

# On Breaking a Wild Young Colt: Associative Intelligence, Alternative Journalism and the Cultural Mutualisation of the Canadian Prairies

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This study presents documentary evidence for the importance of journalism in the co-operative movement's historic fortunes. Theoretically, it challenges narrow conceptions that restrict co-operative education to board training and member / public relations. Instead, it suggests a more democratic conceptualisation that includes alternative journalism. Empirically, the history of co-operation's rapid ascent in the Canadian province of Saskatchewan provides a good opportunity for assessing alternative media contributions. This paper therefore expands the documentary record of co-operation's cultural history on the Canadian Prairies, illustrating that, by opening new channels of communication, education and social mobilisation, alternative journalists cultivated mutualist values, attitudes and practical knowledge, while enhancing movement learning, organisation and action. This project of cultural mutualisation drove movement expansion across the Great Plains through the first half of the twentieth century.

*If co-operatives, co-operators and their movements are to accomplish anything distinctive and permanent, they must ultimately be concerned with ideas not just groceries and interest rates though they too are important (MacPherson, 2002: paragraph 3).*

## Introduction: Ideas Matter. Education Matters. Journalism Matters

Education is the democratic engine of co-operation's historic advance (Chapman, 2012; Crewe, 2001; Fairbairn, 2001; Kristjanson et al, 1964; MacPherson, 2007). Indeed, the world movement's *Statement on the Co-operative Identity* constitutionalises this democratic premise as its sixth principle.<sup>1</sup> The Rochdale Pioneers' investments of 2.5 per cent of annual surplus to fund members' "intellectual improvement" are salutary. These poor weavers thus secured a book library, a reading room, newspaper subscriptions and the staging of lectures (Fairbairn, 1994). Through education, they overcame illiteracy, innumeracy, class society's emphasis on competitive individualism and working class inferiority, and investors' entrenched hegemony over business and development models.<sup>2</sup> Co-operative education has similarly empowered generations of farmers, fishers, workers and many others with the know-how, confidence and organisation to democratise economic life. For over a century and a half, their movement has flourished across diverse sectors and socio-cultural and geographic borders (Birchall, 1997).

In the struggle to cultivate co-operative consciousness, the means of mass communications played a significant role. Alternative journalism's counter-hegemonic commitments have frequently provided popular classes with effective alternatives to the investor-owned media's worldview; reorienting them to view economic life through the prism of their own democratic interests, values and organisational alternatives. For example, the critical and reconstructive conceptions offered by the trade union newspaper, *The Pioneer*, and William King's *The Co-operator* tutored early English co-operation (Birchall, 1997; Findlay, 2004). A worker co-operative of journalists linked to the *Manchester Guardian* helped launch the movement's first national newspaper, the *Co-operative News* (Fairbairn, 1994), still publishing over 140 years later. England's alternative press thus helped spark world co-operation and continues to sustain its cultural momentum.<sup>3</sup>

Alternative journalism thus had a significant role to play in cultivating the early movement's 'associative intelligence,'

the belief that there is a special kind of knowing that emerges when people work together effectively; a conviction that people through working together could learn skills that would make collective behaviour more economically rewarding, socially beneficial and personally satisfying (MacPherson, 2002: 9).

Moreover, this paper argues that alternative journalism has played a much wider, recurring role in furthering and legitimating the movement's associative intelligence. Focusing on the Canadian province of Saskatchewan, it illustrates how agrarian press agitations structured the cultural revolution in economic thinking that spurred Western Canada's greatest co-operative achievements. It traces the formative context and key turning points in this movement's alternative press field as it challenged the interpretive monopoly of the early party and commercial press. This is followed by an overview of the field's structure and significance by the mid-twentieth century.

## **Media Revolt: From Colonial Hegemony to Co-operative Contention**

The grain growers' campaigns in the first three decades of the twentieth century provide the most obvious examples of alternative journalism for co-operative mobilising. *The Grain Growers Guide* (established 1908) followed by *The Progressive*, later renamed *The Western Producer* (1923), had deep roots in settler dissatisfaction with the party and commercial press of the early frontier. The formative experiences of this agrarian press created momentum for the rise of co-operative radio broadcasting under the call letters CJBR (1927). The grain growers' alternative press also supported consumer co-operative and credit union expansion, momentum later reinforced through the development of sector-specific publications (*The Consumer Cooperator* in 1939 and *The Credit Union Way* in 1946). Subsequent decades saw alternative journalism in the form of documentary film and book production — each sponsored by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

The early agrarian press played an important role in women's inclusion and social emancipation, with the consumer co-operative press further broadening their participation and expanding urban co-operation. Socialist perspectives also loomed large in the early agrarian press, creating the conditions for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in 1932. The Fabians' provincial party publication, *The New Era* (later *The Commonwealth*) (1936), also contributed to a counter-hegemonic culture, with co-operative philosophy at its centre. Finally, an important consequence of the four-decade cultivation of intensive and ever-widening co-operative culture was the post-war commitment to continual "intellectual improvement" through increasingly formalised investments in adult education.

From the late nineteenth-century origins of the Western Canadian farmers' revolt, its leaders understood the press's importance. As state-chartered settlement companies opened the North West Territories to immigration after 1856, boosterism left an enduring distrust of state and commercial propaganda. Settler disappointment soon turned to dissent (Owram, 1980).

Westerners' early experience of Canadian Confederation (1867) was of an internal colony and captive market. Politically, they lacked representative government on the Prairie frontier until Manitoba became a province in 1870 and Saskatchewan and Alberta were established in 1905. They felt helpless and voiceless in the face of their territories' unilateral annexation and rule by appointed Lieutenant Governors. Economically, the National Policy's tariff wall protected Eastern capitalists at Western farmers' expense.<sup>4</sup> While Prairie farmers were forced to 'sell cheap' on unprotected world markets they had to 'buy dear' from protected interests in Toronto and Montréal (Conway, 2006). Theirs was both a class struggle against the grain traders and a struggle against the regional disparities deeply rooted in the Confederation project. These intertwined contradictions formed the historical and politico-economic context for Prairie Co-operation.

First Nations and Métis grievances also mounted as Canada prepared to open their homelands to settlers.<sup>5</sup> The Canadian state threatened the Métis' land holdings and traditional way of life with its promise of a transcontinental railroad and cheap land. In the context of the 1869-70 Red River resistance, in present day Winnipeg, Métis leader Louis Riel wrote in Montréal's *Le Nouveau Monde* that "the Canadian Confederation is for Manitoba and the North-West a fraud and a deceit" (Cited in Siggins, 1995: 224).

