Labour/Le Travailleur

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Volume 18, 1986

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/llt18art04

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Publisher(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (print)
1911-4842 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Welton, M. R. (1986). Conflicting Visions, Divergent Strategies: Watson Thomson and the Cold War Politics of Adult Education in Saskatchewan, 1944-6. *Labour/Le Travailleur*, *18*, 111–138.

Conflicting Visions, Divergent Strategies:

Watson Thomson and the Cold War Politics of Adult Education in Saskatchewan, 1944-6

Michael R. Welton

THE NAME OF WATSON THOMSON is scarcely a household word in the histories and popular traditions of the Canadian left. Norman Penner makes no mention of him in his synoptic history, *The Canadian Left*, and only a few traces can be found in our adult educational history, such as it is.[1] A few veteran prairie and west coast activists from the 1930s and 1940s remember him, some with great fondness, but he has essentially drifted into obscurity. This is unfortunate, because Thomson's priorities, aims, strategies, values, achievements, and failures throw light on a moment of highest importance in the social history of Canada. Using Watson Thomson's adult educational work with Tommy Douglas' CCF from late 1944 to early 1946 as an anchor point, this case study has several goals. First, to explicate Thomson's transformative-communitarian socialist vision and thereby confront the inadequacies of the communist/social democratic framing of the history of the Canadian left; second, to illuminate the tensions on the left at an axial moment in its history; third, to examine the specific failings of the social democratic imagination and political will; and finally, to insert Watson Thomson into the social history of adult education and western Canadian radicalism.

[1] See Norman Penner, *The Canadian Left: A Critical Analysis* (Toronto 1977), and Michael Welton, "In Search of a Usable Past for Canadian Adult Education," *CASAE History Bulletin*, May 1985.

Michael R. Welton, "Conflicting Visions, Divergent Strategies: Watson Thomson and the Cold War Politics of Adult Education in Saskatchewan, 1944-6," *Labour/Le Travail*, 18 (Fall 1986), 111-138.

I
Transformative-Communitarian Socialism: Towards A Society of Fellowship

THE GLASWEGIAN THOMSON had arrived in Toronto in the late spring of 1937 where he immediately fell in with Edward A. Corbett, the director of the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE), and his circle of educational radicals. Like all immigrants, Thomson did not arrive in the new country ideologically empty-headed or without experience. The 38-year-old Thomson had fought in World War I with the Royal Field Artillery, come of age intellectually at Glasgow University, seething with political unrest and socialist agitation, taught in Jamaica and Nigeria, colonial outposts of the British Empire, and worked with the personalist New Britain movement in England in the 1930s. He was an experienced and innovative cultural radical — journalist, propagandist, organizer, and educator.

Watson Thomson had returned to Glasgow at the end of World War I totally "disaffected towards the status quo" and convinced of the "necessity of total radical change." By 1918, he believed, bourgeois civilization was at a deadend, lacking in spiritual depth. True individuality had withered. The development of the person was no longer an end in itself. At the same time, deep community was no longer possible, either. Only transformation could solve the problem of cultural fragmentation. The whole capitalist social and economic order had to be radically restructured. How was this to be accomplished?

Living and struggling with New Britain movement founder, Dimitrije Mitrinovic, prophet of the co-personal revolution, suggested to Thomson the means of renewal. Here the constituent elements of his transformative-communitarian vision were put in place. Thomson believed that revolutionary change in the external structures of oppression would be impossible without change in individuals; masses could not bring about fundamental change. The co-personal group had an absolutely crucial role to play here: individuals had to choose freely to be initiators of a new revolution and had to learn, in face-to-face interaction with others, to break with egoistic individualism and become personally allied with others in mutual love and care. One had to both be and build the new world. Thomson believed that this co-personal experiment would provide individuals with a revolutionary enabling structure. Personalities would be transformed and equipped to become leavening agents of the new revolution. He envisaged that economic and social life would be rebuilt around units small enough that face-to-face relationships were never crushed. To accomplish this goal, nothing less than the development of a new value orientation and a new sensibility would suffice. This belief in the primacy of the co-personal group in social change would be one of Thomson's distinctive contributions to Canadian socialist practice.

Adult education was pivotal for communitarian socialists. Men and women

could be awakened through educational processes to begin to be and build the new world. Thomson took this vision and attempted to put it into practice in the Canadian context — Alberta from 1937-40, Manitoba from 1941-4, and Saskatchewan from 1944-6. A critical examination of Thomson's educational thought and practice shows a consistent modus operandi. Thomson's commitment to the microscopic "Kingdom of God on Earth" (genuine fellowship among a handful of people) and macroscopic total change (challenging the vested interests) allowed him considerable pedagogic room to manoeuvre. For Thomson, study-groups were to be spearheads of social change. He hoped that these groups, beginning as small centres of light and reflection, would multiply, eventually illuminating the whole landscape. Guided by the vision of a community-based, decentralized society, these groups would initiate the new revolution.

Before arriving in Saskatchewan in the fall of 1944, Thomson had participated in a remarkable range of adult education and communitarian experiments. He founded chapters of the Workers' Educational Association (WEA) in Calgary and Edmonton in 1937 and 1938 and played a leading role in developing the Danish folk school-inspired Alberta School of Community Life and the University of Alberta Extension Department's innovative outreach programmes. As director of the University of Manitoba's Adult Education Office, he worked to revitalize rural Manitoban communities, often in dreadful conditions. And along with the residents of 139 Roslyn Road in Winnipeg, he created the Prairie School for Social Advance (PSSA) in 1944, to mobilize and coordinate the progressive forces of western Canada.

Thomson also played an important role in several national organizations. He campaigned tirelessly for the Canadian National Refugee Committee. He participated actively in CAAE deliberations throughout the war years and provided philosophical perspective for the CAAE at a turning point in its history — drafting the controversial manifesto of 1943. He was one of the primary instigators of the Citizens' Forum (extending the communitarian vision outward to the national community) and his northern plains project (engaging farmers and agriculturists in critical dialogue about the need to create a decentralized bio-region) was a bold attempt to challenge the centralization of Canadian politics and culture. Moreover, his own experiments in co-personal living, begun in Edmonton in 1939, and continuing in the cooperative house on Roslyn Road in Winnipeg from 1941 to 1944 provided a crucible to test his communitarian theories.

His work in Manitoba, successful within the constraints imposed by the university bureaucracy and conservative political climate, had suffered through disconnection from government policy formation. In 1944, for the first time in his life, Thomson had the opportunity — so he thought — to link his transformative-communitarian educational theory to the social policy of the newly elected CCF government of Tommy Douglas. This was indeed a new and unprecedented experience for the anti-establishment Scot.

II
Conflicting Visions

THE SASKATCHEWAN CCF HAD swept W.J. Patterson's Liberal machine out of office, winning 47 of 52 seats. Despite the bitterness of a business-supported anti-socialist campaign, the CCF had won a decisive victory. The national CCF leadership thought they saw signs of wonderful things to come. Even the fanatically anti-socialist *Financial Post* predicted that the CCF could win between 70 and 100 federal seats.

The 1944 election programme appealed to a broad spectrum. Saskatchewan was promised security of land tenure, expanded social services, including socialized health services, educational reform, and a planned economy. Although the CCF won a convincing victory, Douglas faced formidable problems in establishing a "beachhead of socialism on a continent of capitalism."[2] He had inherited one of the most ineffective political bureaucracies in the country. He had come to power without the support of any of the major Saskatchewan or national newspapers. To be sure, 53 per cent of the electorate had voted CCF. But large numbers of big Saskatchewan farmers had not. Nor had significant numbers of the urban middle classes. Despite the work of an influential Roman Catholic supporter, the Rev. Eugene Cullihane, most Roman Catholics remained suspicious of the CCF, as did many ethnic subgroups — French Canadians, Ukrainians, Mennonites. One group of Old Colony Mennonites even prepared to leave Saskatchewan, believing that a totalitarian dictatorship was about to descend upon the province.

If Douglas faced a politically nervous public, he was by no means presiding over a unified party with a consistent base of support. The CCF's most vigorous support came from the province's left wing — what Richards and Pratt call the "culture of left populism."[3] The left, while agreeing with the party's limited electoral goals of a secure land tenure and of public welfare, wanted soon to create a socialist society with a fundamentally new value orientation. They sought qualitative changes in all social relationships. They proposed cooperative farming and housing, inclusion of cooperative values in public school curricula, and believed social services should be built and governed from the community upwards. They promoted direct, grassroots democracy.

