

# Introduction

Life in the southern part of the nation of Canada shaped my early development, much as it did that of most Canadians. Growing up in Swift Current, a spot on the CPR main line in the dry southern Saskatchewan prairie, gave me an early introduction to an environment dominated by humans. From the orderly blocks and streets of that small city to the neatly surveyed fields that surrounded it, mankind had taken control. Even the residents, from the youngest child to the oldest pioneer, followed a pattern of life controlled by clocks, schedules, and calendars. Yet a wild space survived in the midst of that well-ordered environment. Swift Current Creek flowed through the small city. In the water and on its banks survived traces of an untamed world. Fish swam in the water that rushed through rock-filled rapids, and trees and a vast variety of green plants thrived in the fertile soil bordering the stream. There, in this wild space, children also found a reprieve from the ordered world at home and school.

While little of a once untamed world survived in the south, the opposite situation dominated hundreds of miles to the north. My awareness that this other world existed came first from neighbours and relatives who travelled past where the fields ended. They brought back many large fish, along with tales of an enchanted world of rivers, lakes, rocks, and forests. Eventually, when I was a teenager, I welcomed my first opportunity to see that world. Trading labour as a fish filleter for trips to the north permitted me to spend days on windswept, rocky lakeshores. Several years later, my willingness to work in the north brought a job as a social worker with the Department of Welfare during the final years of Ross Thatcher's Liberal government in Saskatchewan. Although I was stationed in La Ronge, the job involved administering the department's programs in a large area extending to the Northwest Territories (NWT).

The wild spaces I found there in the north still proved fascinating. Thousands of square miles of unsurveyed land, water bodies that numbered in the tens of thousands, and countless millions of trees that formed the vast

forests provided a natural environment unsurpassed in its beauty and possibilities for adventure. Yet the north also included people. It soon became apparent that the human population included two distinct groups: those with white skins and the dark-skinned Aboriginals. As a white employee of the southern-based government, it fell to me to apply programs purportedly designed to help northern Aboriginals overcome their economic and social problems. The human population, particularly the dynamics between the two distinct groups in the north, soon proved as fascinating as the natural environment.

Although my introduction to the north included no history lessons, I soon discovered that any substantial governmental presence in the region dated back only several decades. The Liberals and their predecessors, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF), were the first governments to bother with the northern half of the province of Saskatchewan. Some of the same persons who had worked under the CCF still applied the programs designed by the Liberals. Most notably, my supervisor, John Edgerton Hugh Parsons, once had single-handedly provided the Department of Social Welfare presence in the north during the CCF era.<sup>1</sup> A tireless spinner of yarns, Hugh whetted my curiosity about that earlier time in the north with stories of his experiences as a social worker in remote communities. Various Department of Natural Resources (DNR) officers who had survived the change of government and the intervening years also provided a connection to the earlier CCF time.

Working as a social worker in the north encouraged my desire to know more about the relationship between Aboriginal northerners and the provincial government. My job existed largely because economic and social problems plagued the region, and I could not help but wonder how government might creatively deal with the issues. For the first months after my arrival, the answers to northern problems seemed clear, but this confidence faded as I became aware of various dilemmas. Yet it clearly seemed that government could do things differently and, in many cases, much better. Shortcomings existed, not only in policies made by a remote government in Regina, but also at the local administrative level, where petty officials twisted northern programs to add to their personal wealth and power. Cynicism and resignation that the north and Aboriginals were inherently dysfunctional pervaded the northern civil service.

When the pull of southern attractions proved irresistible, I left the rugged beauty of the Precambrian Shield behind. My work as a social worker in the forest-fringe area near Prince Albert ensured that my contact with Aboriginal families continued for many more years. Later, a career in the private sector included work on Indian reserves, which gave me a somewhat different perspective on life in those Aboriginal communities. A preference for life away from city streets and fields led to my family's choosing to live in the southern fringe of Saskatchewan's northern forest.

This proximity to the north made it easy to spend countless days and weeks there, both for recreation and study, over the past three decades. Travel by air, water, and road has permitted visits to many areas of this vast and always breathtaking region.