Conversely, the Red River colony's *Nor'Wester* was a powerful advocate for Canadian annexation. Under John Schultz it would become an aggressive champion of Anglo-Saxon imperialist bigotry.<sup>6</sup> Indicative was an editorial in which he predicted "the native tribes of the country will fall back before the march of a superior intelligence" (Cited in Siggins, 1995: 80). This belligerence helps account for the decision of Riel's Provisional Government to suppress the paper during the Red River troubles, merging it with *The Red River Pioneer* to form *The New Nation*, the first alternative press in what was then the North West Territories (now Manitoba) (Manitoba, 2013).

Although Manitoba won provincial status, Riel's Provisional Government had executed an Orange man who uttered threats against their leader and Riel was forced into exile. Another indication of the continuing grievances across the territorial frontier and the press's consequent importance was the consideration Riel gave an 1873 Federal bribe of \$35,000 to leave the Territories:

it could buy the Métis a printing press. The importance of a newspaper doesn't escape Louis. The settlers of Saskatchewan could unite under the paper's banner in reading and writing its columns (Boyden, 2010: 49).

The first call for agrarian co-operation on these troubled territories was sounded by the Manitoba and North West Farmers' Union in 1883 and later by the Manitoba and North West Farmers' Co-operative and Protective Union (McCutcheon, 1976). In drawing up a farmers' bill of rights, they took their cue from Riel's successful agitation for representative government in Manitoba. Certainly, the underdeveloped frontier cultivated self-reliance, direct action and mutual aid amongst settlers. But the co-operative agitation began in the Territorial press. Ironically, Red River's *Nor'Wester* advocated for co-operatives and sparked the Union's formation (MacPherson, 1979). The co-operative model was a practical alternative to Confederation capitalism's failures to meet the settlers' wide-ranging and pressing needs. It also appealed to their democratic aspirations. However, early agitations faded in the mid 1880s as troubles followed the expanding Western frontier (McCutcheon, 1976).

As the railway, settlement and conflict moved west, into the territory of present-day Saskatchewan, Riel was summoned from exile to lead the Métis resistance. Prince Albert Farmers' Union Secretary William Henry Jackson became Riel's personal secretary. This was an index of the farm movement's embeddedness in the Western protest tradition and its early overlap with the resistance. Charged with securing representative government for the Territories, Jackson overcame the Orange-Tory press's vilification of Riel during the Red River resistance (1869-70). Riel had been demonised as a "cut-throat, an outlaw, bold braggart and indeed the embodiment of all that is evil". Indeed, Jackson now saw himself as a "peacemaker between the aboriginal and immigrant populations of the North-West" (Cited in Smith, 2007: 11).

The campaign for provincial status in present-day Saskatchewan spanned the next quarter century, descending into armed struggle in 1885 as the Canadian government put down the Métis-led North-West Rebellion and hanged Riel and eight of his Indian compatriots while Gabriel Dumont and William Henry Jackson escaped to the USA. The cruel peace divided the white settler movement from its fragile alliances with First Nations and Métis.<sup>7</sup> It also sharpened the farmers' distrust of established political parties and vested interests in 'the East' (Brown, 1973). In their perennially frustrated bid for representative government, Western settlers also learned the double-edged importance of the Territorial press — both in advancing their democratic cause and in its (often covert) subversion by the federalist establishment. In addition

to contending with Canadian economic and political imperialism, they gradually fashioned their own forms of organised resistance to the Confederation regime of cultural and media imperialism. As the farmers' campaigns to take democratic control of the grain trade took centre stage so would their newspapers.

## Authority Crisis: The Rise and Folly of the Party Press

At the turn of the twentieth century, the early party press in present-day Saskatchewan dominated the journalistic field sparking farmers' co-operative alternatives. Much as the offer of cheap land, the arrival of the railway and the imposition of 'order' incited a land-rush that would settle a million immigrants across the Prairie West in only two decades (Conway, 2006), frontier euphoria also incited a 'newspaper rush,' newspapers in what is now Saskatchewan soaring from one to fifty-two between 1885 and 1905.<sup>8</sup> In an age of the party press, government patronage loomed large over editorial policies at the politically volatile edge of Canadian expansion.

Leading the charge in 1883 was Conservative Party stalwart Nicholas Flood Davin. It is unclear whether he had insider information that the railway route would shift south, through Regina, to avoid the troubles farther North. However, it took Davin only six months to set up shop after the first train's arrival in Regina (population 400) and the ceremony to declare the new capital on 23 August 1882 (Riddell, 1981). He issued 5,000 copies of *The Leader's* first edition 1 March 1883 (Drake, 1951). Ever-faithful to the Conservative cause (Drake, 1952; Koester, 1980), he was the prompt beneficiary of government commission appointments and printing contracts. He was well-positioned to secure the West's ideological and political frontier.

Davin had proven his partisan pedigree as a reporter for the Conservative Toronto Mail, a public speaker stumping for Tory campaigns and a failed party candidate for the Haldimand riding in 1878. He was subsequently consoled with patronage appointments to a fateful government commission on Indian residential schools in 1879.<sup>9</sup> *The Leader* was awarded the contract for *The North-West Gazette*, publication of the Territorial administration. In the fiscal year ending 30 June 1884, it receipted \$2,006.10 from the combined Territorial and Dominion government coffers. Prominent party members of the local establishment even raised \$5,000 and secured a land grant to encourage his venture. On 22 March 1884, *The Leader* gushed at its good fortune: "In truth, so much money was never before sunk in a newspaper enterprise in a place the size of Regina" (Drake, 1952: 20). Davin was poised to profit from the commercial, real estate and advertising booms that would soon follow the railway's path through this administrative and commercial hub. In two years the settlement's population spiked to about 1,000 (Smith, 2007; 52). As the railway moved West, settlement redoubled and the party machine rumbled forward, Davin was appointed by Tory Prime Minister John A MacDonal to lead another fateful federal commission in 1884, this one on Chinese immigration (Ward, 1953).<sup>10</sup>

Despite frequent and flamboyant declarations of editorial independence, his personal correspondence with MacDonal captures the paper's true political purpose:

I am certain the government does not realise what a wild young colt the whole North West is and how soon it will take to plunging unless well bitted and snaffled and curbed. Nor would its plunging be a joke by any means (cited in Ward, 1953: 14).

*The Leader* would help clear the ideological path for the Tories' National Policy on the Western frontier. MacDonal's papers confirm the point of such generous patronage:

Davin established the *Regina Leader* [sic] as a Conservative paper. From the depressed state of things there, the paper does not pay and I fear he will be obliged to close it. Now it is of some importance to the government to be able to keep that paper going and Davin's employment will give him some very needful assistance (cited in Ward, 1953: 15).

As Drake (1951) wryly observed, "though it reserved a right to criticise, the strength of the critical impulse seemed to vary directly with the distance from the next election" (22).

Unsurprisingly, Davin declared, "If Riel is not hanged then capital punishment should be abolished" in *The Leader's* 15 August 1885 issue (cited in Koester, 1980: 65). MacDonald's faithful servant became the Conservative Member of Parliament for the District of Assiniboia West in 1887.