"The CCF government," Richards and Pratt contend, "was a marriage between the leaders of a left populist movement and representatives of professional civil servants. . . ."[4] Was it a marriage of convenience? How much sup-

[2] Lewis Thomas, ed., *The Making of a Socialist: The Recollections of T.C. Douglas* (Edmonton 1982), 169.
[3] John Richards and Larry Pratt, *Prairie Capitalism: Power and Influence in the New West*, (Toronto 1979), 139-41.
[4] *Ibid.*, 139.

port would Douglas and the cabinet provide to the left populist forces? Would they foster this culture's central preoccupations?

Tommy Douglas seemed to be sympathetic to, even identified with, the left wing of the party in the early days of the new CCF regime. Douglas wanted not only to introduce legislation on health, collective bargaining, and education, as he had promised. He also wanted to use a campaign of grassroots radical adult education — a massive campaign of study-action throughout the province — to begin the building of a new society. Thomson, who arrived with his family in October 1944 to direct the new Division of Adult Education, thought he saw "exciting vistas ahead."[5]

Although the University of Saskatchewan Extension Department had done some good work with community organizations and the Citizens' and Farm Forums, W.S. Lloyd, the youthful minister of education, did not think the department could be an educational mobilizing centre. Lloyd thought that a new division of adult education should clarify the thinking of Saskatchewan citizens so that desirable social and economic conceptions could prevail, and provide adult education with immediate and tangible aims (cooperative farming, credit unions, health improvement facilities, development of community centres, and leisure-time activities).[6]

In his first few months as director of the Division of Adult Education, Thomson was convinced that he had "all the room for growth and action that one could possible desire or use."[7] He was happy with the staff he was recruiting — experienced educators like Art Wirick, his first district supervisor, and Florence Gaynor, Thomson's assistant and supervisor of the Basic Citizenship Program. But he also encountered some opposition from the editors of the *Saskatchewan Commonwealth*, who shocked Thomson with their "narrow right-wing line."[8] Moreover, unbeknownst to Thomson, Douglas had received the first of many letters from outside the province casting doubts on Thomson's political acceptability. H.M. Caiserman, secretary of the Canadian Jewish Congress, wondered if Thomson — though a "splendid educationist" — was "communistically inclined." Douglas dismissed the accusation out-of-hand.[9]

Thomson moved quickly to establish government policy for adult education in Saskatchewan. His brief, "Adult Education Theory and Policy," outlined what Thomson thought was the only possible attitude to adult education for a

[5] Watson Thomson to T.C. Douglas, 24 August 1944, T.C. Douglas Papers, Adult Education Division, Saskatchewan Archives, Regina (hereafter TCDP).
[6] *W.S. Lloyd to T.C. Douglas, 28 August 1944*, Woodrow S. *Lloyd Papers (hereafter* WSLP), Adult Education, 1944 box.
[7] Watson Thomson to Roslyn Road, 22 October 1944, Roslyn Road Papers (hereafter RRP).
[8] Watson Thomson to Roslyn Road, 29 October, RRP.
[9] H. Caiserman to T.C. Douglas, 12 October 1944; T.C. Douglas to H. Caiserman, 17 October 1944, TCDP.

socialist government to adopt.[10] It was of the "utmost import" that members of the Saskatchewan government understand the educational theory and principles of the new Adult Education Division, both in itself and in relation to their own social philosophy. Education was not impartial and socially neutral. In Saskatchewan, an adult education conforming with the principles of the social theory had two primary concrete tasks: to support the people with relevant knowledge in their movement towards the new objectives for which the way has been opened up, whether it be cooperative farms, larger school units, or new public health projects; and to awaken the people to a sense of the "central issues of the world crisis," still unresolved, so that there would be a clear way ahead for modern society. Thomson informed the cabinet that a socially-minded education had to find where the growing points were, where a sense of social purpose was breaking through towards liberatory social change. Then, that activization had to be fostered in every possible way, feeding it the material for its creative job of reshaping the environment. In the fall of 1944 Thomson wagered that a significant number of Saskatchewanians had opted to move towards a new participatory and self-reliant society. He saw his task as catalytic: helping people to clarify their goals and achieve their ends through critical dialogue.

The cabinet never responded officially to this brief. Perhaps it was simply forgotten in the hectic first months of establishing the new government. Yet one cannot escape the suspicion that the cabinet may not have wished to face the implications of openly declaring their goals. At any rate, since the cabinet did not provide any feedback, Thomson considered that they found it acceptable. The whole affair did not bode well for the future.

During November and December Thomson shared his hopes for adult education with the Saskatchewan people. This was the old publicist at his best. In early November he published several articles in the *Regina Leader-Post*, *Moose Jaw Herald*, the *Prince Albert Daily Herald*, and the *Saskatoon Phoenix-Star*. He gave a series of four radio broadcasts on the theme of "Power to the People" in December. The knowledge the Adult Education Division wanted to convey was not knowledge for its own sake, but for the sake of change nearer to the heart's desire of ordinary, decent people everywhere. Average people, Thomson believed, did not want to study the history of medicine in the abstract. But when they began to ask why they could not have a decent hospital in their own district, and to get together with their neighbours to figure out some way of getting one, they are ready to learn some history of medicine, as well as some social and economic history of western Canada. In subsequent broadcasts, people heard Thomson challenge them to be "scientific and to be cooperative." Aware that the trend in agriculture was towards increasingly mechanized, capital-intensive, large-scale units, Thom-

[10] "Adult Education Theory and Policy" (hereafter AETP), 1, William M. Harding, papers in my possession (hereafter WMHP), basic literature, book 1.

son urged farmers to bring their isolated farms together into single cooperative communities. He was convinced that the people could take the "raw material" of a prairie village and create a new pattern worked out by ordinary people from below. But one could not do that without study and cooperative action. "No study without consequent action. No action without previous study:" this would be the banner of the department's study-action programme.

By mid-December Thomson and his staff had prepared a detailed "Provincial Study-Action Program" and submitted it to an overburdened cabinet for discussion. In principle and structure, the study-action programme was to be decentralized. Resident field workers, called district supervisors, were to be placed in district centres such as Yorkton. They would correlate their work with that of other government departments and agencies such as the Wheat Pool, University Extension Department, and the NFB. The Division of Adult Education eventually hoped to have a full-time study-action leader for every "Large Unit of Administration" in the province. The district supervisor was to establish a nuclear community centre programme, start discussion and study-groups on basic economic and political issues, encourage all forms of citizen activization (credit unions, community centres, cooperative farms, study clubs, community forums), promote study and discussion of projects in public health, reconstruction, rehabilitation, social welfare, and cooperatives, organize periodic three-day adult schools, act as district librarian and take charge of film distribution, replacing the existing NFB circuit organization. In the urban areas, labour education classes for unionists would begin in Regina, Saskatoon, and Moose Jaw.

Study-action was underway in Saskatchewan! Nevertheless, immediately after returning from Winnipeg on 12 or 13 December, where he had been addressing a PSSA weekend forum, Thomson had the nagging fear that there was "resistance of several kinds" to the programme. He was beginning to see "how every characteristic vice and weakness of social democracy is represented right here in this government."[11] One week later some of this gloom lifted. The cabinet had approved the "Provincial Study-Action Program" plan and granted $100,000 for its budget.

Obviously elated at receiving this stamp of approval, Thomson wrote to Douglas on 1 January 1945, a week after prominent CCF labour researcher Eugene Forsey advised Douglas to watch Thomson closely. Thomson told Douglas that "for the first time" he could "feel identified with the basic goals of the people in authority." Thomson raised several strategic considerations with Douglas. What should the study-action programme emphasize? What should be the content of the central drive? How safe and disarming should the department play? And how challenging? Thomson told Douglas that he was interested in establishing genuine fellowship between small groups of people and "total radical change into a society at all points socialized and 'of the

[11] Watson Thomson to Roslyn Road, 17 December 1944, RRP.

people.' " Small study groups, community centres, and cooperatives were relevant, but so was challenging the vested interests. He asked Douglas what he thought the "wisest and most effective thing to do in the light of our understanding as to the stage of development of the battle . . . right now."[12]

Thomson insisted that the division's activities had to be "clearly and explicitly" coordinated with the general political policies and strategies of the government. All government publicity, public information, and much of adult education should, Thomson thought, be an integrated system directed by someone who had continuous access to the government. Why did Thomson raise these questions with Douglas? Perhaps he knew that the bolder his division became, the louder the political opposition would scream that adult education was nothing but a conduit for CCF propaganda. Could the division count on full government support? Had Thomson read the CCF government correctly?

