SEEK YE FIRST THE CO-OPERATIVE ECONOMIC KINGDOM:
THE RADICAL SOCIAL GOSPELLERS AND THE FIGHT FOR A JUST SOCIETY IN CANADA

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Department of Adult Education, Community Development and Counselling Psychology
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This research study the radical social gospel movement and its attempt to inspire and work for the transformation of Canadian society, from one based on social oppression to one centred on brotherhood/sisterhood, justice and equity in economic, social, and political relationships. It explores the argument that the radical social gospel movement in English-speaking, Protestant Canada would have done more to advance its goal of social emancipation, if it had integrated a comprehensive co-operative economic development approach with its electoral political strategy. Furthermore, it is argued that an adult education programme premised on fostering critical consciousness-raising and functional knowledge and skills in economic and social self-management would have had to be an indispensable part of this process. The idea and practice of co-operative economics in Canada, and the social gospel radical's thoughts on and experience with adult education are highlighted to support the thesis of this research.
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Kwabena Yafeu, *mi hredru*, asante sana (thank you) for a willing pair of ears as I talked about the challenges and demands of balancing work, parenting and academia.

I bear full responsibility for the conclusions made in this study. Furthermore, I hope that I have done justice to the social commitment and legacy of struggle bequeathed to us by the radical social gospellers.
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Chapter One

Introduction

The social philosophy of co-operation is based on collective solutions to human problems. It encompasses the philosophies that emphasize co-operative action in the solution of economic and social problems. The non-exploitation of humans by humans is fundamental. This is a philosophical position of most of the major religions of the world. Consequently, when the social philosophy of co-operation was being articulated by social philosophers one and two centuries ago, it was closely related to the core philosophical positions in religion and could be viewed as the secularization of these morals into business and economic life.¹

This research is a historical study of the Canadian social gospel movement and its attempt to inspire and work for the transformation of society, from one based on social oppression to one centred on co-operation, brotherhood/sisterhood, justice and equity in economic, social, and political relationships. Engendering the process that would affect the realisation of the Kingdom of God on earth was the essence of the social evangelism of the conscientised, radical clerics, who identified themselves as social gospellers. My research explores the argument that the social gospel movement in English-speaking, Protestant Canada would have done more to advance its goal of a just economic, social and political order, if it had integrated a comprehensive and integrated co-operative economic development approach with its electoral political strategy. The crux of my argument is that the social gospellers should have given most of their attention to building the self-management capacity of oppressed and sympathetic social groups, which would have been actualised through a comprehensive co-operative economic programme. An adult education programme

centred on the goal of fostering critical consciousness-raising and functional knowledge and skills in economic and social self-management would have had to be an indispensable part of this process.

In every society and particularly modern, industrial capitalist ones, the ownership and/or control of economic resources, assets and capital give the controlling agents of these objects a paramount say in the manner in which life is organised. It does not matter, substantively, if progressive political forces are in control of the governmental machinery. By exercising strategic domination of property and wealth, the capitalist classes can effectively nullify the core element of a reformist mandate of a governing radical party. The social democratic administration (1990-1995) of the New Democrat Party of Ontario was a good example of the hostility and obstruction that big businesses and other entrenched interests may place in the path of a political party with a progressive predisposition. This concern was most evident in that government’s attempt at putting in place government-controlled automobile insurance. and effecting fair employment (employment equity) legislation.

Politically and philosophically, my orientation as an anarchist predisposed me to look within and to civil society for any manifestations of its capacity to self-organise. What is suggested by the preceding statement is, whether there exist within civil society the social movements, knowledge, skills and attitude for its politically progressive elements to serve as a catalyst for the creation of democratic, non-hierarchical and inclusive organisations, through which the people may seek to construct transformative economic and social relations. With respect to the Canadian social gospel movement and its social mandate, there was a parallel movement whose
origin in Europe and latter emergence in Canada was a reaction against the victorious capitalist economic order. Co-operatives with its social philosophy of co-operation are entities that progressive civil society actors can use to foster a cultural revolution grounded in socially-transformative values and practice.

Co-operatives as organisational structures are no doubt part of capitalist societies. At times it is difficult to qualitatively differentiate co-operatives from outright capitalist businesses, because their mode of operation and profit maximising behaviour are essentially the same. This state of affairs has led some observers to question co-operatives pedigree as socially transformative instruments. However, it should be noted that co-operatives were found in the bureaucratic state-socialist regimes of the former Soviet Union and its satellite states of Eastern Europe. Workers co-operatives in communist Poland contributed about 10% of the annual output and had a major presence in the clothing, leather and footwear, printing and food processing industries.² Co-operatives are not seen as the desired hegemonic organisational forms in both socialist and capitalist states. Co-operatives’ potential to undermine hierarchical structures and put decision-making powers in the hands of those affected by those decisions are seen as a threat by both putative democratic and outright authoritarian societies. Therefore, it should not come as a surprise when co-operatives’ mode of operation converges with that of the dominant institutional context in which they are located. The existing hegemony’s influence on popular and national culture and the regulatory regime that governs business operation makes economic co-operation with counter-hegemonic possibilities a difficult proposition. The challenge for social activists who want to privilege co-operatives as the principal
vehicles of social liberation is the avoidance of organisational convergence with capitalist structures, while attempting to make an integrated and comprehensive co-operative sector a significant player in the whole of society.

Peter Gurney, a European writer on economic co-operation and labour politics expounded thusly on the revolutionary potentialities of co-operation:

The distinction between political and cultural revolution, that is, between profound transformations on the level of the state and the generation of alternative social and economic forms within civil society – provides a useful way of situating co-operative development in Britain [and Canada] in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Cultural revolution cannot be understood as a single event nor should it be regarded as a necessarily peaceful strategy that presupposes an easy accommodation with capitalism; it is not evolution in the dominant late nineteenth century sense of the term. Cultural revolution is a process embedded in modes of behaviour and social practice, involving the development of new modes of signification as well as new modes of production and consumption – these processes are inseparable. All this takes time, experience, struggle, memory. Co-operation can indeed be read as a form of cultural revolution …very different in conception and practice to ideologies that emphasised the revolutionary moment.  