The north that residents and visitors experience today still bears the mark of events that began to unfold in the spring of 1944. At that time, newspaper headlines proclaimed that Saskatchewan voters had elected North America's first socialist government, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation government, led by T.C. (Tommy) Douglas. Those early news reports did not mention that, unlike previous governments, the CCF had plans for the northern area. But in the months that followed, observers became aware that the CCF's vision for Saskatchewan included the north. Although preoccupied with introducing changes in the south, including economic diversification, modernization, and new social and health care programs, the CCF concern also extended to the ten thousand or so persons who inhabited the forested northern half of the province. In fact, it made dealing with the previously ignored northern part of the province one of its priorities.

The CCF interest in the north came from a number of sources. In an effort to avoid a repeat of the economic disaster of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the CCF looked to the north for help in diversifying the provincial economy. Northern resources might, it thought, free the province from its overreliance on agriculture, in particular the production of wheat for the world market. Additionally, in order to implement its ambitious plans to create new health and social programs, the CCF needed to greatly increase government revenues. Although the extent of northern wealth remained largely unmeasured, the CCF felt certain that development of the north could make the entire province more prosperous.<sup>2</sup> Some in the new government optimistically believed that the northern forests, waters, and rocks contained great resource wealth that could contribute to long-term economic diversity and stability.

Various other motivations drove the new government to action. Confidently believing modern ways superior to the old, the CCF set out to modernize the entire province, including the north. In 1944 southern Saskatchewan lagged behind much of the rest of the North American continent. Initiatives in the south included rural electrification, urban water and sewer systems, improved telephone service, road improvements, and new schools and hospitals. Modernizing the north presented a much more formidable challenge, since the northern infrastructure had changed little since the nineteenth century. Although the increasing use of airplanes offered an important transportation option for some, most northerners still travelled on the traditional water routes that traversed the north. The region lacked roads, railways, electrical service, and up-to-date communications systems. The absence of modern infrastructure limited the northern

economy. While some extraction of furs, fish, timber, and minerals took place, transportation limitations prevented the economy from expanding. Large expanses of the north received little in the way of education, medicine, policing, and other government services.

Northern power structures also appeared unmodern. To the CCF way of thinking, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) and other fur traders operated an outdated and exploitive economic system. The new government viewed the HBC as the worst villain, believing it controlled Aboriginals through a Canadian version of the Third World's debt peonage system. The Roman Catholic and Anglican churches also held considerable sway in the region. In the opinion of CCF leaders, these churches carried out many functions, especially in the areas of health care and education, that rightly belonged to the state. The CCF did not oppose personal religion, but it wanted to separate the functions of church and state, secularize northern systems, and remove the Anglican and Roman Catholic presence in education, health care, and community leadership. Joe Phelps, the new minister of Natural Resources, saw a "pretty grim" situation and described most parish priests as fighting the government.<sup>3</sup> The CCF judged northern and Aboriginal society as outdated and problematic, with little worth salvaging. Unlike many northern Aboriginals, who did not see the need for or want widespread modernization of their homeland, the CCF considered it essential to bring the region into the twentieth century.

In addition to its plans to modernize the north, the CCF adopted an agenda of assimilating northern Aboriginals into modern Canadian society. Consistent with the view held by much of Canadian society at the time, this government viewed the Aboriginals' semi-nomadic, hunter-gatherer way of life as a primitive form of economic, political, and social organization, much inferior to the Euro-Canadian culture and its constant "progress." Yet the CCF worked to bring about assimilation with greater devotion than did most governments of the time. During its two decades in power, the CCF sought to direct and alter the lives of northern Indians and Metis. It sincerely believed that Aboriginals needed to adopt white ways of thinking and acting in order to have a viable future.

The CCF set another major goal for the north: to establish a socialist society there. In contrast, the party accepted that it had no choice but to live with a large degree of capitalism in the south. To interfere with agricultural and other businesses among the wheat fields and small towns of southern Saskatchewan likely would have brought political disaster. After spending more than a decade in the political wilderness, Douglas and his party had learned that lesson well. But the north was another matter; there the CCF found an area free from much electoral control, a place where its idealism could take root in concrete programs.

In deciding to promote socialist solutions in the north, the CCF launched what may qualify as its most radical and unique project. While

the controversy that accompanied the introduction of medicare in 1962 attracted international attention, the imposition of a much more comprehensive socialism in the north hardly caused a stir outside the northern region. Like socialists elsewhere, the party believed that socialist-based rational planning offered solutions to society's existing problems and would result in a new and better world. The CCF hoped to replace the haphazard northern society that had grown up over the centuries. In the CCF plan, northerners would not only receive benefits, but would also freely share northern resources with the struggling southern economy.