With a substantial budget approved, Thomson could hire the staff needed to launch study-action throughout the province. William M. Harding was appointed in mid-January as director of study-action and administrative supervisor. A man of keen intellect and exceptional organizing skills, Harding's task was pivotal: he would organize efficient record-keeping and community centres, and the projected "citizens' conferences." Harding moved quickly, fleshing out the details of the proposed study-action plan. In mid-February he was joined by Eddie Parker, seconded from the Department of Physical Fitness and Recreation to work as promotional director. A young man of scintillating imagination highly regarded by David Lewis, Parker joined Thomson, Harding, and Hugh Harvey of the Department of Co-operatives, to form the visionary centre of the division. These men, who really believed that Saskatchewan could be turned "upside down," would be joined in the following months by two new district supervisors, a production editor, and a supervisor (and assistant) of the Lighted School Program.

In early November, Thomson had sent out the first questionnaire to a number of community organizations in order to gain ammunition for future social action projects and keep the CCF on the side of the people. By 18 December, the division had received 200 replies. With the able Harding overseeing the study-action programme and district supervisors ready to go into action, the department began to proceed systematically to establish more starting and growing points, study-action groups, and community councils. A "starting point," as Harding conceived it, consisted of one individual; a "growing point" of four individuals interested in a common "problem" or "issue." When ten "units" cohered around a common theme, a study-group was created.

The visionaries in the Division of Adult Education envisaged nothing less than a "comprehensive adult education campaign for social progress through which five hundred thousand men and women of the province are being encour-

[12] Watson Thomson to T.C. Douglas, 1 January 1945, TCDP.

aged to become active citizens and fully-rounded personalities."[13] By 1 May the central study-action office hoped to circularize all existing contacts. By 1 October, when the study-action outlines would be ready, the Division of Adult Education wanted to have 1,000 starting points and 300 growing points. Looking into the future, Harding and Thomson imagined that by "fifteen years after the start of this campaign and ten years after its full-speed capacity is realized, Saskatchewan should be able to boast it is truly possessed by its people. . . ."[14] "Half-a-million active builders of a new and better Saskatchewan. Half-a-million intelligent citizens of the world." "Nothing less," Thomson exuded in a press release at the end of January, "is the goal of the Saskatchewan Study-Action program. . . ."[15]

Three central issues were clear to Thomson and Harding. First, they understood that the Saskatchewan government had to demonstrate to the farmers, workers, and plain people that a "provincial socialist government" could effect tangible material improvements. Second, they knew that the mass of people must be mobilized and activized as rapidly as possible. Only by participating in the processes of social change would people realize that "socialism is democracy extended" and the bogey of "socialism as mere bureaucracy and regimentation" ludicrous. Third, Thomson and Harding believed that the "political consciousness" of the mass of people must be so deepened that the foundations of prairie radicalism became unshakable.

The first task was one of legislation and administration, the second and third matters ones in which adult education could play an important role. Study-action had been designed to meet the second need — mobilizing and activizing the people at the grassroots level. It was essential, the study-action strategists contended, to begin with a broad approach to "communities as communities," serving them in some appreciable way regarding their "felt needs." Study-action, citizens' conferences, and the Lighted School all aimed at serving communities in an "above-party spirit." Yet, these latter activities were not quite "above-party:" Harding and Thomson wanted to create an organizational vehicle for a more directly "political" or "socialist" type of education. This goal was not announced publicly for obvious reasons.

It was educationally sound, they thought, to attempt to lead study-action groups from local and immediate concerns to the affairs of the province, nation, and eventually, the world. As one did so, the issues discussed would inevitably take on a more "political" character and groups would look to the Division of Adult Education for guidance. That guidance could be then given on the basis of confidence earned through non-partisan services in the

[13] "Outline of the Proposed Study-Action Plan," confidential, not for general release, WMHP, basic literature, book 1.
[14] "*Outline of the Proposed Study-Action Plan.*"
[15] Government of Saskatchewan Study-Action Program, press release, 24 January 1945, WMHP, basic literature, book 1.

community-centred interests. Developing this political consciousness, though the most crucial task as far as the progressive movement was concerned, was also the most difficult. If too abrupt and outspoken an approach were taken to current political and economic issues, one would be "reduced to the futile role of preaching to the converted."[16]

During the month of February, Thomson's main preoccupation had been with an exhausting and exciting training course for the field workers and staff. And the excitement of the training school was no doubt intensified several days after the sessions ended. The staff opened the *Financial Post* of 24 February and saw this headline — "Saskatchewan CCF Adult Education Program May Emerge as Straight Socialist Propaganda." Under this provocative headline, Gordon L. Smith malevolently linked Saskatchewan study-action with undemocratic education. "Nothing like it has ever been broached in Canada," he exclaimed. "One can only point to Germany or Russia or pre-war Italy for such a deliberately planned scheme of a mass education, perhaps more correctly described as mass propaganda." The anonymous author of the regular news column, "The Nation's Business," informed Canadians that if they voted CCF, they were "in for a mass propaganda drive of the Goebbels' variety. . . ." The author was quick to add that Watson Thomson was an exponent of "socialist and communist blueprints for utopia" who readily admitted that he felt "no obligation in educational work to present more than one side of the question."[17] Thomson thought the *Financial Post* comments were "pretty damning." All he could do was to encourage his staff to "go ahead with your work quietly. Shrug off verbal opposition with a smile."[18]

April saw the beginnings of positive responses in the field. District supervisors confirmed the division's opinion that although apathy was still to be found, people were stirring at the grassroots level. Ed Parker had visited the Landis-Biggar area and discovered that their central passion was cooperative farming. In this case, Thomson observed, the department's job began with the "happiest of all stages," namely with helping a "grand bunch of people" to get what they wanted by giving them something "we've got which they know they want." A weekend conference was in the offing. This citizens' conference on cooperative farming would be part of the preparation for a whole winter's study and research and discussion of the entire community. Thomson told his staff that other citizens' conferences on health and veterans were also being considered.

[16] Watson Thomson, "Adult Education in Saskatchewan: The Next Three Years," c. 11 June and 29 June 1945, WMHP, folder on adult education.

[17] "Saskatchewan Socialists Start Mass Propaganda Plan," and Gordon L. Smith, "Saskatchewan CCF 'Adult Education' Program May Emerge as Straight Socialist Propaganda," *The Financial Post*, 24 February 1945.

[18] Adult Education Division Monthly *Newsletter* (hereafter *Newsletter*), 1 (2 April 1945), WMHP, basic literature, book 1.

The idea of the citizens' conferences was that ordinary citizens could come together with "experts," who could provide some analytical guidance, and government officers, who could provide some information regarding "official" policy. This may sound naive to political realists, but Thomson explicitly rejected the notion that specialists were there to deliver their words, leaving the people to criticize or go home and pick the words to pieces. This was not the way to build a "true democracy." Those who were not specialists had a right to have their say. Each conference utilized the familiar methods — speakers, films bearing on the conference theme, group discussion, panels, and strategy and action sessions. The heart of the citizens' conferences, from Thomson's viewpoint, lay not with the large assembly but in the small discussion groups. As issues emerged in the plenary sessions, clear and significant questions were then placed before these "policy-making" groups. Following the panel discussion, Thomson's role, a crucial one, was to intuit the audience's mood and address himself to the question "where do we go from here?" Action, as Thomson repeatedly pointed out, was of two orders: study and practical projects.

If Thomson thought he lived in a "dangerous, fascinating, grandly terrible"[19] world, events on the national and provincial scene were equally ominous for him personally. In early March the original budget of $100,000 had been reduced to $60,000, possibly due in part to the squabble over the seed grain issue. Without any warning that there had been any change in understanding between Thomson and the premier, Lloyd told Thomson in early April that no provincial grant would be made to the PSSA. Thomson was incensed; this seemed to be a unilateral repudiation of Douglas' original agreement that the Saskatchewan government would provide financial support for the prairie school. "But this," Thomson wrote to friends at Roslyn Road, was not the first time Douglas had "acted on impulse and then backed away from the consequences of his action." Thomson told Lloyd how serious the consequences of such an irresponsible decision were. Evidently impressed, Lloyd told Thomson he would reopen the question with the premier.[20] It is at this point that the ground begins to slide out from under Thomson.

