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Better Schools Day in Saskatchewan and The Perils of Educational Reform

In several ways the period of the Great War provided an atmosphere favorable to school reform in Saskatchewan. The conflict was seen by Canadians as a crucible of national consciousness, an era when the country came of age, shed its colonial status and entered the struggle as a major protagonist. As John Thompson has argued, the war was also seen as a struggle for democracy, one in which propaganda played a powerful role.[1] Indeed, the period was the paradise of propagandists, when the means of public information were limited and when the presentation of organized and compelling data was lapped up by a populace relatively undiscerning and uncritical.[2] Only later would the rise of new publications, radio, and post elementary education bring a flood of viewpoints, pronouncements and experts, weakening through surfeit the power of the printed and spoken word.

The war was also a purging process which evoked a mood of renewal and regeneration through sacrifice. Intimately related to this renewal and to the themes of democracy and propaganda was the school system. As former Saskatchewan Inspector F.X. Chauvin exclaimed in 1916, "The great European war is revolutionizing the whole universe; the tremendous sacrifices of life and gold on the battlefields of Europe are spiritualizing humanity. . . ." Speaking of new ideals replacing "time rotted habits" and new viewpoints overthrowing "time-honored opinions," Chauvin promised a new civilization based on a rejuvenated system of public education. "If today we turn our eyes toward education," he said, "it is because it is there that the solution to the new problems of life is to be found."[3]

Factors other than the war were also setting the scene for educational reform. One of the most powerful of these was the country life movement, a genuine obsession in the pre-war era with rural depopulation and degeneration. Partly a religious devotion to the purity of life on the land and an insistence on the values of working with nature and the elemental industry, it was also a harking back to a simpler time fast being overtaken by an urban and machine civilization. Basically its proponents sought to enhance rural life by introducing improvements and by evoking a deferential attitude towards agriculture. In these plans a chief agency was to be the public school.

The concerns of the country life movement were particularly evident in Saskatchewan where they were expressed in the submission to the Canadian Royal Commission on Industrial Training and Technical Education (1911), the provincial Commission on Agricultural and Industrial Education (1913), and a host of articles and letters to local papers, farm and other periodicals. Reform minded professionals in the province were aware of the work of American educators such as Harold Foght, Ellwood Cubberley, Mabel Carney, O. J. Kern, Liberty Hyde

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Bailey, Herbert Quick, and others. Moreover, the pre-war agricultural and settlement boom had made fairly certain that Saskatchewan's destiny would be strongly agrarian.

The boom, however, had ended in 1912. Prices had dropped in 1913 and a recession had begun followed by a severe dought in 1914. When these troubles were added to the failure of reciprocity in 1911 and the subsequent inability to adjust tariffs, the result was an agrarian crisis. In the heart of the prairie this crisis struck at the very nature of society. It was therefore not surprising that the school reform begun in 1915 involved the way that schools could relate to agriculture. Many believed that the existing system of education was in a large measure responsible for dispiriting the countryside since it neglected and depreciated the basic rural occupation and industry.

Closely related to the agricultural crisis and the threat of rural degeneration was the nature of the country population. Because the prairie west had received more than half of the 1½ million immigrants entering Canada since 1900, the foreign problem there was more acute than elsewhere. In Saskatchewan in 1916 only 186,362 of 647,835 people had been born in the province, and of 201,203 not born in Britain or its possessions 110,372 had been born in Europe.[4] These factors intensified the sense of alarm over enemy aliens. They also rendered the task of the country life movement more difficult since the work of social betterment required the concerted action of *all* members of the community and that was unlikely given the barriers of language and segregated settlement. In this milieu Anglophones anxiously sought school reform involving a more concerted attempt at assimilation.

There were other fillips to reform. One was the contemporary women's movement. Far ranging, it extended its purview beyond matters of suffrage to many other reforms. Hence groups such as the Saskatchewan Homemakers' Clubs expanded rapidly in the period stressing the virtues in the work of the soil, the importance of Canadianization, and the need to improve the lot of farm women and rural schools. Likewise the contemporary conservation movement broadened its scope beyond vanishing resources, agricultural land and wildlife, to conservation of child life and to changes in schooling necessary to achieve that object. Thus health and physical education, which also had their own proponents, were encouraged.[5]

Behind at least some of the reform impulse of the period was the growing revolt mentality in the West against all things eastern. As J. A. Calder, former Saskatchewan Minister of Education, said, "There is a general feeling abroad that in the past we have too slavishly followed the school system of Ontario and Eastern Canada and that the institutions . . . for the education of our children do not effectively fit into our present Western prairie conditions."[6]

