give way to the unbridled optimism that had been present at the time of the province’s birth.

The boom would end with a shocking abruptness. Most expected the good times to continue indefinitely. Almost no one could predict the hardships that lay in store for so many. But once Saskatchewan had passed through the dismal decade of the 1930s, the province and its people would never be the same again.

The Great Depression and the Great Drought

Numerous popular accounts depict a similar picture of dust storms, unemployment, relief and bankruptcy. Titles such *Ten Lost Years*, *Men against the Desert*, and *The Winter Years* convey the devastating impact of drought and depression.¹⁷ While the memory of this time has been dying with the seniors who lived the experience, the attitudes and habits formed in the crucible of the Dirty Thirties have been passed down

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through their children. Caution replaced optimism, saving and risk-avoidance replaced past eagerness to invest in new ventures, and a sense of foreboding, even dread, replaced the sunny optimism of the past. On the other side of the ledger, however, came incredible perseverance in the face of adversity, unstinting generosity in the face of poverty, and a powerful sense of community responsibility in the face of economic and environmental disaster.

While the Great Depression was a worldwide phenomenon, countries such as Canada were hit particularly hard because of the precipitous slide in basic commodity prices in the face of protectionist measures taken by most of the country's trading partners to protect their own domestic markets. Canada's staple resources, originally fish and fur, later wood and wheat, had made it wealthy, but the punishing recoil of the Great Depression would make a liability out of these same staples. As the wheat province, Saskatchewan was at the epicentre of this economic earthquake. In Ontario and Quebec, provincial per capita incomes fell by 44% between 1929 and 1932. Over the same period in Manitoba, it fell by 49%. In Alberta, the second-most agricultural province in the country, per capita income fell by 61%, while in Saskatchewan it fell by an astounding 72%.¹⁸

Even these statistics do not adequately convey the depths to which the province fell. In 1929, the southern-central part of the province experienced the first of many crop failures and total net farm income fell from its high of \$185 million in 1928 to \$51 million in 1929. In 1930 it was even worse, with most of the province—including for the first time extensive areas north of Saskatoon—suffering from drought. The 1931 drought covered the southern half of the province and, for the first time, net farm income was *minus* \$31 million with numerous farm families no longer able to live off their capital and past resources. In 1932, the south-central portion of the province was again the hardest hit. In 1933, it was the southwest's turn, although over half of the south-central part of the province was also affected by drought. Much the same area was affected by the drought in 1934. In 1935, the rains finally came, but rust devastated yields through most of the province. In 1936 drought returned to the western and far southern regions. 1937 was the worst drought year of all with two-thirds of the province's farmers losing their crops. In that lowest of years, the average provincial yield was 2.6

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bushels per acre, a little more than one-tenth the average yield of 1928. Once again, farm net income was pushed below zero, hitting a record minus \$36 million.¹⁹

These droughts brought to mind Captain John Palliser's western Canadian expedition in the mid-19th century, when Palliser had carefully described the near-desert conditions of a triangle that covered much of southern Saskatchewan and concluded this region was unfit for agriculture.²⁰ 1938 finally brought some respite from the drought if not from the depression. William Patterson, the premier of the province, was so excited that he telegraphed Ottawa in May to report that "heavy rains coupled with other moisture has [sic] made seeding prospects and conditions most favourable we have experienced in years," adding hopefully that the province was finally "back into production" after almost a decade of drought and dust.²¹

While wheat farmers throughout the prairies were affected by low wheat prices, these successive droughts hit Saskatchewan much harder than Alberta, where wheat yields during the depression years exceeded those in Saskatchewan by nearly 60%.²² The provincial government as well as the urban and rural municipalities tried to assist the human casualties as the depression dragged on, and as drought after drought sucked the lifeblood out of the land.

Although responsible for delivering relief to destitute farmers and the unemployed, the municipalities quickly found their tax bases undercut by dropping land values, bankrupt farmers and business owners unable to pay their taxes, and people literally moving in order to find greener pastures. The provincial government was forced to step into the breach and did so in at least two ways. The first was to take over the distribution of relief from the municipalities and the second was to encourage resettlement from the drought-stricken south to the generally drought-free northern regions of the province.

By 1931, Premier J.T.M. Anderson realized that the sheer task of relief threatened to overwhelm his government so he established an arm's-length commission to facilitate the effective and non-partisan distribution of rural relief in the most drought-stricken parts of the province. The Saskatchewan Relief Commission provided food and clothing to those farmers most in need. In addition to direct relief, the Commission distributed seed grain, binder twine, fuel, as well as animal

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feed and fodder and even gopher poison to keep destitute farmers in the business of farming. In keeping with the predominant attitudes of the day, relief was neither welfare nor charity.²³ Everyone applying for relief had to provide proof of their poverty as well as sign a commitment to repay the Commission once conditions improved. Although dismantled by the Gardiner Liberal government in 1934, the Commission's relief work was continued through the provincial departments of agriculture and municipal affairs, and by 1935, about 227,000 people in Saskatchewan had received some relief payment.²⁴ Although the provincial government worked on other fronts to help people cope with the depression and ongoing drought, including legislation to protect farmers and others against creditors, organizing and managing relief remained the government's most important function until 1939.²⁵

Despite governmental efforts to keep them going, farmers were abandoning their farms and homes and moving away from the drought-stricken regions. Between 1930 and 1938, some 36,000 individuals—almost 7,000 farm families—moved from southern Saskatchewan to northern Crown Lands.²⁶ They settled onto 1.5 million acres in a wide swath that extended from Meadow Lake and St. Walburg through Big River, Shellbrook and Nipawin to Hudson Bay and Preeceville. Although actively promoting migration to the north as part of its response to drought in the south, the Anderson government's policy on northern settlement was far less effective than its relief policies through the Saskatchewan Relief Commission, and many desperate farm families found themselves trying to again work land that was barely fit for agriculture. After the defeat of the Conservative coalition, the new Liberal government established an agency within the Department of Municipal Affairs to relocate at least some of the northern farmers off muskeg and onto land that could produce a crop.²⁷

More promising was the major effort at land reclamation efforts that were begun under the federal Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Act of 1935 and the Prairie Farm Rehabilitation Administration (PFRA) towards the end of the depression. Both as premier and then as federal minister of Agriculture, Jimmy Gardiner hammered home the point that the federal government had an obligation to fix the problem since it had originally lured immigrant settlers to the dryland regions of the prairies including the semi-arid Palliser triangle.²⁸ The PFRA's early work included the

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introduction of new cropping practices, the ridging of fields to prevent drifting, and turning abandoned land into seeded pastures. Later, the PFRA would initiate major water conservation and irrigation projects.²⁹ The total spent on these land-use initiatives amounted to \$9 million between 1935 and 1945, and the PFRA's efforts were more than repaid from the income that was earned on land salvaged from the droughts.³⁰