Similarly, *The Prince Albert Times* declared it would "give no slavish support to any government" on 1 November 1882 (Drake, 1951: 58). Bribed by the Territories' Lieutenant-Governor, Edgar Dewdney, it suddenly reversed its earlier support for settlers' rights in 1884 (Smith, 2007). In the North-West Rebellion of 1885, rebels repaid the betrayal by cutting telegraph lines to Prince Albert and capturing the *Times'* newsprint (Drake, 1951).

Of course, early press manipulation in the West was not the Conservative Party's exclusive preserve. In the late 1890s Clifford Sifton, then federal Minister of the Interior in the Liberal Laurier government, secretly purchased the influential *Manitoba* (later *Winnipeg*) *Free Press* to circulate partisan accounts to a network of other Western Liberal newspapers. Notorious for his ideological trench warfare, he was nicknamed "the Young Napoleon" (Cook, 1966; Hall, 1981a). By 1904, Sifton's Liberal patronage list included 16 papers in British Columbia, 35 in Manitoba and 22 in the North West Territories (Hall, 2013: 9). Sifton was as opposed to the farmers' emerging movement to democratise the agricultural economy as he was devoted to the established order. He viewed farmers as "simple minded" (Cook 1966: 15), with "no idea how to carry out large-scale business enterprise" (Hall 1981b: 27).

While the Liberal Western faction voiced settler grievances, both federal parties were eager to annex the West as a colonial hinterland (Conway, 2006), economically, politically and ideologically. Media power was a crucial pivot. As Jackson declared in 1883, as editor of Prince Albert's short-lived *Voice of the People*,

The people of the North West are destined to undergo a fierce and prolonged struggle with the numerous monopolies which are fastening their relentless talons upon the vitals of their infant country (cited in Smith, 2007: 28).

With the informational and interpretive 'vitals' of Westerners firmly in Conservative and Liberal party press clutches, the Territorial press was far from a democratic clarion. *The Leader*, *Saskatchewan Herald* and *Qu'Appelle Vidette* all opposed universal manhood suffrage, arguing instead for a property qualification (Drake, 1951).

It was into this democratic whirlwind of popular but uninformed antagonism toward the railways, grain traders and the Eastern manufacturers and political establishment that *The Grain Growers' Guide* was launched by the Grain Growers' Grain Company (GGGC) in 1908. It reflected E A Partridge's sentiment that "Public opinion is deliberately and systematically confused and misled by a subsidised press" (cited in Knutilla, 1994: 27).<sup>11</sup> The *Guide* attracted 30,000 early subscribers (MacPherson, 1979), overshadowing the *Leader's* reach six-fold. It was a significant rival to Sifton's *Manitoba Free Press*, with its 22,375 daily readers in 1905 (Hall, 1981b:146).<sup>12</sup> The *Guide* was "the most radical publication in the West and the only one farmers trusted" (Berton, 1984: 275). From its beginning, the farmers' alternative press was thus far from marginal.

As the official organ of the GGGC, and later the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association and the United Farmers of Alberta, the *Guide* spread the farm movement's co-operative gospel across the Prairies. This campaign marked the passage of the Western protest movement's leadership from the Métis' campaigns for representative government to the farmers' campaign for control of the grain trade and prefigured the rise of agrarian socialism (Lipset, 1959). The *Guide* aimed to unify

opinion among farmers and other workers as to what is necessary to do in order that they and we may come to enjoy the fruits of our labour, and having thus unified in opinion, to serve as a trumpet in marshalling our forces for the accomplishing of whatever has been decided is best to be done (cited in Kelcey and Davis, 1997: x).

This regional farmers' voice was reinforced in 1909 by the newly formed Co-operative Union of Canada's *Canadian Cooperator*, whose masthead declared 'Each for all'. Mostly thanks to its powerful farm movement patrons, the co-operative idea was gathering journalistic organisation, intellectual coherence and cultural momentum on the West's agrarian frontier.

By 11 October 1910, popular distrust of the establishment press in the West was sufficiently widespread and deeply-felt to occasion an editorial in the *Guide*:

the ownership of newspapers in Canada has become a sideline with politicians and with capitalists and it is to suit the views of these people that the wells of truth have been defiled. The freedom of the press is a myth and with the exception of a few bright examples, in Canada the freedom of the press is completely gone (cited in Cook, 1966: 43).

In 1918 the Progressives' federal platform called for "publication of the facts of the ownership of the newspapers and periodicals" (Wood, 1924: 347).

Drawing inspiration from the labour press, Sinaluta teacher, farmer and GGGC founder E A Partridge had lobbied tirelessly for a farmers' newspaper to advance their co-operative agitation (Knutilla, 1994). He became the *Guide*'s first editor, taking advantage of the establishment press's credibility crisis to open the door to alternative conceptions and democratic campaigns for economic action. As Partridge (1925) later declared,

We suffer not from visionaries, but from those who lack vision. It can not be too often repeated: 'Where there is no vision, the people perish'.<sup>13</sup>

The 'wild young colt' of the Prairies would be 'bitted, snaffled and curbed' by a press subservient to the Eastern business and political establishment no more.

## **The *Grain Growers' Guide*: A Compass for Change**

When American pooling advocate Aaron Sapiro toured the West to preach the co-operative gospel in the 1920s, much of his work had already been done.<sup>14</sup> Throngs of well-primed *Guide* subscribers filled Sapiro's audiences. By now, its circulation exceeded 75,000 (Print Advocacy, 2013). Many had been reading its critiques of the grain trade for over a decade. Its pages railed against the vested interests and called for farmer control (Brown, 1973). Their *Guide* helped animate the continuing conversation that defined a unified, agrarian 'public' and structured a vibrant, agrarian 'public sphere'. It was the farmers' movement bible through which movement leaders agitated, educated and organised. It helped "weld the individualistic prairie farmers into an effective unit which thought and acted with uniformity" (Sharp, 1997: 27).

The *Guide* helped knit the sparse farm population together in common cause and community. It forged a shared definition of farmers' problems, facilitated and led democratic dialogue and spurred a vibrant intellectual life. Its cultural democratisation of the Prairies enabled the economic and political democratisations which followed. A high priority for the Prairie grain growers' associations, it was sponsored financially by The Grain Growers Grain Company.