Perhaps the catalyst which best explained why a school reform crusade occurred when precisely it did was the temperance movement. The 1915 Saskatchewan Legislative Session had closed the bars and greatly stanched the flow of liquor.[7] Flushed with this success, temperance leaders—including, Reverend W. W. Andrews, Methodist educationist, distinguished chemical researcher, and President of Saskatchewan College in Regina; Dr. Edmund Henry Oliver, graduate of Toronto and Columbia Universities, professor of history and economics at Saskatchewan University, and Presbyterian Missionary; W. C. Murray, President of Saskatchewan University; Reverends Hugh Dobson and J. A. Doyle, authors of

a report on racial conditions and the rural school in Saskatchewan; and many others—moved to what a pamphlet issued by the Board of Social Service and Evangelism of the Presbyterian Church called "The Next Great Question!" That question involved the reorganization of the school system *"with due regard to the outstanding characteristics and needs of an agricultural province peopled by settlers from every quarter of the globe."*[8]

Central in this reorganization was the rural school. In Saskatchewan in 1916, 73 percent of the population was in the country and of 3,873 school districts an overwhelming majority were rural.[9] The problem in these districts concerned the myriad ways in which the country school suffered by comparison both with its urban counterpart and with a pastoral ideal promoted by reformers. Everywhere there were inadequacies. School boards were often incompetent and fractious, inspectoral supervision was lacking, teacher preparation was incomplete, specialization impossible, equipment unavailable, health conditions appalling, and teacher and trustee turnover excessive. If these difficulties could be surmounted, many felt that the rural school could become a powerful and efficient agency in the moulding of Saskatchewan's future.

II

Urged into action by Premier Walter Scott and Opposition Leader W. B. Willoughby at the end of the 1915 Legislative Session, interested reformers from these diverse sources met on September 22, 1915, and formed the Saskatchewan Public Education League.[10] Founders of the League included as well as W. W. Andrews, E. H. Oliver and others, Reverend W. P. Reekie, a social gospel activist, Superintendent of the Saskatchewan Baptist Convention, and main instigator of the League; Dr. W. A. Thomson, ex-President of the Saskatchewan Medical Council, and advocate of physical education; J. B. Musselman, Secretary of the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association; J. W. Sifton, Superintendent of Schools for Moose Jaw; W. G. Cates, Editor of the Moose Jaw *Daily Times;* and Dr. Norman Fergus Black, former Weyburn Principal and Inspector, author of *English for the Non-English* (1913) and *History of Saskatchewan and the Northwest Territories* (1913), new education enthusiast, and Principal of Regina Collegiate Institute.[11] Reekie was elected president and Black was named convenor of a committee to secure a provincial school survey.

The founding convention of the League revealed clearly the sentiments of its fathers. Their view of reform was most comprehensive, including plans for compulsory education, physical and health instruction, larger units of administration, the creation of the school as a community centre, and improvements in teacher training, the system of inspection and treatment of exceptional children. Beneath these issues were two powerful and related biases. One was a broadly focussed dedication to the enhancement of country living. In three separate recommendations the resolutions committee urged the reorientation of the purposes of schooling, teacher training and curriculum in keeping with the agrarian reality of the province. As W. W. Andrews said of the rural school, ". . . the school garden should become the centre around which all of the work should revolve." And as Chairman Reekie asked, "Why not have school grounds model farms and the school buildings miniature sanitoriums where health and hygiene will be taught? Why not have a beauty spot in every community?" After all, he concluded, "The construction of a rose is of more value than a knowledge of the War of the Roses."[12]

The other bias of the League fathers involved the bilingual system of instruction. Addressing the convention on the country school in non-English speaking

districts, E. H. Oliver spoke of Mennonite districts where "not one single word of English is ever taught." In other districts similar circumstances obtained, prompting Oliver to ask, "Are we to be a homogeneous people on these plains, or are we to repeat the tragic sufferings of polyglot Austria? This question must be solved in our elementary schools. And we must solve it now."[13] It was not simply the War, nor the longfelt Western need to assimilate aliens which motivated Oliver. Language differences interfered with the country life movement, hamstrung community enterprise, and hindered rural enlightenment of both Anglophones and foreigners. In certain Ruthenian and Doukhobor areas Oliver observed a rather despotic English minority clinging to control "by playing on the inter-racial jealousies" of the district and by employing "devices which depended upon the ignorance of the non English."[14] Such techniques were as unbecoming as they were regressive. And they stemmed fundamentally from the language problem.

As the League began its work it urged "ratepayers and other adult friends of education" to form local branches. It then announced Premier Scott's suggestion of a public holiday on June 30, 1916, when the whole province could discuss various reforms. Strategically placed at a lull in the farming season and right before Dominion Day, the holiday would be known as Better Schools Day.