Land reclamation cost a fraction of what governments were paying out in relief. These costs made municipal governments throughout the province insolvent, and would eventually cripple the provincial government. To cope, the province had cut other expenditures to the bone, even using the entire construction budget of the Department of Highways for relief purposes.³¹ The government tried to both raise taxes and borrow money, difficult propositions for a province and a people that were virtually bankrupt. The province called upon Ottawa, and in response to the deepening crisis, the federal government put ever-larger amounts into relief. Between 1930 and 1937, the provincial government would end up pouring about \$100 million into relief to supplement the meagre \$5 million initially put in by bankrupt municipalities. Over the same time, the federal government would end up contributing \$72 million to the relief effort in Saskatchewan.³²

The relief burden forced the provincial government into deficit financing. In 1933, the province's expenditures were almost double its revenues while in 1937, when two-thirds of provincial farmers faced drought, the province took in about one-third in revenues of what it actually expended.³³ By 1939, Saskatchewan was by far the most heavily indebted province in the country, and one small step from bankruptcy. Although in slightly better shape, Alberta and Manitoba had also been ravaged by the fall of the wheat economy and were only two short steps from insolvency.³⁴ The near-bankruptcy of the prairie provinces had so destabilized the federation that Prime Minister Mackenzie King was forced to establish a royal commission on the future of federal-provincial relations.³⁵

During the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations—more famously remembered as the Rowell-Sirois Commission—Premier William Patterson drew a picture of the province's extreme vulnerability as a result of its dependence on agriculture and the natural difficulties in providing even basic services and infrastructure to a widely dispersed

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rural population. Patterson wanted the federal government to recognize these special challenges through some form of equalization payment to “make it possible for the people of Canada generally, irrespective of what part of the Dominion they live in, irrespective of what particular occupations they may be engaged in, to enjoy a somewhat comparable measure of service and attention from the government under which they happen to live.”³⁶

At the same time, Patterson could see no real alternative to the centrality of wheat in the Saskatchewan economy, and his election platform in 1944 relied heavily on an agricultural program with four main objectives: 1) markets at profitable prices; 2) protection against the hazards of nature; 3) maximum utilization and conservation of soil and moisture; and 4) independent ownership and operation of farms.³⁷ In other words, even if the wheat economy had proven to be so disastrous during the Depression, Patterson still assumed it would remain the mainstay of the province.

Some diversification *within* agriculture would occur quite naturally during the course of World War II. Wheat acreage dropped over half a million acres from 1939 to 1945, as farmers grew barley and flax in addition to wheat, and some went back into livestock and dairy farming with the advent of war-induced higher prices. At the same time, the war spurred mechanization, and with it increasing farm size and depopulation in Saskatchewan.

It was during the Depression that the inverse relationship between farm size and population began to exert its iron hold on the province, a hold that has since never been relinquished. In the census of 1951, the province discovered that its population had dropped by 100,000 people from its high of 932,000 in 1936.³⁸ Not only was it the only province that lost population during the Depression, it was the only province that lost population in the decade immediately following the Depression.³⁹ More alarming, perhaps, the province lost 116,000 people in rural Saskatchewan between 1941 and 1951. Given that this decade was relatively prosperous, there is little doubt that this population loss was due to increasing mechanization and rapidly expanding farm size.⁴⁰

While some farm families moved to the province's cities, many others left the province permanently. At the time, the dilemma was beginning to be understood. The provincial election of 1944 had already

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brought into power a party and a program dedicated to the diversification of the provincial economy beyond agriculture, and a willingness to use the state in a more activist manner to develop this new economy.

Rebuilding Postwar Saskatchewan

In the census of 1941, Saskatchewan clung to its distinction as the third most populous province in the country despite its population loss during the Great Depression. A decade later, with a population of 832,000, it dropped to fifth position behind Alberta (940,000) and British Columbia (1,652,000). Though Saskatchewan's population would inch up after the 1951 census, Saskatchewan was pushed into sixth place by Manitoba in the mid-1960s, where it has remained ever since.⁴¹

The inverse relationship between farm size and population continued to exert its power despite the enormous efforts, initiated by successive provincial governments, to diversify the economy and develop its substantial resource wealth. In 1946, there were 126,000 farms and the average size was just over 470 acres. By 1966, the number of farms had dropped to less than 86,000 and the average size had moved up to in excess of 760 acres. Although the province would see its population increase throughout this period, its growth was anaemic in comparison to Alberta and British Columbia and lagged slightly behind Manitoba. It could not have been otherwise, given the much greater importance of agriculture in the Saskatchewan economy relative to the other western provinces.⁴²

In 1975, despite the rising importance of oil, natural gas and potash, Saskatchewan was still the most agricultural province in the country, with over 50% of its value-added production stemming from agriculture; this compared to 29% in Prince Edward Island, 25% in Manitoba, 13% in Alberta, 5% in Ontario and Quebec, and a national average of 9% valued added in agriculture.⁴³ Indeed, until well into the 1960s, provincial license plates billed Saskatchewan as "The Wheat Province," but no postwar Saskatchewan government believed that wheat was a solid foundation on which to build the future of the province.⁴⁴

From World War II until the present, successive Saskatchewan governments have attempted to broaden and deepen the provincial economy beyond wheat and agriculture. Belonging to two ideologically-opposing camps, however, they have tried to achieve diversification in

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different ways. Successive social democratic governments, particularly those in the 1940s, 1950s and 1970s, have used government planning, public ownership and equity as central tools in their bid to strengthen the province. The Liberal and Conservative interregnums in the 1960s and 1980s have used public subsidies and low taxes to encourage private sector investment, mainly through mega-project development. Both camps agree on the goal but differ as to the efficacy, even legitimacy, of the methods.

The election of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) in 1944 marked an important departure from the past. For the first time, diversification out of agriculture into manufacturing, services, and—most importantly—the resource industries, was made an explicit part of government policy. The Douglas government wanted to transform a one-crop economy into a more balanced economy that would be better able to withstand a major world depression in the future. The new government's stated purpose in 1945 was "to build an economy" capable of absorbing "some of the shock of depression," if (or when) one reappeared.⁴⁵ If the private sector was not prepared to do the work on its own, the government would use the tools at its disposal to hurry along this needed diversification. The Douglas government needed an economy that would produce the revenues necessary for an ambitious set of social programs including hospitalization, improved and larger schools, better wages through collective bargaining and, eventually, Medicare itself.