But the *Guide* was more than an in-house newsletter for the Prairie farm movement. Its vigorous agrarian journalism situated farmers' struggles and co-operative possibilities in the wider drama of a society in transition. It profiled co-operative models, including buying clubs and silo construction co-operatives (MacPherson, 2007). It encouraged the later emergence of consumer and credit co-operation and provided a window into British labour movement politics and radical ideas in circulation in the USA in the early twentieth century. Fostering a vibrant, expansive democratic culture and an enthusiasm for social innovation, the *Guide* helped set the stage for North America's first governing socialist party.<sup>15</sup>

Articulating a coherent and comprehensive worldview, the *Guide* helped farmers make sense of their world. It was also a "gate-way publication", highlighting the muckrakers' exposes of political corruption and economic exploitation in US magazines such as *McClure's* and *Collier's Weekly*

(Sharp, 1997). As Lipset (1959) notes, the average farmer he visited in the forties subscribed to three or four weeklies. He claimed the province had a larger proportion of lay social scientists than any other area he had visited (xv-xvi).<sup>16</sup> This 'newspaper academy' raised farmers' economic and political literacy, their confidence as economic and political actors and their sense of belonging to a larger agrarian co-operative movement.

The *Guide's* crusade for women's suffrage was an historic benchmark for the Prairies' alternative press and co-operation's widening activist base. In its first year, the *Guide* launched a women's page — "The Women's Sphere" — tackling equal rights, dower law, homesteading and suffrage (Kelcey and Davis, 1997). Women's symbolic inclusion enhanced their status in Prairie co-operation and prefigured their successful bid for the provincial franchise: George Chipman, editor of the *Grain Growers' Guide* and the *Country Guide* until 1936 (Kelcey and Davis, 1997)

wrote so many pro-suffrage editorials that in 1913 he received a letter from an irate Saskatchewan farmer threatening to cancel his subscription if the editorials didn't stop. 'My wife gets the *Guide*,' he wrote, 'and reads your articles to me at the supper table and makes things very unpleasant in my home.' (The editorials continued and the subscription was never cancelled)" (Gray, 2008).

Women's pages encouraged newspaper readership, a place for women in the movement and the inclusion of their issues across the paper. Crusading journalists such as Cora Hind (Hacker, 1979), Nellie McClung (Gray, 2008), Violet McNaughton (MacPherson, 2007) and Annie Hollis (Holtslander, 1998) staked claims to moral and intellectual authority and practical leadership through their compelling reports, commentaries and letters to the editor. Women's page editors — Isobel Graham, Mary Ford, Maryon Beynon, Mary McCallum and Amy J Roe — encouraged grassroots writing talent, legitimated women's issues and gave them voice (Kelcey and Davis, 1997). They also urged women to join farm women's 'intermediary organisations' to gain democratic knowledge, skills and experience by taking minutes, giving speeches and attending conferences. The Farm Women's Clubs, the Women's Grain Growers Association, the Women's Institute and the Homemaker's Club also helped farm women overcome social isolation and loneliness. As 'social feminists' these editors "believed women should be educated, allowed to work, have rights to property and take their rightful place in political discussion" (Kelcey and Davis, 1997: xiii). The *Guide* extended the suffragette platform for McClung's speeches for the Political Equality League and promoted her many books.

Many contemporary co-operators advocate neutrality on 'political' questions. By contrast, these journalists felt that a strong co-operative movement required principled democratic foundations if it were to win popular trust.<sup>17</sup> The early co-operative press thus positioned itself as women's champion. Co-operation's reward was to incorporate farm women's considerable reformist energies into the movement.

The *Guide* emphasised women's vital role on the farm, in economic and social organisations and in community action. This social feminist tradition deepened as *The Progressive* (named *The Western Producer* from 1924) emerged to launch the Pool campaign in 1923. With a loan from the SGGGA and the slogan "Reliable news, Unfettered opinions, Western rights," *The Progressive* captured 12,500 subscribers in its first year (Schmaltz, 1998). One of three Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association representatives on *The Progressive's* editorial board, Violet McNaughton helped arrange its transition to *The Western Producer* (Taylor, 2000). On 19 April 1925, her column "Call to Women Readers" inaugurated her quarter century term as women's editor.<sup>18</sup> *The Producer* encouraged the formation of women's guild chapters. Organising social activities such as fowl suppers after Saskatchewan Wheat Pool district meetings, they bonded dispersed farm families into co-operative communities.

Also indicative of the intertwined character of the co-operative movement, the farm movement, the feminist agitation and the agrarian-co-operative press was the *Producer's* editorial support of the 'Women's Pool' campaign. Reflecting the division of labour on early Saskatchewan farms, where women often kept garden, collected eggs, churned butter, milked cows and separated milk), the Eggs and Poultry Pool was an early women's intervention in a male-dominated

movement.<sup>19</sup> In 1925 a group of women resolved to form the pool to market products they had previously bartered or sold locally. By March 26, they had signed up 8,730 members and the Women's Pool emerged as a powerful demonstration of women's economic contribution to farm households and another index of the alternative press's power to broaden the base for co-operative action.

Like the informal coalition which had bound early co-operators, trade unionists and Owenists in the Chartists' struggle for the franchise in nineteenth-century Britain, Prairie co-operation had put its shoulder to the wheel of a wider movement. Saskatchewan's frontier brand of co-operation opened new vectors of freedom for farmers, women and the evolving civil society. *The Guide* and *The Progressive / Western Producer* were in this movement's intellectual and cultural vanguard.

## The 'Air-War' for Wheat: The Progressive-Western Producer and CJBR

The ideological war *The Progressive / Western Producer* waged for control of the wheat economy is another landmark in co-operative and agrarian press history. The opening battle between the establishment's *Leader* and the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool campaign was a turning point. Launched hastily to agitate for the Pool on 27 August 1923, *The Progressive* sparked a series of front-page *Leader* attacks on pooling and Sapiro's credibility. After two years of court action, the *Leader* was forced to settle, retract its stories and print an apology (Fairbairn, 1984).<sup>20</sup> This was a bellwether in the shifting balance of authority from the established economic order toward the upstart farmers.

This imbroglio also fostered an abiding hatred for the establishment press amongst farmers, dramatically diluting its influence (Brown, 1973). Paradoxically, "those (*Leader*) stories gave Sapiro and the struggling pool organisation a heaven-sent target on which to focus farmers' wrath" (Fairbairn, 1984: 36). Banning outside reporters from Pool meetings was one measure of prairie farmers' sharpening hostility toward the capitalist press. This tradition spanned over fifty years.

In the twenties, *The Progressive* overtook the increasingly conservative *Guide* as the West's leading reform journal. With circulation stagnant at 80,000, 1919-1923, but costs rising (MacPherson, 2013), the *Guide* fell back on advertising revenues to survive. Although articles on pooling had begun appearing in the *Guide* in May, 1919 (MacPherson, 1986: 75), the surging *Progressive* advanced the robust radicalism of the Farmers' Union of Canada and was in the successful pooling campaign's forefront. The *Guide* was increasingly marginalised, retrenching from weekly to semi-monthly, shedding staff, decamping to a business agriculture focus and increasingly catering to a more liberal, affluent and individualist niche of farmers (MacPherson, 2007). From the movement's official organ, it became a family farm magazine renamed *The Country Guide* in 1928. Indicative of the shift was the women's pages' drift from social feminism (Kelcey and Davis, 1997).