From autumn 1915 until the big day, the League bombarded the Saskatchewan people with the general arguments for reform and suggestions of the role of private citizens and communities. Orchestrator-in-chief was Black who reflected the League viewpoint and who edited press releases in several papers as well as a weekly page in the Regina *Leader* entitled "The Crusade for Better Schools." Some articles in the latter dealt with the school survey and reforms advocated by Harold W. Foght; the indictment of the provincial examination system as a heavy expense not essential to scholastic efficiency by Premier Scott and Opposition Leader Willoughby; J. S. Woodsworth's view of the interdependence of school and community and the need to individualize instruction because of varying home environments and racial backgrounds; and W. P. Reekie's view that persuasion was better than compulsion when it came to school attendance and to establishing the "one language of instruction system."

In mid-March 1916, Black reported that, excluding his own five column weekly contribution in the *Leader,* in the past three months three hundred editorials, letters and articles on schooling had appeared in the province's newspapers. Claiming that his knowledge of these submissions allowed him "to speak with some degree of authority as to what the people. . . are saying," he offered a summary. It was clear that many reforms could be accomplished by local initiative alone. A more business-like approach to school affairs, regular school visits, educational use of the lunch hour, the establishment of sanitary conditions, of school gardens, of means of familiarizing foreigners with English, of more rigorous attention to attendance, of better conditions for teachers, of the school as a community centre—these things could all be done "irrespective of anything the education department or the legislature may or may not do."

There were, however, some kinds of reforms "which cannot be affected merely by local initiative. . . ." The enactment and enforcement of a new attendance law was one. The improvement of supervision by educational experts who would more closely approximate superintendents than inspectors was another. The effacement of an archaic rural school board system was a third. And a fourth was the redrafting of the School Grants Act which failed to regulate the size of grant with the efficiency of the district.

What was needed as much as anything was "a Saskatchewan system for Saskatchewan," a system "whose characteristics arise from the fact that this is distinctly an agricultural province and that its citizen body is exceptionally heterogeneous." "The fundamental aims of Saskatchewan schools," Black wrote, "must be their adaptation to training for citizenship in a British democracy and to producing universally an attitude of intelligent sympathy towards our basic industry." The former required a new syllabus which reduced the old stress on information and increased that on habit formation. The latter required among other things agricultural high schools. A secondary school system without such schools, Black intoned, "is little short of an organized conspiracy to bleed rural communities of their best young blood."[15]

As the time for Better Schools Day approached, Black, the League and the various branches made suggestions concerning the conduct of the holiday. These included addresses, entertainment, and topics for discussion. A pamphlet was prepared called "Saskatchewan's Great Campaign for Better Schools," and printed in English, French, German, and Ruthenian. It offered more than fifty questions concerning how the school and community could better serve each other and how administration, supervision, and curriculum could be enhanced. "Let reform begin at home," the League urged. "In a wise investigation of the successes and failures of schools one great aim is the cultivation of *THE HABIT OF SELF-CRITICISM.*"[16]

When the day arrived, communities everywhere celebrated. Perhaps typical of the festivities was the holiday in Watrous, southeast of Saskatoon. After hand bills were distributed advertising two separate meetings, a small but "representative" crowd gathered and took active part. In the afternoon Watrous Inspector A. J. McCulloch spoke on "Chief Factors in a Child's Education"; Reverend McLaughlin of nearby Venn dealt with "The Problems of the Rural School," urging cooperation and consolidation; Mr. McDonald, a local teacher, discussed "Agriculture and School Gardening" stressing that the latter taught observation, kindness and interest in common things.

The crowd at the evening session was larger. Listening to principals and teachers emphasize the value of physical drill, organized play and athletics, they also heard Dr. Hixon of Watrous recommend medical inspection and the hiring of school nurses. Since the time was late and the train to return several of the guests had arrived, the group did not vote on a set of resolutions which Inspector McCulloch said embodied "the general sentiment. . . ." In part, these resolutions promoted the extension of the Normal School term for third class teachers; greater emphasis in the Normal School on English for the non-English; organized play and hygiene; consolidation of schools; medical inspection and the enforcement of compulsory attendance legislation.[17]

Elsewhere there were other meetings, most often moderately attended, but sometimes overflowing and sometimes sparse. Significantly, what followed these sessions throughout the province was a remarkable series of local reports. Taken singly and collectively they detailed the great complexity of school reform, the obvious impediments, and the subtle nuances. They told a story of bedevilling conflict, of the difficulty of achieving a common resolution in a mixed population, of assuming that the masses would be moved by the propaganda of Black and the League, or that people would engage eagerly and wholeheartedly in self criticism. From these local reports, indeed, several themes emerged which foreshadowed the shattering of the League's dream.