In its attempts to diversify and modernize the Saskatchewan economy, the new CCF government established the Saskatchewan Transportation Company (1946), and created Crown corporations out of Saskatchewan Government Telephones (1947) and the Saskatchewan Power Commission (1949), in order to improve transportation, telephone and power services through vast rural areas as well as taking over the distribution and sale of natural gas. By 1949, legislation was passed to provide rural electrification, with 1,100 farms connected to power in that year alone. In addition to the infamous manufacturing enterprises launched by CCF Minister Joe Phelps, more solid enterprises such as the sodium sulphate plant at Chaplin (1946), were also established, and an Economic Advisory and Planning Board was set up to institute a more systematic approach to economic development led by cabinet and its planning agencies.⁴⁶

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Next door in Alberta, the Leduc find triggered an oil rush that would fundamentally change the economic trajectory of that province. It also encouraged exploration in Saskatchewan. The first exploratory oil well was drilled in 1951. This was followed by a natural gas strike near Elrose and then Brock. Heavy oil finds were made near Lloydminster, and medium oil was discovered at Cantuar, Dollard, Wapella, Fosterton, Gull Lake, Midale and Kindersley. In comparison to Saskatchewan, however, the Alberta finds were huge.⁴⁷ As if in compensation for its more meagre oil deposits, Saskatchewan found itself more fortunate in terms of other resources. By the mid-1950s, enormous deposits of potash had been found deep below the surface and mining would begin on a large scale in the 1960s. Uranium had also been discovered, and its mining would eventually become part of the landscape of northern Saskatchewan as well as a regular source of controversy within the province.⁴⁸

When the Liberal government of Ross Thatcher was elected in 1964, it brought to an end two decades of CCF government and its approach to economic development. In Thatcher's mind, the CCF had "caused economic stagnation" and made the province an "economic laggard" through "high taxes" and the dead hand of the state. He promised a stronger and more diversified economy and a more rapidly growing population through "smaller, more efficient government, lower taxes and free enterprise."⁴⁹ In reality, however, Thatcher regularly deployed public money through subsidies, tax rebates, low royalty regimes as well as the power of his own office to entice potential investors into the province. He preferred mega-projects, including a \$65 million pulp mill in Prince Albert and new potash mines near Lanigan, Esterhazy and other Saskatchewan communities. Unfortunately for Thatcher, the provincial economy faltered in his second term despite the mega-projects, population began to fall again, and he was defeated in 1971.⁵⁰

Although similarly focused on economic development and diversification, Allan Blakeney's NDP government was opposed to what it perceived as Thatcher's "giveaway" policies and was more prepared to use the state directly in resource development. Similar to past CCF governments of which he had been a minister and public servant, Blakeney wanted to establish a broad social safety net that would be funded, in part, through new resource development.⁵¹ By the end of the 1970s,

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publicly owned enterprises such as the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, SaskOil and the Saskatchewan Mining and Development Corporation (SMDC) had given life to this vision.⁵² However, this “family” of Crown corporations, and the political philosophy it represented, was effectively attacked by a revitalized Progressive Conservative party under the leadership of Grant Devine, and after three terms in office, the Blakeney government was defeated in 1982.

Devine’s approach to diversification was reminiscent of Thatcher’s approach. Devine was, in practice, prepared to use the state to encourage private investment in various mega-projects in the province. However, in terms of the amount of provincial government money used to lever such investments, Devine went far further than Thatcher, and by the end of his government’s second term, and despite the privatization of the Potash Corporation of Saskatchewan, a bewildering number of state-supported companies and projects had been financed by the public purse, accumulating an enormous debt in the process.⁵³ This debt load, and its repayment, was not only responsible for a fiscal crisis in the early 1990s but curtailed the ability of subsequent NDP governments to pursue as activist an economic development agenda as those pursued in the 1970s and 1980s.⁵⁴

So what did these considerable, government-led efforts at diversification in the postwar era produce? This is a question that remains difficult to answer. Certainly, the province has achieved a level of prosperity that would have seemed almost inconceivable to an observer in 1939. Based upon its own historical standard, Saskatchewan did develop a much more diversified economy. Today, for example, the oil and gas sector contributes more to the Saskatchewan economy than agriculture. It has made Saskatchewan a relatively prosperous province, although beside Alberta it often feels poor. At the same time, reliance on resource development in addition to agriculture continued to make Saskatchewan highly vulnerable to world commodity price shifts and, aside from Alberta’s cyclical economy, no other provincial economy has been as volatile. Finally, as both of these sectors have grown increasingly capital-intensive, and as farm size has grown inexorably larger, Saskatchewan’s population has continued to grow at a snail’s pace relative to the rest of Canada.⁵⁵

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Conclusion

The Depression and successive droughts of the 1930s separate the province's history into two distinct phases. The first phase involves Saskatchewan's birth and early years of development within the context of the unquestioned supremacy of the wheat economy. Boundless optimism and, in the words of historian Jim Pitsula, a muscular sense of self-identity, was the predominant psychological mindset.⁵⁶ The second phase has been marked by slow population growth, diversification beyond the wheat economy and increased prosperity despite inevitable cyclical downturns. This phase has been distinguished by a belief in the potential of the province and, particularly in recent decades, a disappointment in the position of the province especially in terms of Alberta.

Although only ten years in length, the period of the Great Divide reshaped the character of the province. The sense of boundless optimism is a faint memory. Today, even the most optimistic Saskatchewanians feels the constraints of the province's relatively isolated geography in North America and its limited population and relatively small urban centres. While the province can, and has, been able to punch above its demographic and political weight in the federation in the postwar period, the fact remains that it never likely to regain its position as the third wealthiest and most populous province in the federation.

Without doubt, diversification outside of agriculture has added immeasurably to the wealth of the province. Despite the economy's volatility, it has allowed Saskatchewan to survive the most recent agricultural recession and drought without going into a tailspin similar to what happened in the early 1930s. Moreover, for periods of time it has enjoyed among the highest rates of economic growth in the country. This was true during the resource boom of the 1970s. It was also true from 1990 until 1997 when Saskatchewan achieved an average rate of growth in gross domestic product of 4.5% per year, 0.5% above Alberta's annual rate of growth, and almost 2% above the national average.⁵⁷

At the same time, however, Saskatchewanians have never regained the sense of optimism that so dominated the first part of the province's history. In part, this is due to the fact that Saskatchewan has seen its population hold largely constant since the Great Depression and so many of its people migrate to other provinces. And from being the province with the largest influx of immigrants as well as migrants from

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other provinces during the pre-Depression boom years, it has consistently been the least-favoured destination among immigrants and other Canadians since the Great Depression. The psychological impact of these hard demographic facts is revealed in the sense of isolation, pessimism and disconnectedness that a percentage of the population has felt for decades. But at the same time, a powerful sense of identity—even loyalty—has also emerged. This can be attributed to achieving a number of firsts in Canada, including hospitalization and Medicare, and to simply being able to survive—even flourish—in the face of considerable odds.

Chapter 5: The Saskatchewan Myth

Dale Eisler

For a brief moment, on an evening in November 2002, the lure of Saskatchewan was palpable. Given the circumstances, it was to be expected. After all, the 100 or so people who gathered in the Panorama Room on the 26th floor atop the Crowne Plaza Hotel in downtown Ottawa were all linked by their Saskatchewan heritage. They had come to hear Premier Lorne Calvert extol the virtues of the province as part of his government's national public relations campaign to promote Saskatchewan.¹ Looking westward, as the Ottawa River disappeared on the horizon, one couldn't help but imagine the powerful attraction of Saskatchewan that countless thousands of immigrants and others felt many years earlier when they headed West to start a new life in the promised land on the distant prairies.