In attempting to create a new society or the earthly Kingdom of God the social gospellers could not have avoided the challenge or I would argue the prerequisite of conscientising a significant part of the population into the new way of life. This kind of educational work was a strategic imperative even in the absence of structural changes throughout society. As identified by Gurney, co-operatives were instruments that can establish the embryonic framework for the ushering in of the New Jerusalem.

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2 Ibid., 112.
Reading James Cone's book, *Black Theology and Black Power*, in the late 1980s, initially developed my journey along the path of believing that religion can play a part or become a catalyst in sparking revolutionary social and political changes. In the preface to the 1989 edition of this work, Cone stated that this book was his "initial attempt to identify liberation as the heart of the Christian gospel and blackness as the primary mode of God's presence. I wanted to speak on behalf of the voiceless black masses in the name of Jesus whose gospel I believed had been greatly distorted by the preaching and theology of white churches."4 Prior to my encounter with Cone's *Black Theology and Black Power* I had identified religion and Christianity in particular with white supremacy, patriarchal and capitalist exploitation of African people. However, now armed with the knowledge that religious texts and their interpretation was contested terrain, I sought out theological works that privileged the experience of the oppressed and their quest for liberation.

When I reached the point in my studies that necessitated the search for a research topic, I knew that it would have some connection to religion and the Christian church and oppressed people(s). Eventually I came to the position that I would examine the potential of the African Canadian Christian church to serve as a catalyst in the emergence of a co-operative economic development practice in the African community of the Greater Toronto Area. My interest in the topic was spurred by the economic underdevelopment of the community and the belief that the progressive elements in the African church could aid in fostering a co-operative form of economic development.

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Once I got into the literature on the social gospel. I realised the paucity of research on the subject in Canada when compared with the United States. Secondly, no social gospel researcher interrogated its lack of a non-statist economic programme that was consistent with its emphasis on brotherhood/sisterhood, co-operation and equity in all human relations, including economics. Radical social gospellers were emphatic in their call for industrial democracy or workers participation in the workplace's decision-making process. With this understanding and call for workplace democracy and their insight into the machination of the political system and its control by big business interests, the failure to embrace co-operatives as the centre-piece of their economic programme appeared as a strategic mistake to me. The preceding observation led me to the search for material on the co-operative movement in Canada at the turn of the century to the 1930s, a period that roughly paralleled the existence of the social gospel movement. A preliminary reading of co-operative and social gospel literature suggested that the social gospel's aim of just and earthly social relations would have been better advanced, if it had used co-operatives as the instrument for its social evangelism.

My research will largely focus on the social gospel radicals, because their theological and political positions were consistent with a critique of Canadian society that represented the best option of overhauling its economic, political and social structures. Social gospel radicals' problematised evil in society as a social phenomenon, which demanded far-reaching changes, so as to make personal salvation a possibility.5 Conservative and progressive social gospellers were the other elements

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within the movement. The former identified sin as reflective of individual behaviour, and placed its trust in legislation to improve people’s social condition, while the latter positioned themselves programmatically between the radicals and the conservatives. The radical social gospel’s experience and insight may offer direction to contemporary progressive Christians who are dissatisfied with the moral, economic, social and political path that the political and capitalist elite is pursuing. At this moment, human societies at the threshold of a new millennium with a globalising capitalist juggernaut that is causing negative social, psychological and economic changes in the lives of a large segment of the world’s population. The neo-liberal ideology that undergirds a capitalism that was recently victorious over authoritarian state socialism, and is rapidly spreading its belief system and practices throughout the world glorifies and promotes an ethic of atomistic individualism. This ideological posturing is centred on the notion that society is a collection of individuals who are largely consumed by the pursuit of self-interested goals, at the expense of other-regarding ones. Within the logical of this neo-conservative thrust, the state has supported and/or enacted social and economic polices that have reduced the regulation of business corporations, and moved away from the commitment to provide universal social programmes. Private sector business organisations are an integral part of that one-two punch of the state and capital against any entitlement claims by the citizenry. Large corporations have exploited the whittling away of state regulatory regimes to move capital to areas where the highest return on capital can be gained. Corporations are “re-engineering” or “downsizing” their operations without any regard for the social, psychological, and economic costs to society of their actions. In this present social and economic

Ibid. 17.
climate, socially conscious Christians can take inspiration from the radical social
gospellers, while embracing an economic practice that gives power to the people as
citizens, consumers and producers.

The following chapters will substantiate the argumentative basis of this research. In chapter two a historical background of the social gospel in Canada will be undertaken. The factors that gave rise to the social gospel, its theological underpinning and the activism of the radical proponents of this form of social Christianity will form the backbone of this chapter. Facilitating an understanding of the radical challenge of the social gospel to traditional theology and society, and its transformative potentialities are also additional objectives behind the discussion of its historical setting.

Chapter three will analyse and compare the Kingdom of God and co-operative commonwealth precepts, so as to demonstrate their compatibility in the struggle to make Canada a society where justice, co-operation and solidarity would become its defining features. A union between the earthly Kingdom of God and co-operative commonwealth concepts, it will be argued, would have been strategically important for the contribution that their coming together would have achieved. Integrating both phenomena in a purposive, conscious and pragmatic way would have consolidated two civil society forces with the potential to develop the capacity of oppressed groups for self-management, and their receptivity to new cultural practices or a cultural revolution.

Chapter four presents the argument that the social gospel would have benefited immensely from the strong educational thrust and focus of the co-operative
movement. Fostering the educational or cultural development of members so as to improve their moral and mental capacities was a cornerstone of the pre-Rochdale and Rochdale-type co-operators. Given that the citizenry's consciousness and worldview are largely shaped by the hegemony under which they lived, an alternative educational process would be necessary to lead them to the earthly Kingdom of God and the co-operative commonwealth. This chapter will help make its case by highlighting the adult education and co-operative development approach of the Antigonish Movement in Nova Scotia.