The name change to the *Western Producer* aimed to avoid association with the political party. Pool field staff signed up about 5,400 subscribers to launch the paper (12,500 in September, 1924 and 20,000 by August, 1925). The *Western Producer* provided farmers with informational and interpretive tools to resist the grain merchants' campaigns to discredit pooling. The merchants published *The Grain Trade*; a Yorkton radio station was owned by the Winnipeg Grain Exchange, CJGX. To beat back co-operativisation, radio stations were launched in Moose Jaw in 1926 and Fleming in 1928 by John Richardson and Sons, owners of Pioneer Grain Elevators. In late 1926, the Pool responded with its own 'air war' with bought time on CFQC encouraging members to renew their contracts and countering grain trade propaganda. A half hour weekly broadcast carried by CFQC in Saskatoon and CKCK in Regina expanded the Pool's reach in February 1927. That summer, the Pool's own radio charter was approved and CJBR ("Cooperation Justified By Results") went on the air.



## ‘Broadening-Out’ in the Great Depression

Through the Great Depression of the 1930s, the agrarian-co-operative press once again played a key role in mobilising new co-operative campaigns. But first, *The Western Producer* faced a crisis of its own. The provincial economy was in freefall. A one-crop economy also contending with a drought, Saskatchewan was by far the hardest hit of Canadian provinces. Incomes collapsed by 72 per cent from 1928-29 to 1933, the greatest drop in the Western world. European nations raised wheat duties to protect their farmers. Fire sales of surplus wheat on international markets further depressed prices. In 1932, the price of wheat, cattle and hogs all dropped below the cost of production and freight (Phalen, 1977). Saskatchewan daily newspaper circulation dropped by nearly 75% in the thirties (Canadian Communications Foundation, 2013).

With a successful sign-up in 1929 and Depression pressures on Pool finances, CJBR ceased broadcasting in 1931 — after only four years on the air. Forced to purchase the *Producer* to protect it from dropping Depression-era subscription revenues, the Pool could not afford to both rescue the financially uncertain *Producer* and sustain CJBR (Schmalz, 1990).<sup>21</sup> Although this experiment in co-operative education was cut short by economic collapse, the ‘air war’ demonstrated that co-operators could win on the new terrain of radio broadcasting.<sup>22</sup>

*The Western Producer* was in dire straits by June 1931. Out of 31,000 subscriptions, 27,000 remained unpaid; some subscribers paid with chickens. Pool committees held dances, bazaars and other fundraisers to save their paper (Schmalz, 1998). One winter, Pool field men devoted two weeks to a subscription drive offering free admission to families with paid subscriptions (Fairbairn, 1984). *The Western Producer* had 48,000 paid subscribers by summer 1932 and over 100,000 in 1936 (Schmalz, 1998). The *Producer’s* role in sustaining member loyalty explains such strong Pool support over seven decades. Just as the *Guide* and *Progressive* supported grain farmers’ great co-operative campaigns, *The Western Producer* — now a “powerful voice for cooperative action on the prairies” (MacPherson, 1979: 181), reaching 105,000 subscribers by 1939 — rallied the population to ‘broaden-out’ into retailing, credit unions and insurance mutualism.

Like *Western Producer* reporters, Pool field men were in the vanguard of a massive educational mobilisation through this difficult decade. The field men staged meetings, screened slideshows and films and circulated literature. The Pool launched a library-by-mail service in 1930 through local elevator agents (Fairbairn, 1984). In 1934 the Pool began producing educational films, often used to complement talks on co-operation (MacPherson, 1986). It had a library of 205 films and was screening about 700 films each year by 1939. The Pool prepared five films on Prairie co-operation in 1940.

However, movement visionary Harry Fowler warned that the monopoly capitalist press posed a creeping threat to their project, particularly in the cities.<sup>23</sup> It represented the bosses’ values and their class project — to discredit, marginalise and demutualise co-operatives. Business owners had a vested interest in halting the sector’s expansion, assuming its market share and assets and winning development policies for private interests.

The movement launched the *Cooperative Consumer* to fill the breach in 1939. Its twice monthly women’s section followed the lead of the producer co-operative press, urging attendance at co-operative meetings (Fairbairn, 1989). While men had long dominated producer co-operation, women’s traditional role as household managers gave them a particular pride of place in consumer co-operatives. Moving far beyond their earlier trade in agricultural staples such as binder twine, coal and fuel, retail co-operatives now carried a full range of household goods. In consumer co-operation, the male producer was no longer ‘king’. But in the traditional division of farm labour, the woman was ‘queen’ of household economics. The *Cooperative Consumer* tapped into this shift. Powered by the surging post-war consumer society, co-operation’s feminisation opened new retail and democratic in-roads in the context of rapid urbanisation.

The *Cooperative Consumer's* post-war reach rose dramatically. Subscribing member retails drove circulation from 70,000 in the late forties to 137,000 in 1958, 144,000 in 1959, 155,000 in 1960, 200,000 in 1964 and 300,000 in the mid-seventies. With the third highest periodical circulation on the Prairies, it lagged only *Reader's Digest* and the *Free Press Prairie Farmer*. With *The Credit Union Way's* launch as a newspaper in 1946 and *The Western Producer's* reach passing 160,000 in 1948 (Schmaltz, 1998), combined co-operative circulations across the Prairie West achieved unprecedented scope and scale.

After the CCF's landslide election in 1944, Watson Thomson was charged with launching "the biggest adult education program in the country". Deploying the 'living newspaper,' radio and study groups, the short-lived initiative bolstered co-operative and credit union campaigns. His aim was "public education for social ends, for building, cooperatively, a democratic and more human society" (Collins, 2013). In the late fifties, Federated Cooperatives Ltd. organised district education federations. Paid field men studied co-operative principles, adult education and group development methods at the Cooperative Institute, formed in 1955 and reorganised as the Western Cooperative College in 1959 (Crewe, 2001). They assisted local boards and Women's Guilds and staffed co-operative youth schools. University Extension offered credit courses, based on the College's certificate programme. The *Western Producer* even began publishing books in 1954.<sup>24</sup> The peak of a post-war movement regeneration and expansion cycle, it was a golden age for co-operative education in Saskatchewan (Chapman, 2012). These escalating educational commitments reflected, at least in part, half a century of journalistic agitations for co-operation.

## Press for Change: Cultural Mutualisation in Saskatchewan

Saskatchewan, a province of only one million people, was home to the planet's most diversified co-operative sector in the mid-forties (MacPherson, 1979): agricultural producer co-operatives in wool, livestock, dairy, eggs, poultry and grains; insurance mutuals, from municipal health care to hail, fire and life insurance; formidable consumer co-operative and credit union networks; and even the world's first co-operative oil refinery. Farmers' co-operative livestock yards, creameries, grain elevators, co-operative stores and credit union branches came to dominate the Prairie landscape. Within half a century, Saskatchewan had gone from a co-operative *tabula rasa* to an historic outlier of extraordinary movement achievement (Diamantopoulos, 2012a). Articulating a diverse, far-flung population of individualistic farmers into a unified movement required the long-range cultivation of co-operative values, beliefs and attitudes. Indeed, democratic economic innovation on such a scale required a thoroughgoing cultural shift fostered largely by the agrarian-co-operative press (Fairbairn, 2005).