The people in the room that night might have been separated from those early pioneers by a century filled with hope and frustration, achievement and disappointment. But somehow the idea of Saskatchewan remains as powerful and as intriguing as ever. It exists in the minds of its people as a special place. There can be no denying the strength of this attachment Saskatchewan people feel towards their province. It has an emotional, almost spiritual dimension to it. No other

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western province has the same sway over its people. Indeed, other than Quebec and Newfoundland, which have manifestly singular cultures and histories, the psychological imprint Saskatchewan has on its people is both unique and enduring. The source of this identity, I believe, is the Saskatchewan myth, which has played a central role in the province's history and will almost certainly be key to its future. The myth is deeply rooted in the founding of the province and, throughout the 20th century, politics in the province has sustained, nurtured and given expression to the myth. Therefore, identifying and trying to understand the role of myth in the province's history, provides a perspective to better judge the expectations the province has for itself and its future.

It is this notion of Saskatchewan on an abstract, emotional level that is the most fascinating. Frankly, it is not a consistently conscious sort of thing. It manifests itself as more a kind of underlying awareness of a special bond between the people and the community we call Saskatchewan. It is expressed in various ways: pride in the province; a deep attachment to the land; a strong sense of community; and, a powerful belief in the potential for a better future.

In and of themselves, those are not singular expressions of identity. Indeed, they are common to most, if not all, communities. But in the case of Saskatchewan, it somehow seems more powerful and poignant. That for each resident, or former resident, the word Saskatchewan carries with it a certain meaning that captures not merely a place, but a state of mind.

This state of mind is reflected in many ways, but most particularly in a powerful and unifying belief that Saskatchewan has unique qualities that are rooted in its history, its experience, and reflected in its people.

For example, Saskatchewan is made up of resilient, independent folk who adhere to strong communitarian values. This character is expressed in everything from the individual work ethic, to farm co-operatives, to Crown corporations to medicare. As a result, Saskatchewan is a place with a distinct political culture strongly grounded in individual initiative, a belief in the importance of private property and an instinct for social democracy. These individual and collective traits mean the province has produced people who carried with them the blend of personal qualities that makes Saskatchewan unique. It speaks to our character as people, and is often expressed in terms of determination, com-

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mitment and dedication.

The proof Saskatchewan is a special place is evidenced by the many people from the province who have made their mark more broadly—in Canada and the world. Whether it is politics, public service, business, academia, the arts, or my previous profession of journalism, Saskatchewan people seemed to be over-represented and have disproportionate influence based on the province's small population. To this day in Ottawa, there is still recognition of the so-called "Saskatchewan mafia" in the ranks of the federal government, an idea that traces back decades when the likes of Gordon Robertson, Tommy Shoyama and Al Johnson became influential figures in the shaping of Canadian public policy. The same tradition was carried on by Gerald Bouey and Gordon Thiessen, who both served distinguished periods as Governors of the Bank of Canada, and who both called Saskatchewan home. The same is true in the corporate world, certainly in neighbouring Alberta, where for decades the senior ranks of the oil and gas sector have been populated by numerous Saskatchewan expatriates. The examples are numerous, but a few include Charles Fischer, Murray Edwards, Bob Reid, Bob Pierce, the Seaman Brothers and the late Bud McCaig.

And the Saskatchewan influence extends more broadly. For example, two years ago, the deputy minister of Finance and I went to New York for a series of post-budget meetings. One session was a lunch with the senior management of Merrill Lynch, and two of the twelve members of the management team came from Saskatchewan.

But, there is an inverse to the assertion Saskatchewan is a special place that has produced special people. By definition the province at some level has failed those who had to leave to find opportunity and a better life elsewhere. In that sense, the expatriates might reflect admirable Saskatchewan qualities, but they are also evidence of something more negative. The fact that one of Saskatchewan's most noteworthy exports through the decades has been its people, is not an entirely happy or positive story for the province. This conflict between the notion Saskatchewan is a special place and the fact so many of its people have left, is troubling and inconsistent with the belief of Saskatchewan as a province that is somehow greater than its reality.

Although I lived in Saskatchewan until nine years ago, it wasn't until I left that I started to seriously reflect on my home province's psycholog-

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ical and historical underpinnings. In fact, I didn't feel a strong sense of my Saskatchewan identity and the whole idea of what it means to be from Saskatchewan, until I left and was able to think about it in perhaps a more detached, dispassionate way. More specifically, what is the source of the way Saskatchewan people think of themselves and their province.

I have come to believe that at the core of the province's identity, and the way Saskatchewan people look at the province's history and their future as a community, is the myth of Saskatchewan. The myth is rooted deeply in the province and that it has been and remains an essential part of its social, political and economic fabric. As a consequence, the Saskatchewan myth has shaped the province's past and, very likely, will similarly influence its future. Based on an interpretation of Saskatchewan's history and the development of its political economy, it becomes clear that the myth is the essential force that drives Saskatchewan's economic and political discourse. Pursuit of the myth has fuelled false expectations and, as a result, the province is often frustrated by its past and burdened by its expectations for the future.

The Role of Myth

How does one define the Saskatchewan myth? Where did it come from? How is it expressed? Why is it important? What role does it play in the public life of the province?

Before trying to answer those questions, it is important to note that asserting a Saskatchewan myth exists is not, in any way, a pejorative statement. It does not imply anything derogatory about the province or diminish it in any fashion. In fact, myth plays a necessary and often positive role in the lives of people everywhere.

As Rollo May, the American psychologist who studied the role of myth in the emotional lives of people states: "Myth is a way of making sense in a senseless world. Myths are the narrative patterns that give significance to our existence."² Another way to look at myth is as an idea or belief that might not be true, but is real because people believe it to be so. Mark Schorer describes myths as "the instruments by which we continually struggle to make our experiences intelligible to ourselves. A myth is a large controlling image that gives philosophical meaning to the facts of ordinary life; that is, which has organizing value for experience."³

In that sense, myth is important to collective identity and the forma-

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tion of community. It is an essential ingredient to a sense of belonging and a means to understand how socio-economic institutions reflect the myth. It is a common belief that all members of a defined group share by virtue of the fact the idea itself is a defining feature of the community. As Benedict Anderson has argued in his study of the origins and nature of nationalism and identity, we live in “imagined communities.”⁴ We feel connected to each other within a specific community, province or nation, even though that the vast majority have never met and probably never will. Why? Because we believe we share a common past, have intertwined interests and we face a shared destiny. We are joined by what we believe about ourselves to be true. This is clearly reflected in Saskatchewan. People feel connected as a community by their shared history—whether expressed in achievement, suffering or hope—and the conviction their individual futures are entwined. Ernest Renan defines it as a “spiritual principle” on which the soul of a community is made up of the past and present. Says Renan: “One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of remembrance; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the heritage we hold common.”⁵

Given those emotional bonds, it is only logical that myth should play an important role in our lives. Quite frankly, we need to believe because it gives us inspiration to seek a better life for us all. Indeed, such is the lifeblood of politics, and pursuit of the Saskatchewan myth has been the essential ingredient shaping Saskatchewan’s economic and political debate.