Chapter five will present my observations and conclusion on the subject. It will also look at the lessons that can be drawn from the radical social gospel experience, for contemporary clerics who would like the Church either to become socially engaged or to serve as a catalyst for the emergence of a counter-hegemonic project within civil society.
Chapter Two

The Historical Settings of the Social Gospel

'Cause you know some people think
A great God will come from the sky
And take away everything and left everybody high
But if you know what life is worth
You will look for yours right here on earth
And now we see the light
We gonna stand up for our rights
Get Up, Stand Up- Peter Tosh, radical reggae pioneer

The presence of secular co-operative economic actions and the call to actualise progressive ethical precepts in religion are two phenomena that were simultaneously present during Canada’s experience of the Industrial Revolution during the late nineteenth to early twentieth century. The tumultuous economic and social changes brought on by the Industrial Revolution in Europe (especially Britain and France) and North America during the nineteenth century inspired a collectivistic critique of the triumphalist forces of capitalism, and the questioning of the adequacy and relevance of conventional Christianity in responding to the competitive and individualist norms that accompanied the new economic system. Social reformers in the Church and the wider secular society were not satisfied with the mere denunciation of the industrial order that was responsible for the existence of urban slums, dangerous and unhealthy workplace environments, less than subsistence wages, the displacement of rural populations, and a liberal economic ideology that negates any notion of organic community bonds. In response to this social and economic dislocation, the

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movements for economic co-operation and solidarity, and a socially relevant Christian theology and practice emerged.

It would not come as a surprise within progressive political circles, for the question of the role of the Christian religion in society, to inspire an almost instantaneous verbal reactions such as “stabiliser of the status quo,” to “too otherworldly focussed,” to “antidote to radical social change,” or “turn the other cheek, until you run out of cheek” philosophy. This is not a totally unfair characterisation of the way in which Christianity has been used to buttress the forces of oppression, whether at the level of class, race, gender or sexual freedoms in Canada. In a society where the individuals that constitute the ruling class profess their belief in Christianity, and the institutional Church seems to enjoy an incestuous relationship with this paramount group, political radicals’ distrust of or apprehensiveness towards religion is understandable. The liberation theologian, James Cone, captures the sentiment of many African people or progressive minds on the usefulness of Christianity to them:

Christianity came to [African people] through white oppressors who demanded that [they] reject [their] concern for this world as well as [their] blackness and affirm the next world and whiteness. The black intellectual community, however, with its emphasis on black identity, is becoming increasingly suspicious of Christianity because the oppressor has used it as a means of stifling the oppressed concern for present inequities. Naturally as the slave questions his existence as a slave, he also questions the religion of the enslaver.8

Although Cone’s critique was focussed on Christianity’s complicity in the oppression of African people, the insertion of the categories of women, the working class, sexual minorities or the homeless would still make his assertion valid. A

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8 Cone. 33.
religious doctrine that a hegemonic group feels comfortable in embracing and propagating could not be something any oppressed social group could use as the vehicle for the attainment of their liberation. It was thinking along this line that that led in part to the emergence of the social gospel in Canada.

The social gospel was a theological outlook predicated on the idea that Christianity is a progressive, socially engaged religion. In this regard it mandated its adherents to work for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth, advance the cause of social salvation or change, advocate a doctrine of love and co-operation, and to promote an ethic and practice of universal brotherhood/sisterhood.9 A pronounced preoccupation with transforming unjust societal institutions and relationships, and infusing Christianity with a here-and-now focus were elements that drove the social gospel movement in Canada and the United States. It is no exaggeration in stating that a religious movement like the social gospel was both a threat to both the established Church and the entrenched social and economic arrangement. The social salvation thrust of the social gospellers undermined the individualist religious redemption of conventional Christianity, and a social order that attempted to individualise the cause of a person's socio-economic position in society.

The manifestation of the social gospel as a late nineteenth to early twentieth century religious and social experience was stimulated by activities within and outside of the Protestant Church. Internally, there was the historical or higher criticism movement among Christian theologians. While, externally, the rapid industrialisation

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and urbanisation attendant with the Industrial Revolution, and Darwinian evolutionary science were the other contending stimuli that led to the movement of social Christianity.

Historical or higher criticism was the use of historical methodology to examine and verify the origin, meaning and character of events as outlined in the Bible. German theological scholarship of the nineteenth century can be credited for its relentless, if not pioneering work, in higher criticism. According to W. R. Ward, the doctrinaire and bruising strictures of Lutheran Orthodoxy and the influence of English deists led German scholars to rigorously apply "reason to religion with much greater thoroughness than was ever attempted in England, and found, in particular, that history was a better way of overturning the Orthodox exegesis of scripture than "reason" in the deist sense of the word."10 The German higher criticism played a contributory role in the Victorian "crisis of faith" in England. Higher criticism's claim of the falsehood or inaccuracies in biblical accounts of historical events affected the attitudes of certain members of the clergy, prospective ordinances and laity, towards the scripture and Jesus.11

The third degree interrogation of the Old and New Testament books, especially the former, would certainly have caused religious anxiety or a "crisis of faith" among Christians. David Marshall highlights the mood and anxiety that was rampant in the Canadian Church:

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11 Ibid., 45-46.
Many clergymen in Canada accommodated their Christian beliefs to modern social and intellectual trends, those forces that were partially responsible for undermining faith. Christianity was refashioned into a religion that accepted the discoveries of science and principles of history, incorporated the results of biblical criticism, and was sensitive to the moral and social issues of the times. Many liberal-thinking clergy were confident that this new Christianity would foster greater faith and a stronger presence of the Christian church in Canadian society. Any reconciliation of Christianity with modern knowledge and values, however, had to be carefully constructed, so that what was essential and characteristic of the Christian religion was not sacrificed, renounced, or forgotten. In establishing a new Christianity, based on the insights of science and history, clergymen were aware that they had to tread carefully.12