Many of the politicians and bureaucrats who designed and implemented the northern programs of the CCF did not concern themselves with ideological purity. Although numerous programs introduced in the north were not examples of "pure" socialism, they did possess many socialist characteristics and reflected the influence of socialist ideology modified by the experiences of life on the prairie.<sup>4</sup> The party primarily applied an economic socialism, which increased government control over northern land and resources. This did not require nationalizing the land, since the province had received nearly the entire area as Crown land from Ottawa in 1930. The new government added strict control over the use of various resources, imposing a level of state regulation much greater than existed previously and in the south. Prior to 1944, the Liberal government allowed some transfer of resources, including land, trees, minerals, furs, and fish, to private hands. Exercising its lawful authority, the CCF withdrew the rights of private parties to own, extract, and sell most resources, reclaiming them for the "people of Saskatchewan." Joe Phelps wrote about a coming gradual transition "to social ownership in the industrial development of our Natural Resources." He hoped for eventual "complete social ownership and management of key industries in the development of our resources."<sup>5</sup> However, the changes that occurred did not seem distant or gradual to northerners. Almost overnight, Phelps and the CCF introduced socialist policies that transformed reality for most northerners and set long-lasting directions for the region.

Phelps's statement that private trappers, fishers, loggers, and miners had "taken millions of dollars out of our province as a result of planless ravaging" typified the CCF's view of the existing northern economy. The party also blamed private capital for northern underdevelopment. To end perceived abuses and to increase development, the CCF introduced various pieces of legislation that successfully restricted unfettered capitalism in the north. In no uncertain terms, the province advised those who made their living extracting renewable and nonrenewable resources that those assets belonged to the people of the province. Early actions included expelling outsiders from participating in the northern economy and giving economic opportunities to local people. Since very few larger companies operated in the north, those ideologically motivated attacks often jeopardized small, struggling, fishing, trapping, forestry, and retailing businesses.

Realizing that it could not simply wipe out the old, the CCF set out to design and build a better northern world. The government created new structures to institutionalize socialist forms of organization within the region. Crown corporations and marketing boards soon played instrumental roles in implementing the new northern socialist economy, handling the vital commodities of fish, fur, and trees.<sup>6</sup>

Once it held a firm grip on the northern economy, the CCF shifted some responsibility from Crown corporations and marketing boards to its newly created cooperatives. The CCF liked cooperatives because they excluded private capital and encouraged community ownership of assets. As well, the party thought that cooperatives would reduce costs and increase incomes for northerners. Premier Douglas himself strongly favoured cooperatives, viewing them as “the most important form of social ownership.”<sup>7</sup>

While various other provincial governments and the federal government also worked to modernize their northern jurisdictions and assimilate Aboriginal populations, only the government of Saskatchewan sought to combine those tasks with the goal of building a socialist society. The CCF worked towards introducing socialism with a missionary-like zeal. Application of its socialist agenda meant that the path of development in northern Saskatchewan would differ substantially from that taken in other northern regions, especially from the middle 1940s to the early 1950s. By the late 1950s, several programs introduced by the federal government in the Arctic and on Indian reserves in the northern areas of the provinces increasingly resembled some implemented earlier by the CCF in Saskatchewan. But Ottawa did not go nearly as far or enter into as many areas of the society and economy as Douglas and his associates did. During the postwar decades, some provincial governments also instituted programs that resembled those of the early CCF. Quebec became interested in its northern region of “Nouveau Québec” by the 1960s. Across Canada, other provincial governments increasingly focused attention on their northern regions. Yet no other government in Canada allowed socialist ideology to guide its northern actions to the extent that the Saskatchewan CCF did. No one else went as far in seeking to remove pre-existing private enterprise, discourage the entry of new business, and promote public enterprise.<sup>8</sup>

Lacking models to follow, the new CCF government largely invented the form its northern socialism would take. Although the CCF plan for the north called for the creation of a local economy based on socialist principles and a sharing of northern wealth with the south, subsequent programs did not require that northerners receive an equal share of the province's wealth. While on the surface this may appear to contradict the goal of instituting socialism, the CCF justified this anomaly. The government strongly feared that northern Aboriginals would take advantage of generous social programs and become lazy; in a sense, then, the CCF limited benefits to northerners for their own good (discussed further in Chapter

10). In addition, the CCF simply ignored northern needs, knowingly permitting the continuance of Third World-like conditions in the northern half of the province. As a result, southern residents received many more benefits from social and health programs.