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So what is the Saskatchewan myth? It is a belief deeply embedded in our history and our attachment to the land and has evolved through our experiences of the 20th century. Its roots can be traced to the National Policy, the settlement of the West and the calculated political project of securing the Canadian nation. For that to happen, Saskatchewan had to be positioned as a place where people from around the world could fulfill their dreams. It mattered not whether it was true, an exaggeration, a deception or a blend of the three. The forces of nationalism were such that settling the province, establishing a farm economy and society as part of a national east-west economy were more important than pure

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truth. Therefore, the myth stated that Saskatchewan was a promised land of abundance and opportunity for all. It persists today in the belief that Saskatchewan has a much greater economic and social potential than what it has achieved.

In 1905, Saskatchewan faced incredibly high and, I would argue, inherently unrealistic expectations. There was a palpable sense of a great future, of a rapidly growing province that would take its place as an economic leader in Canada. Such faith in Saskatchewan's future did not seem misplaced. The province was playing a pivotal role in National Policy. The settlement of the prairies was the final piece in securing the nation's sovereignty—in both political and economic terms—as a bulwark against US expansionism. Belief in the promised land myth was captured in the words of Walter Scott, the province's first premier, who said: "Just as sure as the sun shines there will be within this province alone some day a population running into the tens of millions."⁶

I believe the myth itself has evolved and been adapted through the decades. Just as its origins were political in nature as part of the pursuit of nationalism, it has remained political in that it is the source of motivation inspiring the public debate of modern-day Saskatchewan.

It has been shaped by the major episodic periods in the province's history: the treaties that established a legal framework for relations with First Nations; the flood of immigration that quickly built Saskatchewan's society and economy; the trauma of the Dirty Thirties; the rise of the social gospel and CCF, the establishment of Medicare; the sense of economic underachievement relative to other western provinces; and, the on-going debate between the role of the state and market in the province's development.

The Early Days

The idea of Saskatchewan as a place of economic opportunity was an essential ingredient of National Policy and was reflected in the federal government's immigration literature of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The fact there were starkly conflicting views of the region as a frontier suitable for mass agricultural settlement—chiefly between John Palliser and Henry Hind on one side and John Macoun on the other—did not inhibit the creation of the promised land myth. The imperative of nationhood required that the federal government seize upon

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Macoun's florid depiction of what became Saskatchewan as a place of such promise that its potential seemed endless. He called what was to become Saskatchewan "the flower garden of the North West."⁷

In the first three decades of the 20th century there was very good reason to believe the myth. With the offer of 160 acres of free land, and government immigration propaganda spread across the US and Europe luring people to a golden land on the prairies, immigrants flooded into Saskatchewan. This province was the place to be in Canada. From 1901 to the 1930s the province's population grew more than tenfold, rising from 91,000 to 931,000, making Saskatchewan the third most populous province in the nation, behind only Quebec and Ontario.

But as Douglas Owram has written, the image and promise of prairie life in Saskatchewan, as depicted by those who wanted to lure settlers, often bore little resemblance to reality:

If the great strength of the expansionists was their ability to evoke an image of the future, their great failure was their inability to maintain any sort of relationship between the myth and the much harsher and more prosaic reality of frontier life... The problem was that, as with most utopias, this paradise was unattainable; inevitably those who believed it were disillusioned.⁸

Still people from Europe, the US and central Canada flocked to the province. Therefore, the settlement of Saskatchewan, the creation of its society and economy based on the family farm and the infrastructure to support it were established rapidly in the span of 30 years.

During that period, a collectivist grassroots culture of the province took root as individual farmers sought means to offset the political, economic and market power of larger external interests. To achieve the province's true potential of a promised land required the means for farmers to take greater control of their economic destiny. The notion of external control, whether it was the railway, large grain companies, banks, a discriminatory tariff structure, or a political system tilted to interests of central Canada, became the source of inspiration for populist politics and farmer-led co-operative enterprises. In those days, achieving the myth required that we change the terms of trade within the existing economic system. It meant that abundance and prosperity for

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all was possible by putting more market power in the hands of farmers.

This pursuit of the myth in the early 20th century very much shaped the political debate in Saskatchewan and the public policy outcomes. The need to create market and political power for farmers led to initiatives such as the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association, the Saskatchewan Co-Operative Elevator Company, the Grain Growers Grain Company and eventually the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. At the political level, the anti-establishment impulse was reflected in populist political movements such as the Grange, the Non-Partisan League and the Progressives, which fought against the National Policy's tariff system that protected central Canadian manufacturing from lower-cost US imports, often at the expense of prairie farmers.

The depth of the alienation caused by tariff policy could not have been more dramatically expressed than, when campaigning for prime minister, Wilfrid Laurier said: "I denounce the policy of protection as bondage—yea bondage; and I refer to bondage in the same manner in which American slavery was bondage." Inflammatory words indeed, but language that came to reflect a growing sense of grievance in Saskatchewan.

This was the period when immigrants flooded into Saskatchewan in the belief a better life awaited them. For all intents and purposes, the province's social and economic foundation was established during this promised land period when the widely dispersed family farm economy was rapidly established. At the time, few seriously questioned whether the promise of Saskatchewan was sustainable or even true, and as immigrants continued to stream into the province, the economy continued to grow. The belief was that the challenges facing Saskatchewan were largely the result of a system controlled elsewhere—whether economically or politically. By putting more power in the hands of farmers, a more prosperous future was within reach.

But was it? As early as 1910 there were some voices wondering about the sustainability of a one-crop family farm economy. In its annual report, the Saskatchewan Elevator Commission stated:

The grain is the gold of the province, the gold that is divided between the growers and all other classes. Upon the grain falls the largest share of the burden of the railways,

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telegraphs, telephones, roads, etc. of the province; of the educational and religious institutions; of the professional classes; and of the machinery of administration and government... The grain of the province needs to be a large and rich crop to be able to pay these tolls, bear these burdens and give the growers a return for their labour, and a profit for their investment.¹⁰

In retrospect, it's reasonable to conclude that the period when the Saskatchewan myth was at its strongest—that is during the first three decades of the 20th century—was a time when the foundation was laid for the social, economic and psychological challenges that the province has struggled with ever since. In fact, one can argue that the last seven decades of the 20th century for Saskatchewan were an ongoing and often frustrating attempt to reconcile the psychology of the province rooted in founding myth of Saskatchewan with the often more sobering reality of Saskatchewan.