Lloyd informed Thomson that the decision not to support the PSSA financially had been made around the end of March. That could mean, Thomson thought at the time, that the decision was related to the Richards-Johnson rebellion in the Manitoba CCF (Berry Richards, CCF MLA from The Pas stayed at Roslyn Road during house sittings) and Watson Thomson's alleged association with that. Thomson had, however, been "officially exonerated."[21] What had been happening behind Thomson's back? In early March, S.J. Farmer, the leader of the Manitoba CCF, informed Douglas that he had talked with Stanley

[19] *Newsletter*, 2, WMHP, basic literature, book 1.
[20] Watson Thomson to Roslyn Road, 16 April 1945, RRP.
[21] Watson Thomson to Roslyn Road, 16 April 1945, RRP. This dispute was very bitter.

Knowles about Thomson. Farmer believed that Thomson was a fellow traveller of the communists.[22] On 19 March the national executive of the CCF and caucus (including F.R. Scott, M.J. Coldwell, Angus MacInnis, and Stanley Knowles) heard Stanley Knowles give a "full report of the background of the trouble with Richards and Johnson, analyzing the situation as it developed from day to day."[23] Knowles no doubt raised the question of Thomson's role in the Manitoba imbroglio.

In fact, only a week after the national executive and caucus meeting, national CCF leader M.J. Coldwell reminded Douglas, his protegé, that the Communists were "boring from within" and wondered if Watson Thomson was "playing ball with these people."[24] The day after Douglas received Coldwell's letter, P.N.R. Morrison, president of the Calgary CCF constituency, told him that the Berry Richards incident had "either been engineered by or the result of contact with Watson Thompson [sic]."[25] Morrison added that "we had Thompson [sic] here for a meeting and his line of talk was certainly very comforting to the Labour Progressive Party [LPP] line." Five days later, on 2 April, Knowles wrote to Douglas to insure that if Stanley Rands applied for a job in Saskatchewan (Rands lived at Roslyn Road and had taken over the directorship of the Adult Education Office at the University of Manitoba), that he should not be hired. "I cannot make my warning too strong. It is very clear that we have a real struggle on our hands with these so-and-sos."[26] Dr. J. Stanley Allen, president of the Quebec CCF party, also warned Woodrow Lloyd that Thomson had been seen on the same platform with an alleged Communist editor, R.E. Gordon.

How did Tommy Douglas respond to all of this? The only piece of direct evidence is found in a letter he wrote to M.J. Coldwell on 31 March. Douglas told Coldwell that he had had "considerable warnings from various parts of the country, outlining the fears of some of our people. Both Woodrow Lloyd and myself are keeping that branch under careful supervision."[27] The suspicion that Thomson was not politically trustworthy, rejected out-of-hand by Douglas in the fall of 1944, seemed to be growing. The CCF was under assault from anti-socialist propagandists; the LPP was indeed seeking to disrupt the CCF in

[22] S.J. Farmer to T.C. Douglas, 4 March 1945; Douglas to Farmer, 7 March 1945; Douglas to Lloyd, 8 March 1945, TCDP.

[23] CCF Papers, Public Archives of Canada (hereafter PAC), Executive and Caucus minutes, vol. 2.

[24] M.J. Coldwell to T.C. Douglas, 26 March 1945, M.J. Coldwell Papers, PAC, vol. 15, T.C. Douglas correspondence file.

[25] P. Morrison to T.C. Douglas, 27 March 1945, WSLP, Adult Education, 1945, January-June box.

[26] S. Knowles to T.C. Douglas, 2 April 1945, WSLP, Adult Education, 1945, January-June box.

[27] T.C. Douglas to M.J. Coldwell, M.J. Coldwell Papers, PAC, vol. 15, T.C. Douglas correspondence file.

the labour movement and in political constituencies.[28] The tide, once flowing in the CCF's direction, was receding. Saskatchewan had to be protected. The CCF national leadership, threatened from outside and from within, was closing its ranks, drawing boundaries to determine who was in and who was out.

Watson Thomson no longer seemed to fit in the CCF camp. His call for unity among progressive people was misinterpreted, his severe criticism of the Communists, and his commitment to building a grassroots people's movement went unheeded. The letters to Douglas and Lloyd sadly but understandably utilize the "character assassination" techniques we have come to associate with *McCarthyism*. *No sound empirical evidence was provided to support any of the* accusations. His writings were not read closely; he was "guilty by association." Nor did the culturally conservative CCF national leadership, particularly Knowles and Coldwell, understand the Roslyn Road experiment. Thomson and Roslyn Road were communitarian socialists committed to self-renewal and decentralized forms of governance, local control of resources, and the elimination of exploitation and alienation. Socialism could not be engineered by humane parliamentarians. Thomson's CCF critics, all of whom were on the right wing of the party, were correct on one issue: Watson Thomson was not a loyal Fabian social democrat.

Everything that the Division of Adult Education and Watson Thomson would do in the ensuing months would be clouded with political suspicion. During May and June, Thomson, who was unaware of the letters, had his first "serious feelings that something was amiss."[29] Only later, though, would he be able to see that the criticism that he was a communist because he talked of left-wing unity was the handwriting on the wall. The failure to gain full discussion of his policy paper on adult education was now looming large, becoming increasingly significant politically. Had the cabinet some doubts about the study-action programme? The budget had been drastically reduced and PSSA support withdrawn. Were they a little uneasy that Thomson, through the study-action programme, might actually succeed in mobilizing the people and gain support among the left wing of the party? If he did, could the party control this grassroots momentum?

The June 1945 federal election left Saskatchewan the only "progressive" spot in the country. Thomson thought the general election had provided a "rough and ready" measure of how far study-action had yet to go in turning the "common man" towards activism. Any objective student of society would agree, Thomson argued, that a victory for the Canadian Liberal Party was a "victory for laissez-faire modified by paternalistic social legislation." It was not a victory for "active, participating citizenship, for government of the people, by the people."[30] The results of the general election also demonstrated

[28] See Gad Horowitz, "The Struggle with the Communists, 1943-8," *Canadian Labour in Politics* (Toronto 1968).

[29] Watson Thomson resignation letter, 31 December 1945, RRP.

[30] *Newsletter*, 4 (1 July 1945), WMHP, basic literature, book 1.

for Thomson that Saskatchewan was "away ahead of the rest of Canada." In contrast to other regions of the country, Saskatchewan was open to the idea of radical social change. "The eyes of the whole continent," he wrote, "and more are upon us — 'progressive' people watching us with envy and guardians of the *status quo* with a sharpened hostility. Clearly, we are a vanguard. . . ."[31] Saskatchewan may well have been a vanguard, relatively speaking, but the shattering defeat of the national CCF was pressuring the Saskatchewan CCF in the direction of becoming a moderate, safe, social democratic party committed to cautious rule by cabinet.

III
Divergent Strategies

WOODROW LLOYD WAS becoming increasingly edgy about identifying the CCF as a militant grassroots movement for social change. He seemed to be retreating from his earlier commitment to counteracting citizen "torpidity," but it is difficult to know whether Lloyd agreed with the social theory of education set out in Thomson's brief. He probably had reservations. In fact, Woodrow had discarded one of the central concerns of CCF educational policymakers, to restructure the curriculum along socialist lines, in favour of a safe policy of establishing larger units of administration and providing better working conditions for teachers.

Thomson certainly did not think that now was the time for the Saskatchewan CCF to play it safe or retreat from the opposition; the latter tendency, Seymour Lipset has observed, was quite characteristic of social democracy.[32] Shortly after the federal election of 11 June, a worried Thomson presented his concerns confidentially to the government in the form of a three-page document, "Adult Education in Saskatchewan: The Next Three Years." Reminding the government of the division's commitment to stimulate activism by people in an "above-party spirit," Thomson then turned to the future. Given the present *tempo of provincial, national, and global events, the government ran the risk of* saying in three years' time — "too little and too late." The extension and consolidation of the widespread goodwill and citizen confidence in the division's usefulness and integrity, now being built through study-action, citizens' conferences, and, soon, the Lighted School, were "immediate and urgent" necessities. The plan was there, techniques known, a small but devoted staff at work as individuals and as a team. But opportunities far surpassed achievements because the department needed more staff, research, writing and fieldwork.

The time was ripe. The people, as the division was finding them, were

[31] *Ibid.*

[32] See Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism*, chap. 11, "Politics and Social Change," for a discussion of the CCF's retreat from "socialism."