Much as the farmers' co-operative project was embedded in an extended social movement family's diverse democratic strivings, its press also embodied this diversity. Indeed, its inclusive and unifying editorial character was a defining feature of its role in building a broad-based, coherent and cohesive 'historical bloc'.<sup>25</sup> The agrarian-co-operative press diversified as its movement patrons and historical bloc matured. The launch of the *Cooperative Consumer* and the *Credit Union Way*, for example, reflected movement expansion beyond farmers' exclusive ranks. Similarly, as popular movements became economically powerful and politically socialist, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation's *The Commonwealth* emerged. A hybrid publication, the Fabians' party press expressed the agrarian, co-operative and socialist strivings from which it sprang. It thus overlapped the 'movement press'. Much as the Territorial and early provincial press establishment had fused the patronage and commercial press, *The Commonwealth* later combined party and movement-building objectives.<sup>26</sup> What Saskatchewan's early alternative press family shared was the popular movements' institutional support and patronage and their opposition to the status quo. To one degree or another, and for at least a significant time, they were "radical alternative media" (Downing et al, 2000).<sup>27</sup>

The *Credit Union Way* was indicative of the shifting focus and tides of co-operative publications in Saskatchewan.<sup>28</sup> It was launched as a newspaper in 1946, retrenched to a newsletter in

1950, only to be expanded in 1956 (Purden, 1980). While co-operative publication waves ebbed and crested, these were far from marginal players in the Prairies' intellectual, economic and political life. For example, the earliest farm movement publication to crusade for co-operation, the *Grain Grower's Guide* had circulation that peaked at about 80,000 in the early twenties (MacPherson, 2013). At the time, Saskatchewan's population was about 750,000. The *Western Producer* reached 105,000 subscribers in 1939, mostly in Saskatchewan (MacPherson, 1979: 181) where the population had topped 900,000. The *Co-operative Consumer* extended the co-operative idea beyond the farm-gate, circulating 300,000 copies across the Prairies in the mid-seventies (Fairbairn, 1989) when Saskatchewan's population averaged 920,000.

Despite its vagaries, the alternative journalism tradition launched a formidable, sustained and multi-pronged educational-cultural offensive for the co-operative idea. Saskatchewan illustrates its role in building up the formative democratic culture, social base and mobilising potential for co-operation's historic movement expansion.

The rise of this 'co-operative ethic' is harder to document than legal incorporations, membership numbers, or business volumes. Nevertheless, the rise of agrarian co-operation hinged on this long-range educational campaign to invest — morally and intellectually — in co-operative principles such as democratic equality. While some farmers' involvements were strictly utilitarian, many others acquired a critical economic understanding of the established order's failings and built up durable mutualist convictions, a sense of solidarity with other members and the 'movement' and a willingness to act and 'stick' with the movement, even in adversity. The agrarian-co-operative press played a key role in continually defining farmers' agenda and framing current affairs from their perspective. Over time, the difference between farmers' realities and interests and the worldview popularised by the established press built up an affiliation with the movement and an antagonism toward the establishment. Alternative journalism thus cultivated an increasingly co-operative common sense.

Psychological investment thus preceded more tangible investments of time, effort and money for actual campaigns. This 'conversion' involved at least a partial renunciation of competitive, individualist and submissive forms of selfhood. Many became 'true believers' in the 'co-operative commonwealth', as each issue of the agrarian-co-operative press, each successful campaign and each new co-operative involvement ratified the movement's moral and intellectual authority. From hauling grain to the wheat pool elevator, buying supplies from the co-operative store to banking at the credit union, the co-operative way of life came to deeply shape farmers' values and social identity. The 'cultural mutualisation' of Prairie farmers had thus sowed the necessary cognitive, affective and motivational seeds for member recruitment and formal mutualisation — the practical, legal and economic organisation of new co-operative firms. Fostering a population's cultural mutualisation, of course, was co-operative education's historic province but the reach and scope of this socio-cultural transformation extended far beyond the classroom.

This mutualist ethic drove a radical democratisation of Plains society. Co-operative enterprises levelled inequalities of income, wealth and power. Its movement press and other educational campaigns, levelled cultural inequalities by providing new access to information, diverse interpretive frameworks and cultivating business and democratic know-how. Alternative journalism redistributed authority from establishment voices to farm movement leaders and farmers themselves. This built popular confidence and competence. Ultimately, democratising this agrarian society's cultural life had 'political' as well as 'economic' implications in North America's first socialist government and the world's first co-operative oil refinery.

Of course, there are limits to generalisation from any single case. This movement emerged in a unique context of rapid and radical change. Certainly, the media's role did not 'determine' movement outcomes. Rather, early alternative journalists manoeuvred within a wider journalistic field and field of social forces. However, agrarian co-operation's rise in Saskatchewan illustrates media power's past and potential roles in movement advance: setting the agenda for coffee row discussion and public opinion; framing economic and social issues where the co-operative alternative can make a positive contribution; cultivating an alternative, co-operative common

sense and engaged worldview; and mobilising a wider public for co-operative advocacy and action.

Indeed, the alternative press played a key role in fomenting co-operation's cultural revolution on the Prairies: in launching grain growers' co-operation and wheat pooling; in pioneering movement radio broadcasting, including its support of dispersed study groups; in diversifying the movement into consumer co-operation and credit unionism through the Depression; in establishing documentary film and book production; in opening the co-operative movement to women and the urban working class; in bringing to power a government committed to co-operative ideals and movement advance; and in socialising a generation committed to adult education, a more inclusive movement and new co-operative development in the post-war boom.

## **Conclusion: Alternative Journalism and Movement Renewal**

The retail stores, gas bars, credit union branches and community clinics that dot the twenty-first century rural prairie are among the most visible, enduring artefacts of Saskatchewan's rich democratic legacy. Less obvious are the educational campaigns that made this popular economic history possible. Nevertheless, the fleeting, invisible hand of the movement press, radio broadcast, film production and book publishing helped forge co-operation's early *cultural* history. *The Grain Growers' Guide*, *The Progressive-Western Producer* and the *Cooperative Consumer* broke new informational and conceptual frontiers for co-operation. This was also true, to a lesser degree, for the *Credit Union Way* and CJBR and in a different sense for *The Commonwealth*, which only partially reflected movement values. These alternative journalists busted the interpretational monopoly of the party and commercial press and investors' cultural hegemony over business and politics. They helped co-operators develop well-reasoned arguments and deeply rooted convictions that gave their campaigns intellectual and moral force. Through its continuous editorial interventions, Westerners learned to critique the elite world view, imagine alternatives and fight for their interests.