The first theme was that the locals were often making decisions based on poor information or no information at all. Frequently this was not acknowledged but became clear from the commentary. Sometimes the locals admitted their weakness. Andrew Jamieson, secretary of the Birch Hills meeting, near Prince Albert, thus confessed that in discussing the curriculum "the majority did not seem to be sufficiently acquainted with subjects taught" in their school.[18] While this seemed the fault of the locals themselves, other forms of ignorance seemed not. C. S. Elsey, secretary of the Rural Education Association of Fertile Valley, southwest of Saskatoon, reported that the coverage of the reform movement in the Regina *Leader,* the *Saskatchewan Gazette,* the *Public Service Monthly,* and the reports of the League notwithstanding, "other papers in the province have not contained anything like a full report of these movements." While the meeting recognized the import of the issues, there was a "feeling that the people in general, have not yet been sufficiently informed concerning the movements that have been made toward reform in our schools."[19]

Probably nowhere was this lack of information more apparent than concerning perhaps the only issue on which there was general agreement—the inadequacy of the existing system of supervision. The Rosthern meeting, for example, decided to "condemn the present method of inspection as worthless."[20] Several meetings requested additional inspectors and at least one wanted an inspector for every municipality, a recommendation as incredible as it was uninformed by fiscal realities, provincial or municipal.[21] The move would have added to the province's contingent of twenty-eight inspectors between five and six hundred more.

A second theme emerging from the local responses was the limited view of reform taken by many meetings. At most sessions very few of the fifty or so issues suggested as topics were discussed and usually the grand scheme outlined by the League was very far from local minds. Thus one well-meaning district resolved "that the trustees be requested to fix up basketball for the girls, parrel *[sic]* and horizontal bars for the boys."[22] While such recommendations were part of the broad thrust for innovation they were a small part and generally the people saw them as isolated from the host of other genuinely connected reforms. Sometimes the local impression of reform was even more limited. Accordingly, the complete report of the Davin meeting, east of Regina, said:

> We came to conclusion *[sic]* if the Department of Education could make the teacher start school by saying the Lord's prayer and close the same way; and that the teacher shall not play cards at night and go to any dances, for it leaves a poor example for the children.[23]

As important as this limited view was a third theme—a fixation in many meetings upon one or two issues. Not surprisingly, the two themes which tended to dominate related to the agricultural nature of Saskatchewan life and the heterogeneous nature of the Saskatchewan population. What was significant, however, was that there was no clear cut popular decision concerning either matter. If one district wished to reduce the syllabus "until the pupil has acquired proficiency in the practical and rudimentary studies necessary for agriculture," another claimed that the three Rs and geography were "the main thing."[24] If one resolved that "school gardens be compulsory in all rural districts," another claimed that early and late frosts made any gardening in the district nearly impossible.[25] If some recognized the inability of most teachers to instruct in nature study, others said that teachers should still "teach the theory of it." If parents claimed that they could teach children agriculture themselves, others responded that "children could learn from a stranger better than from parents."[26]

It was not that the population was evenly divided on the issue. Most meetings favored a broad curriculum influenced by the reality of Saskatchewan agriculture. It was just that some challenged most incisively and most devastatingly the underlying premise that the reorientation of the school would keep country boys on the farm. As W. W. Thompson wrote from Mantario, near the central Alberta Border, ". . .no amount of, or no kind of public schooling, is likely to attain that object. . . . Don't try to mould the boys to fit the farm, but begin at the other end of the string and fit the farm to the boys." Better conditions for farms and not better schools would maintain the farming population.[27]

One meeting which exhibited a complete fixation on the agricultural question occurred in the Mason School District near Invermay, northwest of Yorkton. Here was a complete rejection by farmers of the agrarian way of life. Resolving "that the present educational agitation is solely for the object of keeping the rural population on the land," the citizens bluntly asserted that "in their opinion the only way to keep the rising generation on the land is to do away with education altogether. . . ." The truth was "that agriculture in this country labouring under its present disabilitys *[sic]* is a most undesirable occupation and holds out no attraction whatever to our children when fairly educated."[28]

The other major area of fixation concerned language and ethnic rights. Over and over English speaking Canadians complained that "a large number of children are being brought up in a way which is not calculated to make good Canadian citizens of them."[29] The ratepayers, east of Lloydminister, at Vawn, deplored the teaching of any foreign language "in any school under any circumstances, because the encouragement of and use of more than one language is the greatest drawback we have at the present time in fostering a national spirit. We believe that no nation can be formed and preserved who speak more than one language."[30]