"disposed toward change and ready to take a more dynamic role in affairs." Returned veterans, with their "restless demands," could be directed towards social change. To transform the interest generated around the citizen's conference on cooperative farming into an "active determination" required time and money. This latter example illustrated well the way in which adult education could "stimulate not merely more social and progressive attitudes of mind but also the processes of actually creating a socialist environment." Summing up, Thomson reaffirmed his rejection of innocuous adult education and commitment to "starting a dynamic popular movement, with challenging social and political implications and consequences, making a palpable impact on the mind and life of this province."[33]

Thomson would not get his coveted $200,000 budget. Nevertheless, all Thomson and his co-workers could do was press on with the work and hope that the cabinet would not opt for innocuous adult education. People were stirring at the grassroots level; the Division of Adult Education wanted to be present as educational midwives.

The main achievements of June 1945, from the Division of Adult Education's perspective, were the conducting of the citizens' conferences at Melfort and Wynyard on rehabilitation (5-6 June; 26-27 June), and at Landis on cooperative farming (29-30 June). Throughout the summer and fall, the department would hold other conferences on family services (Moose Jaw), health services (Kamsack, Saltcoats, Canora, Sturgis), rehabilitation (Swift Current), community centres (Kindersley, Torquay), and a second on cooperative farming at Outlook. To succeed, the citizens' conferences needed a clearly defined objective, spontaneously chosen by the people and within their powers to achieve. But it was the Landis conference that really captured Thomson's romantic imagination. He thought that helping communities to establish cooperative farms was the most important action that could be taken at the local community level. The whole quality of the social environment could be altered and a new type of community created. In contrast to unplanned communities, the cooperative farm community would be deliberately created and culturally and technically advanced.

In the first months of the CCF regime there was much enthusiasm, some of it no doubt politically naive, for cooperative farming. Eddie Parker had visited Landis, the leading centre of left populist culture in Saskatchewan, in April, the same month which saw the formation of the first complete type of cooperative farm at Sturgis. Parker was struck by how "sound, open-minded, sympathetic, and forward-looking" the Biggar-Landis area was.[34] Shortly after, Thomson and Parker wrote to Jim Wright and Fred Hart regarding the possibility of having a weekend citizens' conference on cooperative farming. By the

[33] Watson Thomson, "Adult Education in Saskatchewan: The Next Three Years," WMHP, folder on adult education.

[34] Ed Parker to Mrs. "Shorty" Zimmer, 20 April 1945, AED, box 10, conferences file.

middle of May, the Harts, Jim Wright, and others had decided to have a conference on cooperative farming at Landis. After the conference ended, "interested and enthusiastic" individuals would begin study-groups in earnest after harvest and continue throughout the winter.[35]

Why were Landis and other towns and settlements — Rosetown, Matador, *North Battleford*, *Sturgis*, *Kindersley*, *Wynyard*, and *Swift Current* — interested in cooperative farming? The Saskatchewan cooperative farms were not intended, as the United States government-initiated projects of the 1930s were, as "temporary relief measures for migratory or destitute farm families."[36] They were not intended to be sectarian communities such as those of the Mormons, Mennonites, and Hutterites. They were distinct from the collective farms of the USSR, where the voluntary principle was largely ignored, and the Palestinian kibbutzim, which consisted of members largely from a single national group. Nor were they of the utopian separatist variety, such as the Harmony Industrial Association experiment in late nineteenth-century Saskatchewan.[37] The cooperative farming initiative in Saskatchewan was primarily a creative response to agricultural conditions in the province. One cannot discount, either, the cooperative heritage of many of the Scandinavian farmers who populated the above settlements.

With the introduction of large-scale machinery, it became increasingly difficult to farm small units economically. The number of farmers pushed out of agriculture by the pressure of larger, more efficient operations was growing rapidly. For some farmers, then, the cooperative farm may well have been seen in pragmatic terms as the answer to the economic problem. Pooling machinery, for instance, would be a limited step in this direction. But solving the economic problem was only part of the reason for the interest. Cooperative farming was a "step of profound significance," Thomson wrote United Farmers of Canada (UFC) past-president George Bickerton, "as laying the foundation for a really new people's society."[38] Landis provided a crucial opportunity for Thomson and associates like Hugh Harvey, Ed Parker, and Bill Harding to discuss in a receptive milieu their vision of the new people's society. Ever the dreamer, Thomson placed tremendous hope on the outcome of Landis. If successful, Landis could serve as a communitarian socialist model of the new society.

The Landis conference more than fulfilled the Division of Adult Education's expectations. One hundred and seventy people heard about cooperative farming practices in Palestine and the "collective" farm in the Soviet Union. The women of Landis discussed, often in remarkably visionary terms, how a

[35] Jim Wright to Watson Thomson, 14 May 1945, AED, box 10, conferences file.
[36] James Wright, *Prairie Progress*, 164.
[37] Gilbert Johnson, "Harmony Industrial Association," *Saskatchewan History*, 4 (Winter 1951), 11-20.
[38] Watson Thomson to George Bickerton, 11 June 1945, AED, box 10, conferences file.

new form of social organization could ease their endless chain of work. They even dreamed of establishing a "Church of All Nations" to replace the existing denominational structures.[39] The conferees heard Hugh Harvey tell how a community could integrate itself around the many and varied services the people desired.[40] They also heard Sam Sookocheff, a member of the newly formed Sturgis cooperative farm, tell the assembly that the most important factors in cooperative farming were not economic, but social and cultural. At Sturgis they were trying to combat the isolation of the present farm home. Alex Turner, acting deputy minister of the Department of Co-operation and Co-operative Development, said that he was most encouraged by Landis. There were now 25 farm groups interested in pooling their resources or labour in some way; five were now incorporated, the latest at Orlee. On the final day 45 people decided to form a continuing organization, the "Landis Co-operative Farming Committee." This group resolved "to study the means of pooling land and machinery to start co-operative farming . . . in the spring of 1946." Thomson wrote to James Gray, well known district farm leader and cooperator, in early July: "For the sake of the whole progressive movement in this country, you must go ahead with this and you must not fail."[41]

In mid-August Thomson returned from lecturing at the YMCA Public Affairs Institute in Vancouver, very disturbed that, since the high point of early August, the world was rapidly slipping into "lassitude and disillusionment."[42] On all sides — the breakdown of the "Big Five Ministers' Council," the strikes in Detroit and Windsor, the control of atomic energy, the terrible food situation in many parts of Europe, the Palestinian situation — there was either indifference or sinister silence. "Our people, as I find them, are slipping into a new isolationism born of pessimism about international relations or into the more bitter cynicism of some of our veterans."[43] Was this unjustified pessimism?

The Division of Adult Education, in the light of global trends, had to resist cynicism. The urgency of the times requires that the division establish relations with another set of people than the present study-action contacts, the more "politically conscious."[44] It was utterly important, Thomson thought, that Saskatchewanians be brought into the "storm centres of the people's action."[45] The educational form decided upon was the "living newspaper:" it would consist of two components, a "radio college" broadcast and a weekly news-

[39] "Report on the Proceedings of the Citizens' Conference on Cooperative Farming, Landis, Saskatchewan," 29-30 June 1945, AED, box 10, conferences file.

[40] Hugh Harvey, an innovative civil servant in the Department of Cooperation and Cooperative Development, worked as an extension specialist. He spoke to the Landis Conference on "Community Services on a Co-operative Farm."

[41] Watson Thomson to Jim Gray, 7 July 1945, AED, box 10, conferences file.

[42] *Newsletter*, 6 (15 October 1945).

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] *Newsletter*, 5 (19 September 1945).

[45] *Newsletter*, 6 (15 October 1945).

paper, *The Front Page*. The first fifteen minutes of the radio broadcast took the form of a discussion among members of the staff, who attempted to demonstrate that all news selection was biased. In the second half of the programme, Watson Thomson provided people with historiographic principles to make sense of trends in world affairs. Then, two days after the broadcast, a printed four-page newssheet went out to 4,000 registered listeners, study-action contacts, MLAs and, outside Saskatchewan, to individuals in a variety of organizations. The paper had an actual front page of news, the texts of Thomson's "inside story," and the editorial discussion.

The living newspaper was a bold and unconventional experiment in adult education technique. There simply had never been anything like it before. The living newspaper tried to accomplish two aims simultaneously: to dramatize the whole question of what kind of world the people were inheriting, and to educate the people in critical news reception, encouraging them to dig further into the meaning of current affairs. In the light of the anti-socialist propaganda of the Canadian press and radio, the living newspaper experiment seemed confluent with the goals of the CCF government. Little did Thomson and Parker realize the extent to which the project itself would become a "storm centre."