However, the German and English philosophers and theologians who had embraced higher criticism were not into the business of destroying the Christian religion. They tried to find a way to reconcile the evidence of history and the stories in the Scripture. Proponents of historical criticism squared the proverbial circle by their philosophical emphasis on the inner truths of ancient myths, whose “truth could be restated in contemporary terms through speculative philosophy.”13

Canada as a white Dominion jurisdiction within the British Empire, was generally receptive to intellectual or philosophical developments that were current in the metropolitan centre. As such, late nineteenth century Canada was not left untouched by the theological controversy generated by higher criticism in Europe.14 A spirited debate developed within Canada’s Protestant theological colleges and the clergy about the best way to respond to the new challenges from modern historical

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13 Ibid. 60-61.
14 Ramsey Cook. The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto. 1985), 17.
research methodology. This dispute about biblical historical accuracy was especially prominent within the Methodist church, the source of many of Canada's most prominent social gospellers.

George Workman, a Methodist theologian, lost his teaching position at Victoria College in Toronto in 1892 for his challenge of a literal interpretation of a supposedly, divinely inspired Old Testament Text. Workman contended that it was only the moral truths and spiritual principles that were divinely inspired, and the sum total of these events formed the basis on which a guide to societal intervention could be effected.¹⁵ Workman and George Grant (the latter a long-serving principal of Queen's University in Kingston, during the years 1877-1900) argued that the accommodation of the "new science of history" would not represent a threat to the essence of Christianity, but would actually aid the fulfilment of the scripture.¹⁶ Protestant Christianity in English Canada saw the proverbial writing on the wall if it failed to judiciously assimilate the historical method into the infrastructure of its theology and college curriculum.

The Protestant faith groups, especially the Methodists, did somewhat make space for scientific history into their theology, but it had the unintended effect of sowing the seeds of the social gospel movement. Using the Methodists and their Victoria College curriculum as an example, they used the principles and methods of higher criticism combined with historical theology¹⁷ and exegetical analytical tools to

¹⁵ Ibid., 17.
¹⁶ Ibid., 19 and 21.
¹⁷ Historical theology reconciled the basic unity between doctrine and Christianity by employing historical criticism to "confirm and reconstruct the evangelical creed." See Michael Gauvreau. "The
spread the message of the Bible.\textsuperscript{18} Yet the marriage between biblical criticism and church theology was rather selective, so as to maintain the integrity of conventional doctrine while still achieving the goal of attracting educated men to the ministry.\textsuperscript{19} In late nineteenth century Canada, both the Protestant and Catholic clergies were concerned with the "irreligious" sentiment of the educated young people, and the sway that "modern scientific spirit" held over them.\textsuperscript{20}

However, with the substitution of historical criticism for conventional church theology, some Methodists scholars, ministers and colleges shifted away from a literal interpretation of biblical events to a focus on the moral truths and ethical standards of ancient Israel,\textsuperscript{21} the immanence of God in religious development, and the union of the sacred and profane with the subjection of the Old Testament to "critical reason and the discovery of processes of religious growth."\textsuperscript{22} The outcome of the preceding theological shifts was a reformist and interventionist stance about the social and moral conditions of individuals in society and the growth of a liberal theology among Protestants. As a result of their engagement with biblical criticism Gauvreau found that:

Increasingly, Methodists [and other denominations] saw the prophets as political, moral and social reformers, an outlook, which contributed powerfully to the clergy's increasing concern with the problems of industrialization and the reform of national life. It was no mere

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 328.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 330.

\textsuperscript{20} Cook, 47-48.

\textsuperscript{21} Gauvreau, 334.

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 333.
coincidence that the rising tide of social concern became partners in liberalizing Methodism in the 1890s. 23

By placing a high degree of importance on the ethical work of the prophets and a prophetic ministry, the social gospel emerged as a vital force for reform in early twentieth century Canada.

Canada's experience of the twin force of industrialisation and urbanisation was a late occurrence, when compared with that of the United States, and definitely, the English experience of the Industrial Revolution. 24 The growth in Canada's urban population and that of its major cities (Montreal, Toronto and Winnipeg) were tremendous. James Woodsworth, a social gospeller and a chronicler of the early Canadian urban experience found that:

Canada is leaving the country for the city. In 1891 thirty-two per cent of our population was urban (cities of 10,000 and over); 1901 thirty-eight percent, a relative gain of six per cent for the cities in ten years. The population of Ontario more than doubled from 1851 to 1901, but the population of Toronto increased six times during the period. The population of the Province of Quebec was almost twice as large in 1851 as in 1901, but that of Montreal was four and one-half as large. Manitoba is an agricultural Province, and yet one-quarter of the entire population is resident in the city of Winnipeg. 25

This massive population expansion in the major urban centres was also reflected in

23 Ibid., 335.
smaller cities such as Vancouver, Calgary, and Regina. An indication of the explosion in the process of urbanization was the increase in the number of town and cities with over five thousand inhabitants from fifty-eight in 1901 to ninety in 1911.\textsuperscript{26}

Immigration and natural population growth accounted for the burgeoning increase in urban dwellers, but it was the former that was largely responsible. In 1891, the total Canadian populace stood at 4,833,000, but by 1911 it was about 7,206,000, which represented a fifty-percent increase in just two decades.\textsuperscript{27} Between 1905 to 1914, over 2,530,000 immigrants came to Canada, with about half of them staying in the towns and cities and the remainder settling on the prairies.\textsuperscript{28} It was this huge influx of immigrants into Canadian urban centres, and the inadequate social infrastructure of housing, social welfare schemes and educational or English-language training, that inspired different Protestant denominations into action. The institutional response of these churches to the problems of immigration and slums was the setting up of settlement houses, and city missions such as the Presbyterian’s St. Andrew’s Institute and the Methodist’s Fred Victor Mission.\textsuperscript{29}