The 1930s

The folly of the myth during the settlement years became evident in the economic and social trauma wrought by the twin calamities of drought and the Great Depression of the 1930s. No event, or era, has had such a profound impact on both the province's psychology and political economy. What the 1930s demonstrated in the harshest of terms was the vulnerability of an economy built on the export staple of wheat. At the same time, it raised serious questions about the rapid settlement of the land as part of the National Policy's Dominion Lands Policy, at times without serious study or thought given to the agricultural potential of the land being settled. Questions about Saskatchewan's agricultural potential were aptly expressed in a 1937 government of Saskatchewan brief to the Royal Commission on Dominion Provincial Relations. It stated:

Thirty per cent of Saskatchewan soils may be considered either first class or moderately good wheat lands and a further 25 per cent as fair for the purposes of wheat production. Forty-five per cent of the settled area is poor or very poor wheat land, incapable, over a period of years and with normal prices for wheat, of yielding sufficient to cover the

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costs of production.

This was the same year—1937—that, according to the Department of Municipal Affairs, 85% of the province's arable lands failed to produce a marketable crop.¹¹

Faced with the realization that much of the promised land of Macdonald's and Laurier's National Policy had turned into a dust bowl, Saskatchewan politics had to recreate the myth in a new form. Already alienated by a sense of external control, the social and economic effects of the 1930s provided the ingredients for a new political statement of the Saskatchewan myth. It was delivered through a blend of religious and political rhetoric in the form of the social gospel. The rise of preacher politics, which today is so often condemned, was a welcome force in Saskatchewan of the 1930s. Church ministers such as J.S. Woodsworth, Salem Bland and T.C. Douglas became the voice for building what they described as a "New Jerusalem" through the engagement of Christian gospel in the political life of Saskatchewan and Canada. They expressed socialism and Christianity as being the secular and sacred visions of the same philosophy. In the words of Douglas:

A new economic system is only a means to an end and not an end in itself ... We're desirous of building a more just and secure economy; but we are conscious of the fact that when we have improved the economic lot of mankind, we have only begun the much greater task of building a new society... After all, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesses"; life at its best consists of spiritual values such as regard for truth, a love of beauty and a seeking after righteousness.¹²

The potent power from the fusion of social gospel and politics was undeniable, particularly at a time when Saskatchewan desperately needed hope and the inspiration of myth. The rise of the CCF became a crucial juncture in the province's psychology. As a political movement, Douglas and the CCF were able to keep the myth alive when, by all measures, it should have withered, died and been blown away in the dust storms of the Dirty Thirties. From that point forward, the politics of the province have been an ongoing effort to sustain the belief

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that Saskatchewan is a place of much greater economic potential and abundance.

In many respects, the rise of the social gospel movement flowed naturally from the years of agrarian activism. The church played a pivotal role in the pioneer settlement of the province as people sought the emotional comfort provided by religion as they struggled to establish themselves on the great, often lonely expanse of the prairies. One of the best definitions of religion or faith is what a person does with his or her solitude. If that is the case, then the solitude that came with the settlement of Saskatchewan made issues of faith and religion central to the lives of the people who knew intimately the meaning and emotional effect of being alone with nature.

There was no escaping the importance of religion to the public life of the province. It was an undercurrent to the moralism of the Progressive movement, which sought to raise politics to a higher ethical level.¹³ As Norman Lambert, of the Canadian Council of Agriculture said in those days: “hand in hand with the organized farmers’ movement on the prairies has gone religion and social work.” In 1919, the *Regina Leader* described the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association as a “religious, social, educational, political and commercial organization all in one, and in the truest and deepest meanings of these several terms.”¹⁴

So, in that sense, the rise of the social gospel and the CCF were the logical expressions of a sensitivity already deeply rooted in the Saskatchewan culture. What Douglas succeeded in doing was convincing people that to achieve the Saskatchewan dream a new economic and social order had to be put in place. By transforming the province from capitalism to socialism, the myth of a New Jerusalem could be achieved and reflected in a greater future of economic security, growth and social justice for all.

In economic terms, the practical expression of this more secure, moral and prosperous future was through the CCF notion of social ownership. In effect, the application of social ownership under the CCF amounted to the extension of collective ownership, as practiced in co-operatives, to government ownership. As Al Johnson, who worked for the Douglas government and has written extensively on it has stated:

The remedy to these deficiencies of capitalism—its com-

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petitive ethic and its economic performance—lay in social ownership. Here indeed was the magic of nationalization—it solved simultaneously a problem in ethics and a problem in economics.¹⁵

This political union of righteousness and economics during the CCF years changed the essence of the how the province saw itself. Instead of a promised land of economic opportunity and abundance, the myth became more rooted in social idealism. The central idea of CCF doctrine was that capitalism was morally wrong because it promoted values such as competition, individual success and greed, values inconsistent with a moral code that said, because we live in a society, our interests are intertwined and we must put the interests of the group ahead of the individual. The political and economic extension of this moral code was the notion of a planned economy, where the crucial factor was not the making of profit, but the supply of human need. But at the same time, the CCF held out the hope that through a planned economy and state ownership, the province could achieve much greater economic development and diversification. The Douglas government came to power recognizing the vulnerability of an economy excessively dependent on grain production and addressed the need for a more diverse economy. Through government ownership, the province would be able to develop other sectors and also keep more of the economic benefits in Saskatchewan.

The Douglas CCF period has cast a long shadow over the province's history and identity. The most important factor was psychological, both internally, in terms of how Saskatchewan viewed itself, and externally in the way others saw the province. The CCF years allowed the province to see itself as unique, as something of an economic and social laboratory, where innovation and new ideas were being tested. In many ways there was a sense of pride in that the province was taking its own independent path. More broadly, the idea of Saskatchewan as unique carried with it other baggage. As its decline continued, in relative terms with other parts of Canada, the socialist label became something of a stigma and a reason many others attached to the province's lagging economic fortunes.

The fact was the province continued to rapidly lose population until the early 1950s, when the decline was finally arrested and population

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growth slowly returned by the mid-1950s. With the decline of the rural economy and society that had been established as part of the National Policy, and the promised land a faint memory, a new political construct of the Saskatchewan myth was required. It was built around the notion of Saskatchewan as a province of social justice and economic fairness. If no great optimism were to be drawn from economic reality, then comfort could be found in other achievements, such as rural electrification and telephone service. It didn't matter there was no great significance to Saskatchewan reaching those public infrastructure goals when it did. Even though Alberta succeeded more quickly, and Manitoba at approximately the same time, for political reasons they were held out as significant and noteworthy achievements by a trailblazing government.¹⁶

The Myth and Medicare

The next pivotal period that has played a central role in sustaining the myth was the introduction of Medicare. No issue or political event has done more to define Saskatchewan's identity to its own people and, in many cases, to others outside the province. Psychologically it came at a critical period. By the early 1960s, the province needed something to renew faith in itself. Canada's first, government-funded, universally accessible system of health insurance to cover doctors and hospital costs became the perfect vehicle to breathe new life into the Saskatchewan myth.