On 13 October the first issue of *The Front Page*, its two-inch headline announcing "Palestine Now Big Three Test," went out to several thousand readers. Very soon after the first few broadcasts it became evident that the living newspaper was a "success" in Saskatchewan, across the nation, and to a few readers in the United States. Support poured in from prominent figures on the national scene. Queen's University professor Gregory Vlastos captured the sentiments of many when he told Thomson that the "only way to meet the Trestrail propaganda: [was] to take the initiative and put over our world-view into the imaginative currency of average people."[16] And Max Lerner, editor of PM, wrote Parker that *The Front Page* was a "scorching good job."[17] Within Saskatchewan, the living newspaper resonated with the left populist culture's deep-felt need for a global perspective. *The Front Page* was taken up by numerous listening groups, some newly formed, some already in existence, and used as a study guide. Several MLAs, R. Stutt of the Wheat Pool, and a few cabinet members — Sturdy, Brockelbank, and Nollett — also wrote approvingly to the division.

The Front Page provoked limited but strong criticism within and outside Saskatchewan. New York philosopher Sidney Hook, who would have applauded this experiment in social education in the 1930s, wrote the division and said that in all his years as an adult educator, he had never encountered

[16] Gregory Vlastos to Watson Thomson, 20 October 1945, AED, interdepartmental correspondence file.

[17] Max Lerner to Ed Parker, 24 December 1945, Watson Thomson Papers, Special Collections, University of British Columbia (hereafter WTP), box 1, file 4 (hereafter 1-4).

anything so "blatantly and unscrupulously propagandistic in its organization and direction."[48] This view was shared by Jim Struthers, editor of the *Manitoba Commonwealth*, who bitterly attacked Thomson and the department as propagandists.[49] One citizen informed the division that people believed that "Watson Thomson was hired to sell the CCF party to the public." Erhart Regier, a Mennonite from Hepburn, saw the living newspaper as uncritically pro-Soviet. The Rev. Eugene Cullihane, a man the CCF was depending upon to win over Roman Catholic support, thought *The Front Page* and Thomson's broadcasts were "doing untold harm, making his job tougher, and costing them [the CCF] thousands of votes." Still others, like the division's persistent critic, Arkley O'Farrell, simply thought the whole business was just poor educational practice. Why could not the people be left to think for themselves?[50]

These few criticisms, by themselves, might not have unsettled Tommy Douglas, Woodrow Lloyd, or other cabinet members. If views expressed on the Soviet Union were seen as being politically sensitive, Douglas could easily have discussed this with Thomson. But Douglas and Lloyd were, in fact, sympathetic to the position articulated by Hook and Struthers. After the publication of the third issue of *The Front Page*, Thomson received his first official reaction. After reading the 20 October issue, with its headline, "Race Hatred Sweeps Dominion," Lloyd wrote to Parker that the headline of this issue smacked of "spectacularism."[51]

As Eddie Parker admitted 37 years after the event, he had erred in "pushing the news," generalizing from six isolated cases. The headline was sophomoric and intemperate.[52] But there was enough ambiguity in Lloyd's reply to upset Thomson severely. Was Lloyd questioning one particular headline? Did he approve of the living newspaper in principle? Parker wrote to Lloyd on 9 November explaining the purposes of the living newspaper. Since the publisher of *The Front Page* was a leftist government, Parker argued, the publication had authoritatively placed itself in counterbalance to the reactionary slant of the rightist press. Display techniques of equal daring were deliberately employed to provoke response and interest. The real question was: whose interests should a paper serve — the common people or those few who would oppress them? Parker insisted that the living newspaper was a journalistic exercise serving the

[48] Sidney Hook to Al Johnson, 7 December 1945, AED, box 8, political correspondence, 1944-6 file.

[49] The Struthers-Thomson correspondence was very bitter. See James Struthers to Watson Thomson, 13 November 1945; Thomson to Struthers, 28 November 1945; Struthers to Thomson, 3 December 1945, all in WTP 1-4; and Struthers to Thomson, 3 December 1945, AED, box 8, political correspondence, 1944-6 file.

[50] See A. O'Farrell to Al Johnson, 17 January 1946, and Rev. Eugene Cullihane to Fred Williams, 30 November 1945, both in AED, box 8, political correspondence file. Fred Williams sent Cullihane's letter to Douglas on 6 December.

[51] W.S. Lloyd to Ed Parker, 5 November 1945, WTP 1-4.

[52] Interview with Ed Parker, 15 February 1982.

people's interests with regard to news trends. Concluding his letter, Parker asked if Thomson had Lloyd's confidence.[53]

These new developments shook Thomson. While in Vancouver during August, he had heard from a good friend that a leading executive of the B.C. CCF had received a letter from Douglas advising that Thomson be watched because he "was probably up to something with the LPP."[54] Now, with Lloyd's criticism voiced, the situation looked bleak. By 22 October Thomson had accumulated a list of thirteen grievances against the government.[55] Although he never presented these to the government, he did threaten to resign on several occasions during November.[56] But Hugh Harvey and Ed Parker convinced Thomson not to resign. After all, apart from the living newspaper there had actually been little interference with the division's work, except for a directive in October that no additional appointments be made to the staff. Indeed, Thomson thought that the lack of interference with the division's work had been excessive. Neither the minister nor the deputy minister had ever stepped inside the offices of the division. And the 1,500 favourable responses to the living newspaper meant the department was doing something right.

Like Woodrow Lloyd, Tommy Douglas was unhappy with *The Front Page*. Writing to Lloyd on 22 October, Douglas said that he thought that the final editing of the newspaper "ought not to be left to those at too low a level since the government as a whole will have to accept responsibility for . . . this program. . . . I think this matter would bear looking into before it gets out of hand."[57] Three weeks later, on 15 November, Douglas was even more

[53] Ed Parker to W.S. Lloyd, 9 November 1945, WTP 1-4.

[54] Thomson resignation letter, 31 December 1945, RRP.

[55] Thomson's grievances, 22 October, WTP 1-4:

1. Original Brief to Cabinet on Policy ignored;
2. Premier's invitation to informal discussion with Cabinet never implemented;
3. Hedging re PSSA (in light of original understanding at time of appointment);
4. Refusal to reconsider salary;
5. Obstruction of appts. and promotions (Sept.-Oct. '45).
6. Sending ABR as representative to CAAE Council.
7. Never acknowledging reports of work accomplished (demanded peremptorily).
8. Complete absence of encouragement of any kind at any time.
9. Never allowing a single extra-office occasion.
10. Never visiting the Division.
11. Suggesting that neither Soviet Union nor CCF should be mentioned in our Confidential Newsletter.
12. Insistence that DM/E [sic] keep control.
13. Failure to recommend payment of expenses of trip to S'toon prior to appt. and of moving from W'pg [sic].

[56] Ruth Wilson to Roslyn Road, c. November 1945, RRP.

[57] *Tommy Douglas to W.S. Lloyd, 22 October 1945*, WSLP, Adult Education, 1945, July-December box.

incensed. The paper, from all Douglas could gather, was "following increasingly the 'fellow-traveller' line." One year after inviting Watson Thomson to come to Saskatchewan and defending him to H.M. Caiserman of the Canadian Jewish Congress, Tommy Douglas was ready to cut his "man" adrift.

The political wolves in the national CCF now moved in on their prey. David Orlikow, secretary for the tempestuous Winnipeg riding which sent Stanley Knowles to Ottawa and elected Communists municipally, wrote to Fred Williams rather than to Thomson or Lloyd. He felt that the kind of criticisms he wanted to make "ought to be made and acted upon privately and quietly if at all possible." "What Mr. Thompson [sic] is preaching," Orlikow told Williams, is "straight 100% communist propaganda." Orlikow was convinced that Thomson owed "his allegiance to a party . . . doing everything it can to destroy us."[58]

A week later, the militantly anti-communist Charles Millard, national director of the United Steelworkers and CCF partisan who had tried but failed to swing labour to the CCF in the 1945 elections, accused Thomson of making statements that were "unsound historically" and opposed to the "principles and theories of democratic socialism endorsed by the CCF."[59] Thomson had, in fact, argued that democracy, in the sense of a full life for the common person, would not be like capitalist democracy. Pointing to the anti-democratic nature of capitalist economic organization, Thomson called for the creation of "new types of economic organization, new and more socialized directions and controls in industry."[60] On 5 December Douglas replied to Millard. "We have enough grief ourselves, without starting to build up carefully camouflaged communist doctrines among our people."[61]

On 3 December national CCF leader M.J. Coldwell wrote to Lloyd telling him, in so many words, to fire Watson Thomson. Coldwell thought the living newspaper had not paid enough attention to Canadian issues. But, most serious, he thought that "wherever possible, inferences were thrown in with a 'Communist slant.'" Like Douglas, he thought that the dialogue regarding Yugoslavia was "pretty brazen" in its communist tinge. The living newspaper editors had argued that, given the political situation in eastern Europe, a case could be made for one-party government. "If this was indicative of the type of adult education being done in Saskatchewan," Coldwell wrote Douglas, "I feel

[58] David Orlikow to Fred Williams, 19 November 1945, WSLP, Adult Education, 1945, July-December box. On 10 November 1945, in *The Front Page* Thomson stated: "Democracy *as we understand it*, is part and parcel of capitalism. Now we can begin to see where the tension comes from. It comes from the fact that there is another aspect of capitalism, as much part of it as the democratic ideals themselves, which is nevertheless in radical opposition to these democratic ideals. . . . The point to be realized here is the inevitably undemocratic, indeed, in the long run anti-democratic, nature of these economic organizations."