It was within the above context of doing something to alleviate the conditions of people within the cities as residents, and their situation as industrial workers, that the manifestation of the social gospel took form. Crysdale stated that the social awakening within the Church did not come about until the industrial revolution blossomed in the early years of this century with the attendant oppressive socio-


\textsuperscript{27} Crysdale, 5.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{29} Allen, \textit{The Social Passion}, 11-12.
economic state of the cities, that the imperative of a prophetic ministry against the economic and social status quo was realised.\textsuperscript{30} Pragmatic and self-interested factors may have influenced some elements within the Church to become involved in the improving the condition of the urban masses. Similar to the experience of the English and the Americans, large segments of the Canadian urban poor were estranged from the church.\textsuperscript{31} Declining attendance at church and diminution of ecclesiastical control over the people's daily lives were probably taken as evidence of the parting of ways. A Congregational clergy person, Rev. G. Ellery Read, made a statement about the church and the status quo that captures the sentiment of the social gospellers:

Unfortunately the church in her corporate capacity has always been in dealing with social and economic evils . . . She has been too much afraid of custom, too much restrained and constrained by the bonds of conservative practice, and has been moved from the official mooring only when demands from the reforming party within the church and the censures and criticisms of those without have been so insistent and claimant that to save herself she has not dared to continue in her indifference and apathy.\textsuperscript{32}

Whether the motive force behind the mainline churches' action was internally or externally derived or a combination of both, the problems of industrialisation and urbanisation were now on their agenda. Social gospellers as the most socially-advanced sector within the larger Protestant denominations such as the Methodist, Presbyterian and the Anglican churches, could claim their churches' new orientation toward social intervention as the basis of the prophetic work that was being undertaken in the cities, and some rural communities.

\textsuperscript{30} Crysdale, 16.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., 16 and 24.
\textsuperscript{32} Cited in Crysdale, 25.
Lastly, Darwinian evolutionary postulation also propelled a significant minority within the church toward a social Christianity. Charles Darwin’s books, *On the Origin of Species* (in 1859) and *The Descent of Man* (in 1871), gave rise to theological debates about the relevance and impact of these texts’ claims on the traditional teachings of the Christian religion. This controversy was most pronounced in the area of the Bible’s ontological account of human’s beginning, and it occurred on both sides of the Atlantic.\(^{13}\) The clergy and most theologians were strongly opposed to a doctrine that denied divine, purposive intent in the creation of the world and the special place of humanity in it. In the opinion of the conservative religious faction in Canada represented by its chief spokesperson McGill University principal, William Dawson, evolutionary or Darwinian ideas constituted a threat to morality grounded in religious precepts, and people’s unmet expectation (as a result of Darwinist influence) would “threaten to overthrow the whole fabric of society as at present constituted.”\(^{14}\)

It was this convergence of conservative religious dogma and the existing social and economic structures that religious and secular reformist found unacceptable.

Notwithstanding the initial apprehension over evolution, traditionalist theologians and clergy by the 1880s in Canada and the United States found a way to reconcile Darwinian outlook with their take on Christian theology. The religious traditionalist found in Darwin’s concepts of natural selection and the survival of the fittest, a bastion of support for the economic and social system of the day. According to these religious proponents of social Darwinism, the natural order was individualistic.

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\(^{14}\) Cook, 11-12.
and competitive, and intelligent adaptation was the only route to success.\textsuperscript{35} The Protestant ethic of individual thrift, hard work and self-sacrifice were, from the perspective of the social Darwinists, legitimated by "scientific" doctrine.\textsuperscript{36} Furthermore, the social application of the concept of the survival of the fittest gave comfort to the capitalist, white supremacist and patriarchal hegemony that the oppression of socially marginalised people was both natural and necessary in the progressive evolution toward a better society.

However, as the religiously sanctioned Social Darwinism was on the ascent in the 1890s, the progressive clergy and theologians (many of them social gospellers or advocates of a social Christianity) countered with an adaptation of evolutionary belief to religion that emphasised mutuality, co-operation and solidarity. In the United States, prominent thinkers such as John Fiske and Lester Ward were articulating the position that co-operative traits, the exercise of reason and purposive co-operation by humans, were the next and desirable stage of evolutionary development.\textsuperscript{37} Canadian religious and social figures such as Mackenzie King and Salem Bland concurred with Scottish theologian and naturalist Henry Drummond that evolution and Christianity could be integrated within a general notion of progress.\textsuperscript{38}

With this harmonisation of evolution and Christianity, liberal theologians and clergy "produced three clearly related ideas that together constituted a logical and

\textsuperscript{35} May. 143.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.. 50.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.. 144.

\textsuperscript{38} Cook. 15.
unified frame of reference for social Christianity. These were the immanence of God, the organic and solidaristic view of society, and the presence of the kingdom heaven on earth.\[39\] A fourth principle that rounded out the philosophical basis of the social gospel was the ethical foundation of the Bible and the ministry of Jesus. Now supported by the authority of Christianity theology and natural and social science, the emerging social gospel movement felt that it was on secure ground in trying to affect social and economic justice throughout the land. The individualist focus of normative Christianity and the capitalist social order was place within the crosshair of the radical clergy's social evangelism, and its antidote of co-operation, brotherhood/sisterhood and social justice.

**Philosophical Foundation of Social Gospel**

The philosophical and theological ideas that informed and made up the foundation of the social gospel supported co-operative economics, collective work and responsibility, social solidarity and justice. Any organised group or individual that was advancing these concepts during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century would have opened itself to being accused of overindulging on the socialist brew that was finding favour among sections of the industrial working class in Canada and Britain. However, having these notions being championed by liberal elements in the clergy and progressive theologians was almost sacrilegious, and a perceived movement away from the otherworldly, individual salvation emphasis of conventional Christianity. In the social Christianity of the Social Gospel movement, four theological philosophical tenets are given pre-eminence: the immanence of God; an

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39 Hopkins, 123.
earthly Kingdom of God; an organic, co-operative and solidaristic view of society, and an ethical Christianity grounded in the Gospels.