Of course, not just the Anglophones felt threatened. Often foreign settlements which had enjoyed language freedoms, either because of the block nature of the settlement, or language guarantees by the government or its agents, saw the whole crusade as a menace to their survival. Wasyl Stefaniuk of Howell reported that his meeting "unanimously resolved to sign a vigorous protest against the new school system introduced in the Province of Saskatchewan." Saying nothing else and referring no doubt to school provisions allowing instruction in a foreign language, Stefaniuk declared, "our wish is that no changes shall be made in the former system of education." The protest was signed by some two dozen citizens most certainly of Ruthenian extraction.[31]

If Stefaniuk and his people did not elaborate, a French speaking group from Marseillaise School District near Arborfield, east of Prince Albert, did. There was in the province, secretary J. C. Faucoup reported, a "fanatical element. . . ready to lay aside the British ideal of tolerance and sympathy towards the foreign races." He said one could not choose one's race or ethnological character. There was, moreover, an irony in the Canadian horror at the "Bismarckian" methods employed in Europe against the small countries. Surely "if the respect of right and of the dignity of little nations is worth in Europe the blood of millions of English and French, this same respect should not be considered a thing anti-patriotic and to be condemned in Saskatchewan."

Confederation was essentially an agreement between the "two principal races" which allowed "each. . . the liberty to keep their aspirations and to aim to satisfy them. . . ." Experience showed that it was impossible to coerce "a people who wish

to defend the language of their fathers and the religion of their homes." Forcing a young child "to translate in indifferent style" the ideas in the great books which "improve the mind and set free the heart" was "a brutal torment. . . and an attempt at moral suffocation. . . ." This effect was intensified by a school system which neglected religion. It was shameful that "under the guise of neutrality generations should be brought up who are half way between paganism and Christianity."

The Marseillaise group, Faucoup continued, was very interested in enlightenment and worthy reform. French settlers wished to learn English. But this wish was best seen as a desire for social and patriotic improvement, and not as a manifestation of disloyalty to the French race.

In sum, minorities everywhere had rights and those for the French, Faucoup wrote, were guaranteed if not in the letter then in the spirit of the constitution. Anyone who lays on these rights "a sacriligious hand," he warned, "exposes himself, not to immediate and bloody reprisals, but to the blows of a superior justice, tardy perhaps but inevitable."[32]

Clearly an inherent trait of the two major fixations was the spirit of opposition. So abiding and so pervasive was this sense of contradiction that it constituted a major theme in its own right. Even on the more minor issues the locals were at odds. Several meetings thus advocated consolidation and the one at Herbert, east of Swift Current, suggested that consolidation would make the school the centre of community life.[33] But the group at Canora, north of Yorkton, feared that centralization would lead to the breakup of community centres.[34] "We believe in small districts when the people have direct control," added Ole Kaldor of Bright School District, south of Saskatoon, "because it is a good training in citizenship... creates interest and tends to make the school a center."[35] Likewise, at Alameda, east of Estevan, the people were satisfied with their rural school and convinced that their children could not "be got early enough to school under any kind of consolidation."[36]

There were other contradictions. The meeting at Rosthern, north of Saskatoon, proposed a flat rate of taxation for school purposes within each rural municipality, but the assembly west of Regina, at Hogeville, declared "that the present system of taxation is satisfactory."[37] The gathering at Forest Bank recommended a trustee system operated by the municipality.[38] And the ratepayers at Penkell, southwest of Kindersley, agreed, since "at present trustees devote quite a lot of time, free of cost and receive in return for their efforts more kicks than thanks."[39] But when the meeting at Denzil, near the central Alberta border, considered the possibility, the conclusion was "decidedly no."[40]

Even in the resolutions of a single district there was what must have appeared to the school crusaders a measure of inconsistency. The Dundurn meeting, south of Saskatoon, resolved "that the public schools confine themselves to the fundamentals of education and that the curriculum be made more practical."[41]

Inconsistency was related to another problem, a fifth theme emerging from the Better Schools Day correspondence—the general inarticulateness of the masses. Despite the cogency of certain local presentations on certain issues, often local responses were vague, their underlying motives unspoken, their consequences unassessed. The Middle lake meeting, northeast of Saskatoon, was one example. Very briefly it considered two of the dozens of suggested issues. "Those present," the secretary then noted, "considered they were hardly experts enough to deal

further with the questions submitted but were convinced that considerable reforms are needed in many ways."[42] What reforms in what ways were never spelled out.

Local vagueness stemmed in part from the fact that not everybody was as excited about Better Schools Day as the promoters. Grumbling had occurred, elusive grumbling, difficult to pin down. As crucial for the outcome of reform was the all too frequent "expert" reaction. Inspector W. H. Magee of North Battleford, an ardent promoter of school reform, wrote:

> It seems to me that the great amount of grumbling that is claimed to have taken place has been without just cause and that when the grumblers are asked to put their complaints in form, they find that they have not words to express them, that in other words they have no expressible cause for complaint.[43]

Verbal gymnastics and the denigration of the ignorant and unlettered commoner were typical reactions of the expert who could never understand those who either never listened to him or objected to his "reasonable" arguments. Scholars and promoters like Magee often argued themselves into a pernicious form of self deception and anti-intellectualism. Having no expressible cause for complaint was a far cry from having no complaint at all. Such sentiments, moreover, scarcely encouraged either local involvement or reassessment.