The CCF simultaneously imposed modernization, assimilation, and socialism, expecting their joint application to solve northern problems. Douglas and his ministers placed great confidence in the power of knowledge and planning applied by those with the benefit of social democratic enlightenment. They held a roughly equal lack of faith in the ability of northern Aboriginals to plan for their future. Although northerners resisted CCF plans for the north both at the ballot box and through numerous actions, this had little effect on the southern-based party. Even when its efforts led to failure, the CCF did not question its basic hypothesis or goals, but blamed imperfect subjects and methods, as we shall see in the following chapters.

Possibly as important as what the CCF set out to do in the north was how it sought to bring about change. The CCF used paternalistic, colonial methods to impose its agenda. Northern Saskatchewan already had a centuries-old legacy of colonial control. First Britain, then Canada, and finally Saskatchewan exerted authority over the area. During each phase, political and economic control remained largely outside the region. This situation was not unique. Governments had long established colonial control, both economically and politically, over far-flung regions of the globe. The years after the Second World War brought a global decolonization movement, which saw colonial masters gradually relinquish control over their former possessions. However, decolonization did not apply to internal colonialism within Canada. Instead, where one area held power over another, this colonialism frequently strengthened as the century progressed.

Similarly, the Saskatchewan CCF increased the province's colonial control over its northern region. Although northern Aboriginals accepted and valued the existing northern system, which had evolved under the direction of the traders and churches, the CCF decreed its end. Driven by the dual engines of unquestioning ethnocentrism and socialist fervour, CCF ministers and bureaucrats overpowered the north. The early CCF government brimmed with confidence that it would do things much better than had former governments and institutions. The region known as "the north," although covering about half of Saskatchewan, lacked political power. Its residents formed only 1 to 2 percent of the provincial population while the CCF held power. Only two elected Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) represented northerners in the provincial capital of Regina, making it easy for the relatively massive southern population to dictate what happened in the north. The physical distance between the northern region and the centre of power also meant that the north became a distant periphery of the southern centre. About three hundred miles separated Regina from

the near north, and seven hundred miles or more lay between the southern city and some remote northern areas. Only in the north could government impose the society it visualized without fear of repercussions at the polls. Northerners lacked the numbers to remove the CCF from power, and southern voters, who would not have tolerated similar programs closer to home, would not interfere in the remote north.

Even though most CCF officials had virtually no experience in or with the north, they consulted only minimally with northerners, white or Aboriginal, considering them incapable of analyzing their society or participating in designing improvements to it. Typical of a colonial situation, the CCF did not rely on local input. Some northern residents participated in surveys and possibly helped determine minor details of changes to resource policies, but that limited opportunity excluded most isolated and non-English-speaking northerners. The consultation process did not extend to the other economic and social engineering policies that quickly and dramatically altered reality for all northerners.

The early CCF government chose the Department of Natural Resources and Industrial Development (DNR) to serve as its strong colonial arm, greatly expanding its presence and power in the north. Other departments also participated, and bureaucrats from many departments visited the north. With few modifications, that far-reaching northern colonial system continued throughout the CCF's time in office. Some see an increased promotion of community development in the CCF's later years as decolonization.<sup>9</sup> Yet that claim minimizes the ongoing role played by the CCF in creating and operating the northern colonial system. It also does not recognize the colonial nature of the so-called tools of decolonization, including the forced promotion of cooperatives and community development used by the CCF.

Contradictorily, while the CCF wanted to assimilate Aboriginals, the colonial system perpetuated and reinforced the presence of two economies and societies in the north. More than before, the Aboriginal economy and society functioned separately from those of non-Aboriginals. Phelps and others in the CCF visualized happy, sober, educated, healthy, hard-working, and cooperatively-minded Aboriginals living in orderly settlements while participating in what the CCF viewed as "traditional" economic pursuits. The CCF believed that Aboriginals had a natural aptitude for trapping and fishing, while lacking the ability to participate in nontraditional industrial activities such as mining and forestry.<sup>10</sup>

Although no other jurisdiction sought to impose socialism as the CCF did in Saskatchewan, the CCF was not alone in Canada in creating a colonial system. In some respects a colonial or neo-colonial situation existed throughout other provincial norths and in the NWT. Colonialism grew at various rates, increasing greatly in some areas during and after the Second World War when capital and workers moved north to extract resources. The fragmenting of the Canadian north by provincial and territorial borders



made it easier to impose colonialism, in northern Saskatchewan and elsewhere, by breaking a natural region into pieces. This limited the potential strength of the north. Tying northern provincial areas to more populous and powerful southern areas further facilitated colonialism.<sup>11</sup>