[59] C.H. Millard to Tommy Douglas, 5 December 1945.

[60] Watson Thomson, "The Inside Story," *The Front Page*, 10 November 1945.

[61] Tommy Douglas to C. Millard, 5 December 1945, TCDP.

some misgivings as to what the results in Saskatchewan in the future will be, not only for our Movement but to democracy in Saskatchewan."[62]

The youthful and inexperienced Woodrow Lloyd was caught in the middle, squeezed by the national CCF leadership and his own Saskatchewan superiors. On 3 December a beleaguered and bewildered Lloyd informed M.J. Coldwell that he was waiting for the "proper time" to liquidate the division. He admitted, however, that the Division had done a "considerable amount" of good work, and that the living newspaper had only been an experiment.[63] Shortly after, Lloyd suggested that Thomson submit his resignation. Thomson, in my opinion, had erred tactically in publishing the living newspaper. But his opponents in high places used the episode as a pretext to oust a man whose socialist sensibility clashed with their own.

IV
Disheartening News

ON 12 DECEMBER WATSON THOMSON sent his resignation to Woodrow Lloyd. Within days of Thomson's resignation, word leaked out through the grapevine that Thomson had been fired. At the end of December the news of the "firing" (officially a resignation) was made public and another storm crashed in upon Douglas and Lloyd. In left-wing circles throughout Canada and in Saskatchewan the firing was received as incredibly disheartening news. Letters of support for Thomson and censure of the government poured in from hundreds of ordinary people in Saskatchewan. The Landis activists, led by Fred Hart and Jim Wright, and supported by a number of cabinet ministers, were ready, if Thomson so wished, to wage a fight within the CCF. Needless to say, the Saskatchewan press and political opposition had a field day flaying the CCF once again.[64]

[62] M.J. Coldwell to W.S. Lloyd, 3 December 1945, M.J. Coldwell Papers, PAC, vol. 43, Education Department file.

[63] W.S. Lloyd to M.J. Coldwell, 3 December 1945, WSLP, Adult Education, 1945, July-December box.

[64] Examples of reaction to Thomson and the Adult Education Division: "It now appears that Saskatchewan's government takes a different and most unethical view of the matter. It does not hesitate to use public funds in a campaign to secure converts to a very distinct political belief. One could imagine the uproar that would have followed if Liberal or Conservative governments in Saskatchewan in the past had used taxpayer's money for a similar purpose" (*Estevan Mercury*, 13 December 1945). After *The Front Page* folded, a *Calgary Albertan* editorialist of 2 January 1946, opined: "Fortunately for the proletariat, not many people read 'The Front Page.' Its effort was both juvenile and feeble, and no doubt backfired on most of those who saw it." The moderate *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* of 8 January 1946, noted: "The whole course of this incident should convince the Government that the subject of adult education contains more political dynamite than most Governments can safely play around with."

Norman Smith, long-time farm activist and Thomson's friend since the late 1930s, was distressed by this "astonishingly bad news." He decided to intercede with Douglas on Thomson's behalf, but "grounds for hope did not seem very promising." Smith told Douglas that all who knew Watson Thomson have recognized his "disinterested devotion to social ideals."[65] Glen Allen, the Killarney, Manitoba community leader and CCF activist with whom Thomson had worked in the Manitoba days, was also astonished at the news from Saskatchewan. Although Allen thought that Thomson would have trouble with Douglas' "understrappers," he believed that Douglas would understand Thomson and give him the necessary freedom to do grassroots educational work. Allen wondered if the struggle had exhausted Douglas such that, like Coldwell, he was becoming less scrupulous than in earlier days of the movement. In late January Allen informed Douglas that Watson Thomson was "*not* a communist. To tell you the truth I have never been able to make up my mind how to define him, but finally I have boiled it down to 'A Gandhi in a tweed suit.' He loves everybody, including millionaires, socialists, communists, presbyterians and pimps."[66]

Others were equally disturbed when they learned that Thomson would be leaving the province. Gregory Vlastos, who believed that Thomson was doing a particularly successful job of adult education, was concerned that a person of his stature "should continue to make a contribution to Canadian life."[67] Vlastos believed that *The Front Page* would have given "David Lewis and others of the same persuasion . . . fits." He was surprised, though, that the "Saskatchewan outfit was . . . ridden with Russophobia. It is a heart-breaking business."[68] Heartbreaking indeed. Lewis Lloyd, Woodrow's older brother, was shattered, so much so that he did not talk to his brother for several years. For Lewis Lloyd, the firing of Watson Thomson was sure evidence that the "people's movement" had swung to the right. "O Christ," he lamented, "what a mess and where in hell do we go from here?"[69] The firing was no less a shock to Thomson's staff. Art Wirick spoke for them all in expressing his "sense of dismay and personal loss" to Thomson. "God knows," he concluded, "what milk and water they propose to dispense."[70]

It is evident, as Thomson had hoped, that the living newspaper had succeeded in getting in touch with the politically conscious elements in Saskatchewan. These were Thomson's activated citizens: aware of the seriousness of the global crisis, committed to playing intelligent roles in building more fully cooperative communities and larger society. In their minds, the expropriation of

[65] Smith to T.C. Douglas, 16 December 1945, NSP.
[66] Allen to Douglas, 27 January 1946, TCDP.
[67] Gregory Vlastos to Watson Thomson, 16 January 1946, WTP 1-5.
[68] Vlastos to Thomson, 31 January 1946, WTP 1-5.
[69] L.L. Lloyd to Thomson, 17 December 1945, WTP 1-4.
[70] Art Wirick to Thomson, 18 December 1945, WTP 1-4.

the box factory in Prince Albert, the fight against the federal government over the seed grain issue, the promotion of cooperative farming and small-scale, government-managed industries as well as the hiring of Watson Thomson were linked. With Thomson's dismissal, the left populist culture felt betrayed. The government, the Rev. Harry Penny observed, had committed an "unforgiveable blunder in losing one of Canada's outstanding devotees to the cause of freedom and democracy."[71] But just how widespread was Thomson's support?

Some Thomson supporters like John Colbert thought there would be a "tremendous upsurge against a government who dismisses a man so able and so popular as Dr. Thomson. The point is this," he told Lloyd, "that the number of letters sent in . . . represent a fraction of those interested in the work."[72] On 13 December Jim Wright informed Thomson that he had probably heard of the unanimous support for the living newspaper at the joint meeting of three adjacent provincial constituencies — Wilkie, Cutknife, and the Battlefords. The Juniata constituency had censured the government, as had the Nary Valley UFC lodge. Wright also told Thomson that he had been talking to Toby Nollett — a "fighter for the zeal, sincerity and world vision of yourself and Adult Education" — at Lloydminster — to discuss putting up a fight. Fred Hart also tried to encourage Thomson: "All the great workers run in opposition. We have learned a great deal from you. . . . I feel perhaps a few letters from people such as myself we [sic] give you encouragement to carry on."[73]

But Thomson did not think that the "good people of the left-wing in Saskatchewan" were "ready to fight on this or any other issue yet." The important fight, Thomson pointed out to Wright, had to be "necessarily within the CCF about the basic questions of trends and principles." The tragic fact, as Thomson saw it, was that there was "no consolidated left-wing within the CCF to follow through and make the fight significant."[74]