The Immanence of God

Traditional Christian theology has long held that God is a transcendental entity that dwells outside human history and its accompanied limitations. The image of God is that of an imperial, despotic and autocratic monarchical figure that brooks no opposition from his lowly subjects. Walter Rauschenbusch suggested that this conception of God was a product of the social environment wherein “kings and governors were the greatest human being in the public eye, [therefore] it was inevitable that their image would be superimposed on the idea of God.”

God, not unlike a traditional monarchy, transcends the world of the believers, but is in it by way of the favours or punishment that can be meted out for compliance or disobedience, respectively.

Rauschenbusch captures the conventional religious sentiment of God’s transcendence when he asserts that, “God was imagined far above, in an upper part of the universe, remote from humanity but looking down on us fully aware of all we do, interfering when necessary, but very distinct.” The social gospellers were revolted by the notion of a transcendental God whose authority approximates the tyrannical structures and behaviour of existing political regimes. However, these radical Christians’ interpretation of Jesus and the prophets’ understanding of God, led them to

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81 Ibid., 172.
declare God's immanence in human affairs. Social gospel proponents were beneficiaries of the revisionist scholarship of Albrecht Ritschl's, the dominant force in European Protestantism in the 1870s and 1880s, in his reconceptualization of God within history. Allen outlines the significance of Ritschl's contribution to the social gospel:

Just as the traditional characteristics which distinguished God from man were discounted, so the existential alienation between [humans] and God, expressed in the doctrine of original sin, was denied and [humans] appeared as fundamentally good. Similarly, Ritschl saw no great gulf between mankind and Jesus. Jesus marked the moral perfection that was possible to every[one], and His work was to bring the believer into a kingdom of moral ends.42

God was not conceived of as the vengeful and holy entity of the Bible and Reformation, but one whose essence was premised on forgiveness, love and solidarity with humanity.43

The Christian God that was taken to be existentially the same as humans, was a momentous breach of the historical dichotomy between the sacred and secular. God as an integral force in human society gave religion a high degree of immediacy, legitimised the broadening of its role in social and economic matters, and repudiated the idea of society as collection of atomised individuals.44 The sum total of the theological reformulation of God as a force within society was to imbue their social movement with a moral imperative for social transformation, which was taken a

42 Allen, The Social Passion, 4-5.
43 Ibid., 4.
44 Hopkins, 124.
fulfilment of God's word. Rauschenbusch positively extols the virtue of an immanent God:

The old conception that God dwells on high and is distinct from our human life was the natural basis for autocratic and arbitrary ideas about him. On the other hand the religious belief that he is immanent in humanity is the natural basis for democratic ideas about him. When he was far above, he needed vice-regents to rule for him, popes by divine institution and kings by divine right. If he lives and moves in the life of mankind, he can act directly on the masses of people. A God who strives within our striving who kindles his flame in our intellect, sends the impact of his energy to make our will restless for righteousness, floods our subconscious mind with dreams and longings, and always urges the race on toward a higher combination of freedom and solidarity, - that would be a God with whom democratic and religious people could hold converse as their chief fellow-worker, the source of their energies, the ground of their hopes.

God as a positive force in history and on the side of the socially marginalised was a critical development in Christian theology by the social gospellers. Christian believers and non-believers would not need to suffer without resistance against the oppression within society, in the belief that they were “rendering unto Caesar, that which is Caesar”. This being the case, the justice, peace and equality that was hitherto projected onto the sacred realm could now be expected in the secular realm, with God now immanent in history, and a partisan on the side of the oppressed.

The Kingdom of God on Earth

The theological concept of the immanence of God and the proclamation that the Kingdom of God as an earthly sphere, and not one that will be realised in heaven was closely related ideas. The former concept naturally led to the latter. Social gospel advocates made the claim that the Kingdom of God that was present in the
teachings of the Old Testament prophets and Jesus, and was an earthly and inclusive realm that would manifest the good life and the regeneration of society. \(^{46}\) Traditional church teaching on the Kingdom of God was absolute in its belief that heaven, where the Christian god resides, was the location of the Kingdom of God. The hardship and tribulations that people experience on earth was merely to prepare themselves for a life of everlasting bliss in a heaven beyond earth. Therefore, the social gospel movement reinterpretation of this and other cardinal doctrines of the Church was not appreciated by many Church traditionalists. They claimed that this upending of orthodoxy was an undue pandering to secular humanistic ideologies as prescriptive remedies for the oppressive human condition. \(^{47}\) Furthermore, the forces of orthodoxy argued that a lack of conviction in the uniqueness and distinctiveness of biblical teaching led the social gospel heretics astray. \(^{48}\)

The critics of the social gospel's understanding of the Kingdom of God as an earthly phenomenon were the same ones who resisted the use of historical criticism in a radical exegetical reading of biblical historical and moral accounts. Barker, as an historian and theologian, strongly implored the church to "restate and reinterpret and visualize" the Kingdom of God ideal so as to respond to the social, economic and political challenges that affected modern, contemporary society. \(^{49}\) Social relevance in doctrinal matters was the basis of the social gospellers' exhortation to the Christian

\(^{47}\) Barker, 4.
\(^{48}\) Ibid., 84.
\(^{49}\) Barker, 4.
community that an immanent God working within history logically made the Kingdom of God a worldly one. To the social gospel movement there were two relevant meanings that Jesus’ messianic ministry gave to the Kingdom ideal: a spiritual and personal experience and an application of his ethical teachings to the process of transforming exploitive societal relations.50

A socialised and an individualised understanding of the Kingdom are not necessarily in conflict. The complete and progressive reconstruction of the social order would be impossible, if a similar process of change does not happen at the level of the individual. Debates or disagreements about the order in which this transformation (individual or social) will occur was not really of material interest. The two meanings of Christ’s pronouncements on the Kingdom ideal and emphasised by the social gospel would have probably worked themselves out in a dialectical process.