The first few years after the 1944 election victory brought the most aggressive intervention by the CCF. Joe Phelps, the powerful minister of Natural Resources, led a handful of dedicated bureaucrats in their mission. Yet problems soon beset the well-meaning small army. Even as the CCF proudly boasted it could logically plan a new and better society, chaos characterized its northern initiatives. Goals remained poorly articulated, while ad hoc natural resource development projects disrupted northern lives. This stage brought the most dramatic change to the north, as Phelps and other southern socialists fought to excise capitalist abuses and introduce socialism and strict state control. Often flying by the seat of his pants, Phelps energetically made and modified policies. Hope remained strong that, once the CCF worked the bugs out of its new system, the north would reap the benefits of the interventions.

A second stage in CCF northern policy began in the late 1940s. After voters threw Phelps out of office in 1948, no other CCF politician possessed a similar dedication to reshape the north. The party also came to realize that diversification of the provincial economy through developing northern resources would not come about easily or cheaply. Financial realities severely limited the CCF's options as well. While early optimism and hopes of a quick return on northern investments had helped loosen the purse strings after 1944, a more cautious fiscal approach characterized the 1950s. CCF interest in the welfare of northern people also faded. Erosion of earlier reforms took place, disillusioned radical staff members quit, and CCF attacks on the churches and the HBC eased somewhat. The CCF still did not successfully apply its self-touted planning ability to the north. Phelps's replacement as minister of Natural Resources, John H. Brockelbank, favoured action over contemplation, placing little emphasis on developing goals and plans.<sup>12</sup> The lack of effective planning became apparent in the unexpected consequences of CCF actions: health care improvements led to a population explosion, new roads brought social problems, market interventions increased poverty, and social aid undermined self-reliance. The problems created by the CCF often proved more formidable than the old ones. Perplexed by its numerous failures and ongoing resistance from the northern population, the CCF lost faith that it could quickly and easily build a new northern society. Yet instead of giving up, it adopted subtler methods to impose the same goals on northerners. The new plan combined extensive anthropological study of northern Aboriginals with community development methods to achieve its goals. The modernizing, assimilationist, and socialist agenda remained, with DNR still the primary colonial administrator. This final stage continued until the defeat of the CCF in 1964.<sup>13</sup>

In many respects the story that has emerged is not a celebration of the CCF era in northern Saskatchewan. Instead of being liberated by the CCF from forces that the government viewed as corrupt and capitalistic, many northerners, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, experienced a new and destructive oppression. Certain that its goals justified its actions, the CCF imposed its ideology and programs in the north, ignoring and overruling the desires of northerners, while attempting to bring modernization, assimilation, and socialism to the region. Unfortunately, destroying the old proved much easier than building a new and viable north.

In retrospect, some of the negative effects of the CCF presence came from its failure to reconcile its actions with its ideology. As a result, the CCF left a legacy riddled with contradictions. Even though it prided itself on being an intelligent, thoughtful government, it often acted on impulse and emotion. While the party thought of itself as a kinder, gentler alternative to capitalism, it built and employed an insensitive, heavy-handed colonial apparatus. At the same time that it claimed to care for northern Aboriginals, the CCF judged their culture as worthless and worked to assimilate them. There was inconsistency in the CCF attempt to impose economic socialism on the north while it opposed expanded sharing through social programs. Similarly, the CCF viewed northern wealth as belonging to all Saskatchewan residents, but it refused to share the province's wealth equally with northerners. Another major contradiction existed between the CCF choice of pre-industrial vocations for northern Aboriginals and its stated goal of assimilating Indians and Metis. CCF policies that established isolated Aboriginal ghettos also limited assimilation. Further, while the CCF wanted to modernize the north, it failed to devote the needed resources to bring this about, leaving northerners living in semi-modern poverty.

In addition to describing the CCF and northern society, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, this book portrays Canadian society from the 1940s to the 1960s. The momentum of society's attitudes and beliefs exercised a powerful influence on events in the north, sometimes proving more powerful than the overt ideology espoused by the CCF. As a result, the CCF often behaved as a product of its time. The CCF claimed socialism as its ideology, but the more powerful ethnocentric beliefs that it shared with the larger society dictated many of its actions and helped determine the outcome of its projects.