III

Better Schools Day had revealed much about the nature of educational reform during the Great War. In this important period the country's essence came to be described as democratic and the mobilization of public opinion was achieved through the dispensation of carefully organized propaganda. In Saskatchewan the schools crusade occurred amid powerful movements concerning country life, women, conservation, health and temperance, and amid two crises—one agrarian and one demographic—which threatened the development of a regenerated English speaking rural commonwealth. Significantly this view of the "proper" destiny of the province was that of the Saskatchewan Public Education League. Indeed throughout the campaign the encounter was between the League and the people, a point revealing the inadequacy of many educational histories in Canada which view developments from the Department of Education and which underplay popular influence. Clearly the initiators of school reform have sometimes been spontaneous ad hoc groups of interested citizens. Though, as in the League's example, they had important links with the Department of Education, they could in no way be identified with the Department. A significant essence of the Better Schools Day crusade, moreover, was its populist nature. From the very beginning all the crusaders from Premier Walter Scott to Norman Fergus Black and his cohorts in the League, recognized that educational reform was neither a top down nor a bottom up process, but rather a mixture of the two, an interaction initiated by the informed and decided considerably by the common citizen. Probably this state of affairs had always obtained to some extent in the province but from existing studies it seems certain that the willingness to solicit popular opinion on school reform and the confidence in the power of propaganda to influence that opinion were both suited to the time and unprecedented.[44]

Better Schools Day revealed almost all the arguments pro and con regarding almost all the specific school reforms. In the process, it underscored several agonizing obstacles to innovation. For the crusaders the great question now was

how to proceed, how to interpret the local outpouring. The most obvious generalization one could make was that there was no strong consensus on almost any issue. Notwithstanding the careful grooming for the big day, the locals drafted resolutions on poor information or no information, or refused to do so for the same reasons. Discussing few issues, they never saw reform as a set of related sub-movements. Fixating on agricultural or language questions, they often construed Better Schools Day in a spirit of suspicion, sensing that all other issues were mere sops or disarming camouflage. Alternatively, many sang the choruses the crusaders wanted them to sing, advocating "improvements" unfortunately with little thought of costs, municipal or provincial finances, or the effect of prolonged drought and depression. Since the reform movement meant different things to different groups it was no surprise that many resolutions were contradictory. Likewise what was often cultivated was not as the League had fondly hoped, a habit of self criticism, but one of self preservation.

Whenever reforms seemed threatening—part of a plot to keep people on the land, say, or to shut down schools where foreign languages were spoken—the ability and willingness of the group to discuss other issues discerningly was seriously impaired. A cautious taciturnity resulted, an almost silent grumbling, well nigh impenetrable. These glum mutterings were part of a mass inarticulateness, the real proportions of which reformers could only imagine. It was this blunt negation, a refusal or indisposition to crystallize things, to expose inner thoughts to the light of reason and to the penetrating analysis of cultured intellect, which so infuriated reformers like Inspector Magee and which drove them to their own irrational, albeit articulate, counter response. No doubt heaping abuse upon mute respondents soothed the spirit, but it did little to further change. In fact, it likely retarded it.

All of this is to say that the reform movement in its totality was simply impossible from the beginning. After W. M. Martin succeeded the ailing Walter Scott as Premier in October 1916, he suggested to the secretary-treasurer of the Teachers' and Trustees' Association of Northwestern Saskatchewan that after the whole school system "is given the fullest consideration it will be found inadvisable to make any very radical changes." It was not just that Martin was less a reformer than Scott. It was also that in the preceding few months something of the complexity, the conflicting nature of reformist demands, and the welter of ambiguity and misinformation in popular requests, had impinged itself on Martin's mind.[45]

Martin would authorize the Foght *Report,* of course, the last significant work of the Saskatchewan Public Education League. Over the issue of commissioners, however, Martin clashed sharply with Black. It was a mark of the latter's continuing confidence in the League's populist approach that he insisted on a majority of local commissioners for the survey, an insistence which the Premier could not abide and which led to Black's resignation and the rapid demise of the League's influence.[46]

Saying little more than the League and its branches had said, the Foght *Report* accomplished as much. In an important sense the professionals had already had their say. And the popular reaction had already taken place in a spectacular, one-day flowering of local wisdom and shrewdness, ignorance and enmity, fear and crooked reasoning. Together these characteristics embodied some of the perils of educational reform and foreshadowed the long and grating process of school innovation. Any legislator who wished to inaugurate holus bolus the monumental changes the schoolmen promoted courted certain disaster and perhaps provincial

insurrection. These were effects never enticing to politicians and never less so than during wartime.