However, there was another sense in which it was claimed that Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God idea- an apocalyptic future event.51 This was the conventional understanding of Christ’s ministering about the Kingdom of God that was propagated by the orthodox clergy and theologians. It would come into being through a cataclysmic destruction of this world, and was thus in accordance with church teachings of God taking the faithful into heaven—the Kingdom of God. The radical social gospellers were strongly opposed to this exclusive apocalyptic sense of the Kingdom. Darlene Peitz argued that:

50 Ibid., 6-9.

Placing the kingdom at the end of human history through apocalypticization subverted the radical nature of Jesus’ ethic for this world. When the kingdom was pushed to the end of history, Jesus’ message was understood as an interim ethic until the second coming. In light of the fact that the second coming remains an unfulfilled hope, the interpretation of Jesus’ ethic as an interim ethic, rendered it vulnerable to dismissal as irrelevant.52

Rauschenbusch as the chief theorist of the social gospel in the United States was critical of an apocalyptic emphasis. He did acknowledged a future orientation of the Kingdom in Christ’s teachings, which was attributed to the surrounding religious environment wherein the notion was predominant. But Rauschenbusch claimed that Jesus was “shaking off catastrophic ideas and substituting developmental ideas.”53

Presently, New Testament historical research and evidence suggest a more apocalyptic thrust of the Kingdom ideal of Jesus.54 This revelation does not destroy the social orientation of the Kingdom of gospel in the theology of the social gospel, because the religious and intellectual context of Jesus’ time may have conditioned the articulation of his message. Peitz appeals for a historical contextualisation of the Kingdom of God:

If the reality of the kingdom for the prophets, Jesus and the early Christian communities was social, be it the restoration of the nation of Israel or the imminent return of Jesus as Lord of a new social order, the reality of the kingdom for today becomes the hope for the regeneration of the social order for the salvation of the race as a whole.55

The social gospellers would not have found a problem with the above statement that made a case for historical relevancy and ethical treatment of the Kingdom ideal.

52 Peitz. 117.
53 Rauschenbusch. A Theology. 218-220.
54 Peitz. 118.
55 Ibid., 119.
The Ethical and Social Basis of Jesus and Christianity

The social gospel proponents put forward an ethical understanding of Christianity that was centred on the social reconstruction of human society. Social gospelers argued that social salvation should primarily define the evangelism of the Christian Church, rather its traditional focus on individual salvation. Personal repentance and piety of the individual believer were the cornerstone of Church and theological teaching in preparing her/him for the otherworldly experience of the heavenly kingdom. The material or social situation of the believers' lives and the structural processes that oppressively conditioned the former were generally outside the realm of clerical investigation and interests. In other words, Christians should not strive for the things of Caesar's world, but that of the spiritual world to come.

Church attitude towards societal matters was informed by its belief that sin was a defining feature of humanity. The Church taught that sin arose from selfishness and rebellion against God. Therefore, any suffering that was experienced, especially those of a social nature were due to personal immorality and sinfulness. Parishioners could not expect the traditional Church to champion on their behalf the socio-economic and political challenges that confronted them in society.

This position was rejected by the social gospelers who pointed to the New and Old Testaments for evidence of social involvement by biblical figures. The biblical

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57 Allen. The Social Passion. 6-7.
58 Rauschenbusch. A Theology. 97.
prophets were cited as examples of social reformers. Their denunciation of the evil
behaviour of the Israelites, their political activism, and persecution in resisting the
political hegemony of the ruling groups were taken as a model of the role that the
pulpit should fulfil in contemporary society. It was from this ancient source that the
social gospellers took inspiration for their position that a prophetic ministry was a
legitimate field of religious and social endeavour. Samuel Chown, a contemporary of
the social gospel movement and prominent figure in the Methodist Church, stated that
"the preacher who fulfils his mission in our time must be a prophet and a leader to his
generation," which was facing similar problems as those of the biblical prophets.

In the view of the social gospellers, if the prophets under the inspiration and
influence of God spoke out against economic and social oppression, nothing less was
expected of them in their own time. By embarking on this path, the social gospel
movement believed that it was fulfilling a religious tradition and duty that placed a
socially transformative and ethical stance at the centre of the Christian religion.
Woodsworth lashed out against a Christianity that does not place ethical consideration
at its centre:

A curse still hangs over inactivity. A severe condemnation still rests
upon indifference. Christianity stands for social righteousness as well
as personal righteousness. It is quite right for me to be anxious to save
my never dying soul, but it is of greater importance to try to serve the
present age. Indeed, my friend, you will save your own precious soul
only as you give your life in the service of others. We have tried to
provide for the poor. Yet have we tried to alter the social conditions
that lead to poverty.  

59 Antonides, 51. Walter Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order* (New York:
Macmillan, 1919), 51.

60 Gauvreau, 336.
Social gospellers in both Canada and the United States could not conceive or tolerate a religion that divorced itself from social action.

Furthermore, the teaching of Jesus was relied on as another source of support for the ethical treatment of religion. Social gospellers held the position that Jesus did not exclusively teach about morality, but also the pursuit of the good life that entailed an engagement with the societal forces that would prevent its materialisation. Jesus' social ethics necessitated a concern and solidarity with the poor and the outcasts, and condemnation of the abuse and oppression of the wealthy and those holding public office. Canadian theologian and social activist, Oscar Cole-Arnal concludes from this study of the ministry of Jesus that:

Liberation against oppression emerges as central to the entire message of Jesus. He demonstrated it in his healings, in his solidarity with the poor, in his intimacy with every marginalized sector of his society, and in his agrarian radicalism embodied in the notion of jubilee. In this respect he represented both the heritage of liberation found in ancient Israel and the subsequent beliefs and practices of the early communities that would bear his name. Jesus, in his message and ministry, highlights the central focus of Biblical teaching, namely, that God makes common cause with the oppressed and the vulnerable in their struggles against those who would crush them.

The above statement depicts the essence of the social gospels claim that ethical and social goals was basis of Jesus' work and religion.