It was a time when the CCF government hegemony was showing signs of weakening, with Douglas himself moving to federal politics. The province's economy, while solid, had failed to make the significant progress towards diversification the CCF had promised. Attempts at socially owned commercial enterprises, particularly those in competitive markets during the Douglas government's first term, had met with little success. Again, while the 1950s were a period of steady economic growth for Saskatchewan, the postwar years were a time of tremendous economic growth across North America. And more significantly, during this period the province's population slipped behind British Columbia, Alberta and eventually Manitoba. The decline of Saskatchewan in the Canadian context continued.

So a social policy initiative like Medicare, where Saskatchewan was seen as blazing its own trail, helped instill more deeply the myth of

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Saskatchewan as a special place. It mattered little that the idea of government-funded medical care was not radical. Indeed, municipal medical care was common across the province with 107 municipalities, 59 villages and 14 towns employing 180 doctors on either a full- or part-time basis by 1939. As well, municipally owned union hospitals dated back to 1916. And government-funded health insurance had been a subject of debate and federal-provincial negotiation since the mid-1940s.

In fact, there are some who argue the true father of Medicare was not T.C. Douglas, but a little-known municipal politician named Matthew Anderson, a reeve in the town of Bulyea. As early as the mid-1920s, Anderson proposed comprehensive medical insurance paid for from municipal taxes. In 1933, the urban municipal councillors called on the provincial government to immediately put in place a system of publicly funded hospital and medical insurance. And in 1938, Anderson introduced a municipal health plan that became a model replicated by other local governments.¹⁷ Moreover, the idea of a national government-funded health insurance scheme was proposed by the Rowell-Sirois Commission in 1940 and in 1944 the federal government proposed a system of Medicare in its Throne Speech.

So far from being a radical idea, Medicare was very much in the mainstream of the political discourse for years. But clearly, the Douglas and later Woodrow Lloyd government in the 1960–62 period showed its commitment to the principle of equal health treatment and demonstrated the political courage to implement it during what was a tense period. But over the years since, Medicare as a political initiative has grown far beyond its true significance as a ground-breaking event. As such it has woven itself deeply into the myth of Saskatchewan as a special place.

Modern Myth and Reality

The 1960s, the defeat of the CCF-NDP government after two uninterrupted decades in power, and the arrival of the Ross Thatcher Liberal government marked an important turning point in the province's history and sense of its own identity. It was the political debate inspired by Thatcher that ushered in the period of the modern Saskatchewan myth. There are, I believe, two key elements to this period, which extends to this day. One is the sense of Saskatchewan as an economic underachiev-

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er, a province that has not been able to secure the kind of economic and industrial development it should, that it consistently fails to reach its true potential. The other is the social and economic reality faced by Aboriginal people in the province. While some progress has been made, they remain largely an underclass out of the economic mainstream of Saskatchewan life.¹⁸

As a political figure, Thatcher changed the terms of the public debate to focus on economic underdevelopment and the plight of Aboriginal people. The 1960s became the period when Thatcher fed the myth of a greater future by advancing the argument that the end of a socialist government, a more welcoming attitude to free enterprise and foreign investment—particularly from the US—would unlock our true economic potential and the myth would finally be achieved. Just as social ownership had failed to deliver the economic growth and benefits the CCF had promised, private investment, both foreign and domestic, under the Liberal government would turn Saskatchewan into the economic rival of Alberta. In Thatcher's words:

This government believes that a greater investment of private capital in Saskatchewan is the one step that is vital in the achievement of every economic and social goal we hold dear. We passionately believe that only private enterprise methods will achieve the much needed investment.¹⁹

The primary symbol of this economic debate from the 1960s through to the end of the 1980s was potash development. Thatcher talked aggressively about Saskatchewan's potash wealth rivaling that of oil in Alberta and during his time in office there was spectacular growth in potash investment and development. But ultimately, Thatcher's approach to achieving the myth of a much greater economic future through private investment proved unsuccessful and Saskatchewan's relative decline in the West continued.

In terms of the challenges faced by the Aboriginal population, Thatcher was able to at least focus more public attention on the issue. "I consider few problems facing the present government to be in more urgent need of a solution," Thatcher told a Canadian Club audience in Regina shortly after taking over as premier in 1964.²⁰ While his arguably paternalistic and assimilationist approach was misguided, no one

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can doubt his commitment to improving the situation faced by the Aboriginal population. Moreover, it was Thatcher who, more than any other premier, personally and forcefully put the issue on the public agenda. Its importance as an issue was reflected equally by Allan Blakeney's New Democratic Party government, which embarked on an aggressive strategy to bring Aboriginal people into the economic mainstream, in large part through the creation of the Department of Northern Saskatchewan.

Based on the context set by Thatcher, the quest for economic development became the core issue in the 1970s and 1980s around which pursuit of the myth revolved. In its 1971 "New Deal for People," the Blakeney government held out that a greater future for Saskatchewan hinged on a return to social ownership. While increased investment and development was important, what Saskatchewan needed was to capture much more of its existing economic rent by taking greater public control of resources and development. As a 1972 memo from the government's central planning board to Blakeney stated:

It should be noted that Saskatchewan faces a major decision as to the degree of uniqueness and isolation of its economic development approach ... if we are to be other than a depopulated province, limited to the export of raw materials to more developed regions, we must strive to become a net exporter of various finished commodities... Clearly if we wish to bring about these developments, we shouldn't be in a situation where large multi-national corporations can arbitrarily make decisions which make sense to them with respect to their own corporate interest, but which make little economic sense for Saskatchewan, and which, in fact, work harshly against the development of the province.²¹

The notion of a fair return on our resources became the policy underpinning of the Blakeney government, both in terms of its confrontations with industry—particularly private potash companies—and the federal government in battles over taxation and control of natural resources in the mid-to-late 1970s. During the 1970s, the Crown corporation sector became the instrument to achieve both the objectives of provincial control and ensuring more of the economic benefits from resource develop-

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ment remained in the province. In effect, achieving the Saskatchewan myth was very much about government ownership as the means to unlock and retain the great resource wealth of potash, oil, gas, uranium and the northern forests.

That was, at least, until the arrival of Grant Devine and his Progressive Conservative government in 1982 that crushed the NDP in a landslide victory. In many respects, nothing better captures the essence of the Saskatchewan myth as a political expression than Devine's exhortation that: "There's so much more we can be." Those seven words, in many respects, distill the myth to its most basic concept. Other than perhaps Douglas, no other Saskatchewan politician made people believe in myth more than Devine. It might have been a fleeting period that lasted only a year or two after his government's election, but it was intense.

With the belief of the potential for a much greater future deeply embedded in the Saskatchewan psychology, Devine was able to tap into it politically by making people believe they could will the Saskatchewan promised land to be true. It required unbridled optimism, an open-for-business attitude, and, as it turned out, a government willing to pour huge amounts of public money into joint ventures with private sector partners. The result was twofold: not insignificant new investment and development, but huge public debt; and, after a period of population growth, a return to the decades-long plague of out migration.