In particular, the agrarian-co-operative press tested the limits of the farmers' rugged individualism and the West's dependence on investor-led development. Indeed, it is hard to imagine co-operation's spread without the perpetual agitations of this expanding, diversifying press. As McLuhan (1968) argued, the mass media are like society's extended nervous system: they extend our perceptual and conceptual reach and orient us for action. Similarly, co-operation's early alternative media were the peoples' eyes, ears and democratic academy.

Over the decades, alternative journalism thus infused geographically dispersed Westerners with a common vocabulary and analysis, a shared ethic of joint-action and a strong sense of social solidarity. The rise of agrarian co-operation in Saskatchewan suggests adult education can open the intellectual frontiers and forge the motivational base, for ambitious campaigns. The alternative press's role in this great co-operative enlightenment and expansion also illustrates its vast, diverse potential. Indeed, Prairie co-operation's rise in the first half of the twentieth century offers a compelling metaphor for the world movement's contemporary struggle to respond to investor-led development's crisis of authority; overcome its own degenerative tendencies (Diamantopoulos, 2012b, 2012c); and realise its emergent potential (Mills and Davies, 2013). Rather than adopt the limiting strategies of corporate public relations or the 'magic bullets' of a naïve technological determinism, Prairie co-operation's past achievements urge a focus on fundamentals, ie the role and structure of mass media power in expanding co-operative perspectives' relevance, resonance, reach and frequency.

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## Notes

- 1 Titled “Education, Training and Information,” it reads:  
Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public — particularly young people and opinion leaders — about the nature and benefits of co-operation (International Co-operative Alliance, 2014).
- 2 According to Williams (cited in Apple, 1979):  
Hegemony is a whole body of practices and expectations; our assignments of energy, our ordinary understanding of man and his world. It is a set of meanings and values which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming. It thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society, a sense of absolute because experienced [as a] reality beyond which it is very difficult for most members of a society to move in most areas of their lives (5).
- 3 This enduring connection to its alternative press tradition may explain Co-operatives UK’s leading role in contemporary media organising (Boyle, 2013). *The Co-operative News* can be found at <http://www.thenews.coop/>.
- 4 The National Policy’s three pillars were Western settlement, a transcontinental railway link to the Pacific to bring British Columbia into the fold and bridge the vast new country and a tariff wall to strengthen Canadian manufacture.
- 5 “First Nations” refers to the original inhabitants of the Plains, traditionally referred to as North American Indians. Before European settlement, they were nomadic hunter-gatherers who relied heavily on the buffalo hunt. As white hunters depleted buffalo herds, sometimes for their hides and sometimes for sheer sport, the First Nations feared starvation, signed treaties and were relocated to reservations. The “Métis” people emerged from two centuries of inter-marriage between European fur-traders — mostly French, English and Scottish — and their First Nations business partners, who trapped beavers, wolf, fox and muskrat. The First Nations and Métis peoples along with Inuit are referred to collectively as Aboriginal people.
- 6 As Saul (2009) notes, a mid-nineteenth century wave of Irish Protestants had brought their ‘Old World’ prejudices and imperial entitlement with them:  
They saw Canada through British blinkers and brought with them a hatred of Catholics, a resulting angry incomprehension before the French-Canadian reality, a rejection of the possibility of Aboriginal culture and contempt for immigrants coming from other than Britain (313).  
This faction would pressure Prime Minister John A MacDonalld to make an example of Riel and put the Métis in their place. Later, they would foster “exclusionary race laws and anti-French educational restrictions and Aboriginal assimilation policies”. Their influence would peak with the “explosive tensions during the First World War” (314), including Ku Klux Klan agitations against Saskatchewan’s French-speaking Catholics (Sher, 1983).
- 7 Settlers’ waning commitment to social solidarity with Aboriginal people reflected Saskatchewan farmers’ lived contradiction as both oppressor and oppressed. On the one hand, settler landowners occupied Aboriginal lands and were instruments of the colonisation process. On the other hand, they were also part of a colonial hinterland pitted against the federal state and central Canadian capitalist interests (Fairbairn, 2005). Ottawa’s ‘divide and rule’ tactics would establish ‘order’ at the expense of an increasingly divided apartheid society, the injuries of which are yet to heal. Indeed, failing to include Aboriginal people in the settlers’ co-operative project left a legacy of distrust and underdevelopment in ‘Indian country’ that would seriously hamper the movement’s prospects, both on-reserve and off (Dobbin, 1981; Hammond Ketilson and MacPherson, 2001).
- 8 *The Saskatchewan Herald* was first published at Battleford in August 1878 by Patrick Gammie Laurie, formerly with *The Nor’Wester*. He transported his printing press by ox cart from Fort Garry, a 72 day trek (Kesterton, 1984).
- 9 “The experience of the US is the same as our own as far as the adult Indian is concerned. Little can be done with him. He can be taught to do a little at farming, and at stock-raising, and to dress in a more civilised manner, but that is all. The child ... who goes to day school learns little, and what little he learns is soon forgotten, while his tastes are fashioned at home, and his inherited aversion to toil is in no way combated,” declared Davin (1879). He thus justified the wholesale abduction of Aboriginal children, many of whom faced physical, sexual, and emotional abuse in residential schools.
- 10 In summarising his findings, “Nicholas Flood Davin described with passion the low race and character of the Chinese, revealing to the House that Chinese women were without exception prostitutes whose practices were ‘indescribable’” (cited in Hall, 1981b: 263). Davin’s work would help fuel a moral panic that would lead to the imposition of a ‘head-tax’ to discourage Chinese immigration, the 1908 disenfranchisement of the Chinese in Saskatchewan and the Province’s 1912 ban on the Chinese