The two major issues Better Schools Day had grappled with—how the school system should reflect farming and how it should treat ethnicity—would be settled somewhat later. Aside from a compulsory attendance Act in 1917 the most striking "reform" after the crusade was the eradication of alien tongues from the school system in 1919. A decade or so later French was also removed.[47] Regarding the former, it has been argued that wartime zenophobia was chiefly responsible.[48] John Thompson more accurately suggests that "What caused the imposition of compulsory unilingual education was the determination of English-Canadian Westerners to use the school as the primary tool of assimilation, a determination that originated before 1914."[49] Even this, however, did not quite capture what had happened. Another factor which caused the imposition was the determination of English-Canadian Westerners to use the school as a primary tool for the regeneration of country life. It was thus little wonder that country life proponents sought a common medium of communication. With a Tower of Babel in the West their task was simply too onerous. And it was even less wonder that the rather laudable country life enthusiasts and the rather bigoted English-only fanatics were often one and the same. The former of course lost their verve during the long drought beginning in 1917 and the depression beginning in 1920 which brought disaster to the Saskatchewan southwest.[50] The school's participation in the broader agricultural reality of the province thereupon greatly diminished.[51] But the abatement of the movement in the twenties had not at all prevented its crucial conjunction with the forces of unilingualism so clearly exhibited during the Better Schools crusade.

Notes

[1]John H. Thompson, *The Harvests of War* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), ch. 2.

[2]See Harold D. Lasswell, *Propaganda Techniques in the World War* (New York: Knopf, 1927); J. R. Mock and C. Larson, *Words That Won the War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1939); J. M. Read, *Atrocity Propaganda, 1914-1919* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941).

[3]"Many Instructive Addresses Were Delivered on 'Better Schools Day' at Different Points in Saskatchewan," *Regina Leader*, July 8, 1916, X3A newspaper clippings, Saskatchewan Public Archives, Saskatoon, hereafter SA (S).

[4]*Census of the Prairie Provinces* 1916, p. 217; Thompson, *Harvests of War*, p. 10.

[5]See Neil Sutherland, "The 'New' Education in Anglophone Canada: Modernization Transforms the Curriculum," in G. S. Tomkins, ed., *The Curriculum in Canada in Historical Perspective*, 1979 Canadian Society for the Study of Education Yearbook, 1979, pp. 49-59, for the breadth of the reform movement and the degree to which it was comprised of unified and separate advocacy groups.

[6]"Hon. J. A. Calder Explains Better Schools Day, June 30th," Printer's copy for release on or after June 1, 1916, Ed 23 (1), SA (S).

[7]See *Canadian Annual Review*, 1915, pp. 665-73; Saskatchewan, *Statutes*, 1915, ch. 38, 39, 40. The legislation stopped short of prohibition, however.

[8]See Henry James Morgan, ed., *Canadian Men and Women of the Times*, (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912), pp. 26, 868-69; "The Next Great Question!"

[9]Harold W. Foght, *A Survey of Education in the Province of Saskatchewan* (Regina: King's Printer, 1918), pp. 1,26.

[10]See "Saskatchewan's Great Campaign for Better Schools 1915-1916," (Regina: Government Printer, 1916), Ed 6, SA (Regina), hereafter SA (R); also, Ed 6.87, SA (S).

[11]See Bruce Braden Peel, *A Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces to 1953 with Biographical Index* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), p. 644; "Saskatchewan's Great Campaign for Better Schools."

[12]"Convention of Prominent Citizens. . ." Regina *Leader,* Sept. 23, 1915, p. 2.

[13]*Canadian Annual Review* 1915, p. 679.

[14]"Convention of Prominent Citizens. . . ." p. 2.

[15]N. F. Black, "Development of Campaign for Better Schools," Mar. 14, 1916, letter to Regina *Leader,* Ed 23 (1), SA (S).