In the last week of December, Thomson sat down to reflect on the events that had led to his dismissal. So many friends and supporters had written to him that a lengthy reply was in order. From Thomson's perspective, the CCF government had condemned itself in serious ways. When Thomson accepted Douglas' invitation to come to Saskatchewan, he believed that the government was "more socially conscious" than they were, that the government had a "genuinely socialist purpose." Now, however, he had seen social democracy in action and he did not like it. He did not think the government had any strategic plan or clear social goals or methods. They lacked both imagination and political will. They had never provided him with the opportunity for rational discussion of questions of adult education policy. And dismissal procedures, Thom-

[71] Harry Penny to T.C. Douglas, 23 January 1946, WSLP, Adult Education, 1945, July-December, Watson Thomson resignation file.
[72] J.G. Colbert to W.S. Lloyd, 14 January 1946, WSLP, Adult Education, 1945, July-December, Watson Thomson resignation file.
[73] Fred Hart to Watson Thomson, 30 December 1945, WTP 1-4.
[74] Thomson to Roslyn Road, 8 January 1946 , RRP.

son contended, were disturbingly arbitrary. From Dr. Carlyle King, Thomson had learned that the CCF provincial executive had been sounded out four days before the axe fell. Apparently they did not support such a step. In this light, Tommy Douglas' letter to Glen Allen on 7 February is illuminating. He is "not a *Communist but . . . he is an enigma. . . . You can be sure that we are treating* Watson well and that we are parting without any hard feelings."[75] Douglas had treated Thomson neither well nor honestly and they were parting with hard feelings. But Watson Thomson had expected too much of the Saskatchewan CCF and people.

After the publication of the living newspaper, it was perspicaciously evident to Thomson that there were basic disagreements of policy. In an unpublished "letter to the editor" meant to answer his press critics, Thomson insisted that the government had not taken an explicit stand against the liberal theory of education. Thomson had not anticipated that the Saskatchewan government, which he assumed was committed to a "policy of involvement in the people's struggle, not of aloofness from it, of challenge to the *status quo*, not appeasement,"[76] would withdraw its support. Indeed, Woodrow Lloyd's reply to Fred Hart, which represented Lloyd's official interpretation of the crisis, clearly indicates that the "government did not really want the fight which doing a straight forward kind of socialist education would inevitably arouse."[77]

Thomson also accused the Saskatchewan CCF of "venomous anti-communism." This anti-communism, and its more veiled anti-Sovietism, Thomson believed, was a social menace. Rather than providing leadership to the genuinely socially conscious people, of whom the 1,500 supporters of the radio college and *The Front Page* were a good cross section, the CCF leadership had exploited the "phobias of ignorance." Once the "anti-red phobia" was touched off, Thomson believed that "ordinary, decent interchange" was impossible. Once Thomson had received the scarlet brand of "communist," everything he said or wrote or did was interpreted within this frame of reference.[78] "I do not think that most of us would agree," Lloyd told Fred Hart, "that Democracy and Capitalism are the same thing, and that any satisfactory future organization would have to be something outside a democratic set-up." Thomson had argued no such line. Lloyd linked Thomson's alleged totalitarian bent to the radio college's justification of Marshall Tito's plan. After this, Lloyd informed Hart that when Watson Thomson spoke in B.C., Alberta, and Quebec, and published an article in a Manitoba magazine, the department had received letters of complaint. "These letters came not from our political opponents, but from leaders in our movement in these provinces. I think," Lloyd added, "that we must accept the fact that these people, selected as leaders by those of our

[75] Douglas to Glen Allen, 7 February 1946, TCDP.
[76] Thomson, "Letter to the Editor," undated, WTP 1-5.
[77] Thomson to Jim Wright, 5 January 1946, WTP, 1-4.
[78] Watson Thomson resignation letter, RRP.

political conviction, wrote only because of their genuine concern." Lloyd concluded by saying that Thomson did not have the flexibility to "accept and represent the Government's point of view."[79] But the government had never told Thomson what their point of view was. The whole business had a shabby and hollow tone.

By the end of 1945, with the Gouzenko spy trial about to push Canada irrevocably into the Cold War era, Watson Thomson was convinced that the social democratic idea had to be challenged. To an appalling extent, he thought, Saskatchewan was conforming to the same pattern of "tragic inadequacy exposed elsewhere — in Germany, Austria, France, Britain. . . ."[80] Blaming social democracy at first, in later years Thomson would shift some of the blame for his firing to Ed Parker who had pushed him on to more "dangerous ground" than he would have "penetrated on my own."[81] But Thomson had allowed himself to be pushed in that direction. Thomson was heartbroken and humiliated.

With the dismissal of Watson Thomson, the momentum of Saskatchewan study-action gradually dissipated. Approximately a hundred community-based projects had been started throughout Saskatchewan and numerous study-action groups were ready to begin their winter's work. But without divisional leadership and government support, these groups gradually disbanded or turned to other activities. The Landis dream of the "cooperative farming community" was never fulfilled. Within a year, Harding, Wirick, Parker, and Harvey were no longer associated with the Division of Adult Education. Thomson's career as an adult educationist was finished.

Historians try to hold their values in suspension as they grub in the archives and ferret out the facts. "But once this history has been recovered," E.P. Thompson observes, "we are at liberty to offer our judgment upon it." This means that we will affirm certain values and reject others. We will try to identify certain values and practices we wish to "enlarge and sustain in our present." In this way history becomes "intelligible within our present tense."[82] Some judgements are in order.

Watson Thomson's work as an adult educator in Canada was motivated by his desire to awaken individuals and communities to a participatory civic consciousness and to create communal, decentralized forms of organization. Thomson hoped that once individuals had experienced the satisfactions of direct democracy in small affinity groups and community-oriented action projects, they would go on to challenge the existing centralized political structures in favour of regionally devolved political, economic, and cultural formations. Communitarian experiments were viewed as embryonic, anticipatory institutions of the future new order. Thomson's linking of personal development and

[80] Watson Thomson resignation letter, RRP.

[81] WTP 2-5, 196.

[82] E.P. Thompson, *The Poverty of Theory and Other Essays*, (London 1978), 234.

social action, his commitment to community-based, participatory forms of social organization and emphasis on the centrality of education in creating a "socialist" society placed him in critical tension with the communists, social democrats, and the liberal democratic cooperative movement. These ideas resonated with small but significant cultural currents in labour, farm, religious, and community organizations in Saskatchewan and elsewhere. This "third force" on the Canadian left has been insufficiently acknowledged and studied in our histories.

The Watson Thomson affair is seldom ever mentioned in the histories of either Saskatchewan or the national CCF. Yet, for a brief and intense moment, Thomson had the attention of the national CCF leadership. And it is sadly evident that "venomous anti-communism" radically simplified the perceptions of the national CCF leadership and reduced political discourse to clichés. Thomson may well have been naive to think that, at a turning point in Canadian and global history, creating a unified progressive movement was even conceivable, let alone possible. But he tried, and in his failure we see social democracy's lack of courage and vision.

But the "communist" label pasted on Thomson masked deeper fears. World War II had unleashed a profound longing for a totally new social order. The people were stirring at the grassroots level; many wanted much more than welfare state social democracy. The citizens' conferences implicitly challenged traditional modes of capitalist democracy and CCF notions of how people participated in decision-making. Rather than passing a resolution at a local constituency meeting and then hoping, sometime, that a cabinet minister might implement it, government departments would have a different role. Their task would be to facilitate programmes demanded, through a democratic pedagogical process, by communities, providing them with the resources to solve their own problems. Rather than interpreting legislation or restraining this process through bureaucratic procedure, government departments would help the people build more cooperative institutions.

For Thomson, the Saskatchewan experiment was a grand opportunity to mobilize the people towards laying the foundation for a "really new people's society;" for Coldwell, a grand opportunity to show the Canadian electorate that the Saskatchewan CCF was a moderate reform party, ruled by humanistic bureaucrats. It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Saskatchewan parliamentary democracy, like other parties communist or capitalist, wanted to marginalize any movement at the base, however innocuous. In the exuberant first few months of the regime, Douglas thought he wanted to "launch the biggest adult education program in the country."[83] There is no evidence, however, that he or Lloyd shared Thomson's commitment to a socialist learning society. Under pressure from an increasingly conservative and Russophobic national leadership, the Saskatchewan government lost whatever imagination it

[83] WTP 2-5, 184-5.

had, discouraged creative and innovative experiments in self-management and community-based development, opting instead to be a party of order and respectability.

Finally, we note that Thomson's unique contribution to adult education as theorist and practitioner is scarcely mentioned in our historical literature. Recovering the work of Thomson, the radical educator, provides necessary historical links for those who are educating for personal and social change in our own time.