- employing or managing white women. In 1914 Ontario would introduce a similar bill, followed by BC in 1923 (Li, 1998).
- 11 Illiteracy made this task easier:  
 In the early twentieth century, the average Prairie farmer had only a grade 5 to 8 education. Saskatchewan's first Premier, Walter Scott [inducted in 1905] had only elementary school, with no high school at all" (Smith, 2007: 118).
  - 12 Sifton was a favourite target for the early alternative press. For example, Bob Edwards, editor of Calgary's anti-establishment weekly, the *Eye Opener*, once declared, "the Canadian Pacific Railway, Clifford Sifton and the Almighty comprise the Trinity of Canada, ranking in importance in the order named" (cited in Berton, 1984: 266). Edwards was sympathetic to trade unions, suffragettes, was frequently compared to Mark Twain and was once described as "a Robin hood of the pen". By 1908 his national satirical weekly circulated 18,500 copies, 4,000 in Toronto, 2,600 in Winnipeg, 1,000 in Vancouver and 1,800 on Canadian Pacific Railway trains (Dempsey, 2014). He was the West's best known journalist of his time.
  - 13 Indicative of the difficulties, Partridge resigned as editor amidst objections to his proposed merger with *The Voice*, the West's leading labour movement publication (Knutilla, 1994). Becoming one of the West's most influential newspapers, the *Guide* carried on his campaign for producer co-operation and his hoped for left-turn. Indeed, the farmers' press would clear the intellectual and ideological path for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (Brown, 1973). In 1911, *Guide* editor George Chipman declared "what is needed in Canada is a radical party with the courage of its convictions" (cited in Berton, 1984: 278). In the spring and summer of 1915, Chipman happily published a weekly column, 'Sermons for the unsatisfied', by J S Woodsworth. The Methodist minister was later jailed for 'seditious libel' as editor of the *Western Labor News* during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. He would also become the CCF's founding federal leader in 1932. *The Voice* was published weekly from 8 May 1897 to 26 July 1918. It was reorganised as the *Western Labor News*, publishing from 2 August 1918 to 13 April 1923 (Manitoba, 2013).
  - 14 While wheat farmers' early co-operative campaigns focused on grain handling and storage to get their product more securely and affordably to market, the pooling phase cut out the grain traders altogether. By pooling farmers' crops in storage facilities and selling directly into international markets when prices were advantageous, farmers avoided glutting the market and driving down prices. They also captured earnings previously skimmed by speculators.
  - 15 The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation would rule Saskatchewan continuously from 1944 to 1962, establishing itself as the natural governing party for decades (Lipset, 1959). As the New Democratic Party, it would achieve official opposition status for the first time federally in 2011.
  - 16 Among other notable Western sources of agricultural news were the *Nor-west Farmer* (est 1882), *Canadian Thresherman and Farmer* (1903) and *Farm and Ranch Review* (1905) (Print Advocacy, 2013).
  - 17 As Findlay and Findlay (2012) have argued in the contemporary context:  
 the notion of apolitical membership seems worth revisiting, as does education as a major problem as well as a source of solutions for co-operators, so as to bring out social, cognitive, and ecological justice as key goals (45).
  - 18 McNaughton approached her journalism as a form of community organising: "As she worked for women's rights, regional hospitals for the deaf and a hundred other causes, she built up a network of correspondents and fans that amounted to an invisible social-reform movement. (It) included virtually every prominent figure in prairie social reform" (Fairbairn, 1984: 127). In 1914, McNaughton had been named founding president of the Women's Grain Growers' Association (WGGA). By 1916 Saskatchewan women had won the Provincial vote. By contrast, Québec women would not win the vote until 1940.
  - 19 Symptomatic of the challenge: the first female delegate did not attend the annual meeting of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool until 1981 (Taylor, 2000: 68).
  - 20 The Leader Publishing Company's motivations were commercial and ideological. It had a virtual monopoly of the printing, book-binding and office supply needs of the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company. If the Pool were organised to assume grain handling and marketing, the SCEC would undoubtedly go out of business (Brown, 1973).
  - 21 Similarly, when the federal government created the Canadian Wheat Board in 1934 to bring greater stability to the depressed wheat market, the Winnipeg Grain Exchange and James Richardson and Sons with no reason to stay in radio sold their stations.
  - 22 Indeed, the experience of the agrarian press and CJBR helped steel farmers' support for the launch of public broadcasting in Canada. For example, George Williams of the United Farmers of Saskatchewan told the Aird Commission in 1929 that public broadcasting "would break up the newspaper monopoly" in Saskatchewan and "provide alternative views to the ones expressed by those hostile to the



- cooperative movement” (Schmalz, 1990: 47). To an extent, and for a time, Williams’ view would prove prescient. In 1941, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation staged the “National Farm Radio Forum”, a series of weekly discussions to support the work of local study groups. A review of the Forum’s achievements declared that “Credit unions were certainly the most popular action project among our forum groups. Indeed, 21 groups indicated their intention to get ready for credit union organisation and were provided with the study materials which would prepare them for action” (82). The NFRF broadcast until 1964; Williams would become the CCF’s provincial leader in 1936.
- 23 Fowler led the farmers’ campaign for the world’s first co-operative oil refinery, today a multi-billion dollar enterprise that drives the Western co-operative retailing system (Fairbairn, 1989). He went on to organise 14 other major co-operatives (Phalen, 1977).
- 24 It would create Western Producer Prairie Books in 1975, releasing about 145 titles to appeal to Western farmers, establish a documentary record of Prairie life and encourage Western writers.
- 25 Carroll and Ratner (1989: 30) define an “historical bloc” as “a strategic alignment of classes, class fractions and popular groupings whose interests and outlook are realised within the project and whose coalescence establishes an organic relation between (the economic) base and (the ideological-cultural) superstructure”.
- 26 Founded as a monthly in 1936 under the name *The New Era*, it was renamed in 1938. This repositioning reflected the hegemony of co-operative ideology within the farmers’ socialist movement. For example, in 1943 CCF leader Tommy Douglas declared that, of all forms of social ownership — federal, provincial, municipal and co-operative — “we believe (co-operative ownership) to be the most important of all, hence the name ‘Co-operative Commonwealth’” (cited in Radloff, 2004: 38). He even set a goal for the ideal size of a co-operative sector to balance public and private enterprise: “We felt that if 20 to 30 percent of the economy was co-operatively owned and operated, this would act as an effective balance wheel to maintain a free economy”. Like the party’s name, its publication thus accorded a central pride of place to the co-operative ideal. The *Commonwealth* increased its circulation and became a weekly in 1944, the year the CCF formed government. It sustained this frequency for two and a half decades of continuous publication. After 1970 it moved to bi-weekly frequency. After a further retrenchment to monthly, the cash-strapped party rolled it back again to quarterly in 1999 (Quiring, 2013).
- 27 Of course, the co-operative press embodies the ‘dual nature’ of its parent co-operatives, as both businesses and democratic associations. They are thus also prone to democratic degeneration. As co-operatives mature, they tend to rely less on their founding movement sponsors, values and goals. They de-emphasise co-operative education, community organising for new co-operatives, or bloc-building and renewal. As well-established businesses, they may become increasingly bureaucratic and driven by their own firm’s market priorities. The co-operative press is thus structurally torn between the movement-building alternative journalism characteristic of its founding periods and he pull toward corporate public relations / market relations and brand promotions more characteristic of the degenerative stages of the co-operative’s associational life (Diamantopoulos, 2012b; 2012c). This is a defining contradiction of the co-operative press.
- 28 *The Credit Union Way* was the brainchild of the father of credit unionism in Saskatchewan, Tom Molloy. He was a former reporter in Brandon, Winnipeg and with Walter Scott’s Leader. As president of the Typographers’ Union, he also helped establish the Regina Trades and Labour Council.

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