Although forty years have passed since the CCF defeat at the polls in 1964, the record of this government in northern Saskatchewan has remained largely unknown outside the region. There are various reasons for this situation. Only recently have historians begun to study many aspects of the Canadian north. Yet the northern areas of the provinces have been more neglected by the historical profession than have areas of the Canadian territorial north. The attitude, which exists in some circles, that the

true north does not extend below the sixtieth parallel can take attention away from regions like northern Saskatchewan. At the same time, the northern areas of some provinces have received more notice than has the northern part of Saskatchewan. Beginning in the 1940s, the Alaska Highway drew the attention of North Americans to northern British Columbia and Alberta. More recently, the Nisga'a land settlement and the *Delgamuukw* court decision, both relating to British Columbia, have directed the national spotlight onto that northern area. Similarly, the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement and related Aboriginal claims have drawn the attention of historians to northern Quebec. No such major event has attracted historians and those working in related disciplines to northern Saskatchewan.

Another reason that the history of the CCF era in northern Saskatchewan remains largely untold is that Canadians believe they know the history of the CCF in Saskatchewan. While many provincial politicians from the first decades after the Second World War have sunk into obscurity, large numbers of Canadians still recognize the name of T.C. Douglas. In popular mythology, Canadians associate Douglas and the Saskatchewan CCF with positive advances in social policy and particularly with the introduction of medicare. It is likely that few people think of the north when they think of Douglas and his party. As a result of the lack of study of the CCF's northern record, the picture of this government remains incomplete and inaccurate. Therefore, the significance of this book extends beyond providing information about, and an analysis of, two decades in northern Saskatchewan. It adds necessary information about the nature of the CCF in the larger Saskatchewan and Canadian arenas.

I used a variety of sources and methods for this exploration of the history of northern Saskatchewan during this period. As the dominant Canadian historical tradition has done, I relied heavily on archival sources. Without the information contained in the records preserved by the Government of Saskatchewan and various individuals, the story of events during this era would be largely lost. On the other hand, to rely only on these records would omit the voices of many northern people, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Interviews with numerous northern residents who remember the CCF presence have provided an invaluable check on archival sources and additional information. Drawing on both written and oral sources combines the traditions of historical transmission of both cultures, the Euro-Canadian and the Aboriginal.

A third source has contributed to this work, particularly to its conclusions. Without the interpretation of the observer, the information gathered remains little more than disjointed descriptions of incidents. In this book, as must almost certainly happen in every historical work, the various pieces of information join together to form a picture. While the data gathered conceivably could tell many different and possibly conflicting stories, one

story has emerged, standing above the other possibilities, as most convincing and true. Although this picture may appear subjective and constructed to some, to me it has taken on the status of being a true recreation of events.

The narrative that emerges by combining the information from various sources may not be what some expect or want to hear. Some CCF goals for the north, including socialism and modernization, found and still find many sincere and devoted supporters. Many also would agree with Joe Phelps in his desire to end the reign of parish priests, bootleggers, and fur sharks in the north.<sup>14</sup> Large numbers of Canadians have placed the CCF and its leaders on a pedestal, thinking them above the failings that afflict ordinary mankind. Many look on the CCF and its successor, the NDP, as the originators of many of the best aspects of Canadian society. They accept that Tommy Douglas and his party helped save Canadians from the excesses of capitalism by developing and implementing a kinder, more humane society. The CCF record in southern Saskatchewan serves as one basis for this belief. Yet little is known about the actions of the CCF in the northern half of the province, where the party had much more freedom and power to demonstrate its nature. Examining the CCF record in the north can shed light on the nature of CCF socialism in the larger context of Saskatchewan and Canada.

The reader should not interpret this work as an attempt to blame the CCF and its program of modernization, assimilation, socialism, and colonialism for all the ills that came to plague the north. Other governments across Canada, including those that did not adopt socialist policies or other aggressive programs of directed change, experienced similar failures in their northern regions. This book does not seek to release Aboriginal society or those who promoted nonsocialist solutions from accepting some responsibility for life as it was lived in northern Saskatchewan. As this book demonstrates, Aboriginals possessed free will and some power, even when confronted by a powerful state. Also, the pre-existing Euro-Canadian capitalist and church institutions, which sometimes made victims of Aboriginals, certainly did not vanish completely with the election of the CCF. Although greatly weakened, the old forces continued to affect events during the CCF era.