The trauma of massive annual deficits and mounting debt, resulting from Devine's pursuit of the myth, forced us through a period of reflection and more modest politically inspired expectations during the Roy Romanow government years of the 1990s. The depth of the debt and overspending crisis was captured by the Saskatchewan Financial Management Review Commission, which was established to do an independent review of the province's fiscal situation when the Romanow government took power. With the province's debt in 1991 at \$12.04 billion, the commission stated:

Saskatchewan faces a difficult situation... Government spending has been at levels which cannot be maintained based on the province's revenue generating potential. To re-establish a more secure financial position, the government must bring its spending back under control.²²

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The fiscal crisis led to major policy shifts by the Romanow government. The most dramatic were controversial reforms to the public health care system that resulted in a rationalization of service. Measures included the outright closure 52 rural hospitals or their transformation from acute care into primary “wellness” centres. But to this day the political pursuit of the myth remains central to the public discourse, whether expressed in the Lorne Calvert government’s national public relations campaign of Saskatchewan’s great potential, to conferences such as the one staged by Saskatchewan Agrivision in 2003 that suggest Saskatchewan can double its population,²³ to the presence of a political opposition that draws its strength from the continuing sense of Saskatchewan as an economic underachiever.

Conclusion

So, when viewed in the context of the ebbs and flows of Saskatchewan’s economic and political history, the role of myth comes into greater focus. It becomes evident that not only is the political debate inspired by belief in the Saskatchewan myth, but the political discourse itself sustains the myth by often feeding false expectations. Admittedly, the belief in, and pursuit of, a better future is the lifeblood of politics and progress. But in the case of Saskatchewan, I believe it has often distorted perceptions, prevented the province from fully coming to terms, and being comfortable with, both its more modest and realistic potential as well as the difficult challenges it faces.

In particular, pursuit of the myth has been a huge inhibiting factor in addressing what I believe to be unquestionably the most important social and economic issue confronting the province—the situation faced by our Aboriginal peoples. No one, since Saskatchewan became a province in 1905, has been more excluded from pursuit of the myth than Aboriginal peoples. And today, nothing is more incongruous with belief in the Saskatchewan myth or its attainment, than the social and economic reality of an Aboriginal population as a growing underclass in what is a low population growth scenario for years to come. The demographic profile of the Aboriginal population, coupled with its continued economic and social marginalization from the mainstream of Saskatchewan life, paints a clear picture of the challenge facing the province. The reality was aptly expressed in an analysis done for

The Saskatchewan Myth

Saskatchewan Institute of Public Policy by Janice Stokes. She wrote:

Recent census results and projected demographic trends for Saskatchewan are troubling. An aging non-Aboriginal population and a very young Aboriginal population are demographically polarizing the province, and related statistical trends indicate that Saskatchewan will experience arduous challenges as a result of its population features. Demographics in Saskatchewan are negatively affecting the condition of the workforce, health care system, education and race relations, threatening long-term socio-economic sustainability in the province.²⁴

I would argue Saskatchewan must escape the clutches of its myth by recognizing and accepting its limits and being truthful with itself. Specifically, that means building a broad and deep consensus with Aboriginal peoples that makes bringing them into the mainstream of Saskatchewan life the single most important issue in the years and decades ahead. It will require uncommon commitment, unanimity of purpose and leadership at every level and among all sectors, whether it's the political, Aboriginal, business, farming, academic or labour groups that make up Saskatchewan society.

To fail in that urgent endeavour will mean that pursuit of the Saskatchewan myth will remain as illusory and deceptive as ever.

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8. Van Herk, “How the West was Divided,” 45.
9. J.C. Herbert Emery and Ronald D. Kneebone, *Should Alberta and Saskatchewan Unite? Examining Proposals for Closer Co-operation—From Maintaining the Status Quo to Political Union* (Toronto: C.D. Howe Institute Commentary, 2003).

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4. Regina *Leader* (October 5, 1909).
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6. The other noteworthy data from the 1906 census were the sex and age breakdown. Men not only dominated Saskatchewan society—there were roughly three men to every two women (1.46 to 1)—but two of every three men were single. It was also a young population. Two-thirds were under 45, including a large number of people in their prime working years. This preponderance of single, young men would characterize the Saskatchewan work force into the 1930s. *Ibid.*, xi–xviii, 81–85; W.P. Ward, “Population Growth in Western Canada, 1896–1905” in J. Foster (ed.), *The Developing West* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press 1983), 174–75.
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8. *Ibid.*, 79.
9. *Ibid.*, 78–81.
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5. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 52.
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8. See Paul Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics," *American Political Science Review* 94 (June 2000): 261–62.
9. Compare Ward and Smith, *Jimmy Gardiner*, 184 and 215.
10. See Robert I. McLaren, *The Saskatchewan Practice of Public Administration in Historical Perspective* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1998), chapter 5.
11. Malcolm G. Taylor, *Health Insurance and Canadian Public Policy: The Seven Decisions that Created the Canadian Health Insurance System* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978). Two of seven chapters devoted to "decisions" have a Saskatchewan provenance: Chapter Two, "The Saskatchewan Hospital Services Plan: The Policy Decision To Go It Alone" and Chapter Five, "The Saskatchewan Medical Care Insurance Plan: The Decision to Pioneer Again." Quotations in this and the following paragraph are drawn from Chapter Two.
12. The metaphor of progression is pervasive. See, for example, C. Stuart Houston, *Steps*

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 We do not agree when it is said sometimes that the surrender of taxing power necessarily involves the loss of authority. For some years now the Dominion government and the provinces have had tax agreements. Under those tax agreements the provinces have surrendered certain taxes and have received in return certain sums of money ... [T]hese tax agreements have in no way restricted the capacity of the provinces to serve human needs; as a matter of fact we believe it has enhanced the power of the provinces to satisfy human needs.
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 15. Jean Larmour, "The Douglas Government's Changing Emphasis on Public, Private and Co-operative Development in Saskatchewan, 1944–1961," in J. William Brennan (ed.), *Building the Co-operative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1984), 165.
 16. *Ibid.*, 166.
 17. *Ibid.*, 164.
 18. *Ibid.*, 177.
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2. *Toronto Globe*, March 13, 1905, as quoted in John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980), 132.
3. Walter Scott quoted in Gordon L. Barnhart, "Walter Scott," in Gordon L. Barnhart (ed.), *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004), 11, 13.
4. Gordon L. Barnhart, *Building for the Future: A Photo Journal of Saskatchewan's Legislative Building* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2002), 16. *Images of a Province: Symbols of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Government of Saskatchewan, 2002), 51.
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 32. *Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, Vol. 3*, 96–97.
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 37. *Ibid.*, 151.
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 46. Archer, *Saskatchewan*, 275. A.W. Johnson, *Dream No Little Dreams: A Biography of the Douglas Government of Saskatchewan, 1944-1961* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). Pat Rediger, *The Crowns: A History of Public Enterprise in Saskatchewan* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 2004).
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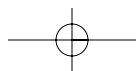
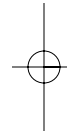
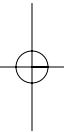
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