[16]"Saskatchewan's Great Campaign for Better Schools," bold type and italics in the original; Calder, "Better Schools Day," June 6, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[17]A. J. McCulloch to A. H. Ball, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[18]Andrew Jamieson to Department of Education, July 3, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[19]C. S. Elsey to Department of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[20]M. J. Sexsmith to Minister of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[21]This muddled local thinking concerning finances is an important point. The Warnock meeting, in the northwestern part of the province, for example resolved that rural municipalities "be managed on more businesslike lines so that instead of it costing on an average one dollar in the managing, etc. to spend one dollar it shall only cost 25 cts to spend a dollar." *[sic!]* A. Rallison to Deputy Minister of Education, July 10, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[22]W. C. Davies to Deputy Minister of Education, July 14, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S)

[23]Peter Duesterbeck to Department of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[24]O. R. Gould to Deputy Minister of Education, July 19, 1916, Ed 23 (3); A. C. Robinson to Deputy Minister of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[25]Archd. Rutherford to Deputy Minister of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2); Fred H. A. Bowles to Minister of Education, July 4, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[26]G. W. Cornwell to Deputy Minister of Education, July 12 c., 1916, Ed 23 (3); Chas. Black to Deputy Minister of Education, July 15c., 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[27]W. W. Thompson to Editor, Regina *Leader,* July 27, 1916, Clippings, SA (S).

[28]William Hewson to Deputy Minister, July 6, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[29]W. J. Orchard to Scott, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[30]Arthur Smith to Department of Education, June 30 c., 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[31]Wasyl Stefaniuk to Department of Education, August 2 c., 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[32]J. C. Faucoup to Department of Education, July 17, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S). There were of course no specific guarantees to the French in the BNA Act.

[33]Daniel Fast to Department of Education, July 28, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[34]Wasyl Dorsch to Department of Education, July 13, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[35]Ole Kaldor to Deputy Minister of Education, July 3, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[36]John Deyell to Deputy Minister of Education, July 12, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[37]M. J. Sexsmith to Minister of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2); Archd. Rutherford to Deputy Minister of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[38]H. B. Hope to Department of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[39]George Ryde to Deputy Minister of Education, July 8, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[40]A. C. Robinson to Deputy Minister of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[41]C. J. McArthur to Deputy Minister, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (2), SA (S).

[42]W. H. Baker to Deputy Minister of Education, July 19, 1916, Ed 23 (3), SA (S).

[43]W. H. Magee to Deputy Minister of Education, June 30, 1916, Ed 23 (1), SA (S).

[44]See Neil G. McDonald, "David J. Goggin: Promoter of National Schools," and Nancy M. Sheehan, "Indoctrination: Moral Education in the Early Prairie School House," in D. C. Jones, N. M. Sheehan and R. M. Stamp, ed., *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West* (Calgary: Detselig, 1979).

[45]L. M. Rogers, "Toward Rural School Administrative Reform: The Saskatchewan Experience, 1915-1945,"(M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1975). My interpretation of these lines, however, differs from that of Rogers who stresses only personality differences between Scott and Martin.

[46]Ibid., pp. 24-25.

[47]Keith A. McLeod, "Politics, Schools and the French Language," in Jones, Sheehan and Stamp, *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West,* pp. 59-83; McLeod, "Ethnic Relations and Schooling: The Case of Western Canada Since the 1870s," *Compare,* 8 (1978): 51-68. The latter details changes in provincial statutes regarding instruction in foreign languages since the thirties.

[48]See for example, E. K. Francis, *In Search of Utopia* (Altona: Friesen, 1955); Raymond Huel, "L'Association Catholique Franco-Canadienne de la Saskatchewan: A Response to Cultural Assimilation 1912-1934," (M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, Regina 1969). Note, however, that neither author limits his interpretation to the influence of the war.

[49]Thompson, *Harvests of War,* p. 92.

[50]See Deputy Minister of Agriculture Papers, xxiii.i, Better Farming Commission file, SA (R); "The Swift Current Conference," *Grain Growers' Guide,* July 21, 1920, p. 1627 and P. M. Abel, "A Neighbor's Example," in above, p. 1619; *Royal Commission of Inquiry into Farming Conditions* (Regina: King's Printer, 1921), ED 6, SA (R).

[51]Elsewhere I have written extensively on this issue. See Jones, "'We cannot allow it to be run by those who do not understand education'—Agricultural Schooling in the Twenties," *BC Studies,* 39 (Autumn 1978): 30-60; "Schools and Social Disintegration in the Alberta Dry Belt of the Twenties," *Prairie Forum,* 3 (1978): 1-19; "The Strategy of Rural Enlightenment: Consolidation in Chilliwack, B.C., 1919-1920" and "Creating Rural Minded Teachers: The British Columbian Experience, 1914-1924," in Jones, Sheehan and Stamp, *Shaping the Schools of the Canadian West,* pp. 136-176; "The Little Mound of Earth'— The Fate of School Agriculture," in G.S. Tomkins, ed., *The Curriculum in Historical Perspective,* Canadian Society for the Study of Education Yearbook 1979, pp. 85-94; "The Zeitgeist of Western Settlement: Education and the Myth of the Land," in J. Donald Wilson and David C. Jones, eds., *Schooling and Society in Twentieth Century British Columbia* (Calgary: Detselig, 1980), pp. 71-89.