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63 Oscar Cole-Arnal, To Set the Captives Free: Liberation Theology in Canada (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1998), 30.
However, there were religious critics of the social gospel movement, who were not pleased with an interpretation of religion that mandated social action. Christian traditionalists asserted that the reliance on human reason rather than on divine revelation, contributed to a shift from theology to the social sciences as a guide for what constituted a moral society. In the opinion of the social gospel critics the abandonment of theology for sociology as the analytic and prescriptive lens through which society was viewed, caused the Church to lose its historically recognised role as the expert in all things religious. This position would seem to be pandering to the notion that an impermeable barrier exist between the religious, economic, political, social and ethical facets of ones' life, rather than the interpenetration, and in some situations, the conflation of them. Furthermore, it was in the interest of the paramount classes to demarcate an area of life, religious, which was the only jurisdiction that the clergy was considered competent to speak on.

Critics also pointed to an inevitable difficulty caused by the substituting of sociology for theology, which made the Christian message one of social reform and good citizenship. They claimed that self-interested and partisan groups and individuals subjected the "historical Jesus" of liberal Christianity to varied and conflicting interpretations. It seems unfair to lay the blame for the opposing interpretations of the ethical stance of Jesus' ministry and Christianity at the feet of the social gospellers. Orthodox Christians could also be implicated in this state of affairs. They have conservatively read the ethics in Jesus' ministry to exclude women from

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64 Antonides. 55-56.

65 Cook. 230-231.
significant leadership roles in the Church, or remain silent on exploitive economic relations by citing the well-known but incorrectly interpreted injunction, "leave unto Caesar that which is Caesar." The lesson that can be taken from this is that the social gospellers had as much right as the traditionalist in reading an ethical thrust in Christianity that supported social transformation.

A Solidaristic View of Society

Given the social gospel's partiality toward a programme of social salvation over individual salvation, it should not come as a surprise that it would have advanced an organic and solidaristic view of society. The position that the members of society, notwithstanding our differences, are nonetheless part of an integrated whole was grounded in the theological doctrine of the fatherhood of God, and the resultant "brotherhood of man." The idea of brotherhood/sisterhood was not restricted to only Christian believers, but to all humanity, since they were all children of God. At the level of the community or society we all need each other to survive and fulfil our potential as individuals. Society as an organic and solidaristic entity, according to the social gospels, can be found in the written work of St. Paul (the epistle), but it was hitherto taken to mean only members of the Christian community. Rauschenbusch refers to the work of St. Paul in expounding on the organic nature of society:

One of the earliest leaders of this remarkable organisation formulated its social philosophy from the biology of the human organism. The

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66 Hopkins. 125-126
68 Hopkins. 209.
ideal society, he said, has an unlimited diversity of organs and functions, but a fundamental unity of life, motive and purpose; it is perfect in the measure in which every member has the support and protection of the whole body, and in turn serves the whole in its due place. Paul's philosophy of the Christian Church is the highest possible philosophy of human society. The ideal society is an organism, and the Christianising of the social order must work toward and harmonious co-operation of all individuals for common social ends.69

The radical social gospellers belief in co-operation and solidarity as the cornerstone of the good society made them critical of industrial capitalism. Salem Bland, a radical social gospeller and theologian argued that the cut-throat competition and excessive profit seeking of capitalism militated against Christian solidarity, since the essence of the former was embedded in a zero-sum logic.70 This economic system was predicated on there being losers and winners in the pursuit of the outcome from the productive process. John Murray, a McGill University theologian and philosopher from 1872-1917, gave voice to the alienation that he saw being experienced by the workers in a capitalist order that was undergoing rapid consolidation of ownership into ever fewer hands. Furthermore, he deplored the use of workers as means to an end, and called for a co-partnership of labour and capital in the work process and sharing of profit.71 Murray was not calling for the destruction of capitalism, but his claim in the late Victorian period that ethics was inseparable from economics provided a starting point for the social gospel movement in its questioning of the economic order.72

71 Cook, 182.
72 Ibid., 185.
During the early years of the twentieth century there was evidence of a critical interrogation of the corrosive impact of capitalism on Christian brotherhood/sisterhood by progressive elements within the mainline churches. A statement issued by the Methodist’s General Conference in 1906 expressed the prevailing sentiment of a small but influential section of the church:

We acknowledge with regret that the present social order is far from being an ideal expression of Christian brotherhood, and that the spirit of much of our commercial life is alien to that of the Gospel. We deplore the great evils which have source in the commercial greed of our times, the money madness which leads men to oppress the unfortunate and to forget their obligations to the higher interests of society.**73**

As stated earlier, the Church felt the pressure of the alienation of its members and potential members as a result of the belief of the latter that the former was not in solidarity with their interests in an industrialising and urbanising society. Pressure also came from within the Church, and sometimes from seemingly unlikely sources. Methodist leader, Albert Carman, a theological and biblical conservative, expressed his disfavour with a church that was in comradeship with the new economic order:

Should the suddenly rich, the monopolists, those who have filched the savings of the people, all who live by the labour of others, meet in secret to frame a religion under which they would like to live, what better could they enact than that the oppressed would bear with Christian humility their oppression, and the wronged would live on with silent lips, looking for right only beyond the grave? And yet that is in practical effect the gospel being heard in many an upholstered pew.**74**

Capitalism was not the first economic system to create social divisions based on the ownership and/or control of economic resources. However, it was the first to

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**73** Cited in Crysdale, 19-20.

**74** Cited in Cook, 119.
have such pervasive and almost totalising power to determine the access of people to the means of acquiring the basic necessities of life. Almost all of the propertyless members of society were required to work for wages in industries whose tools or machineries were owned by the capitalist class. The exaltation of selfishness and the stand off between a small group of capitalists and the rest of society made for a zero-sum competition of each against all. The organic and solidaristic thrust of the social gospel's Kingdom of God ideal was thus threatened by a rapacious and competitive capitalist economic practice.

As such the radical social gospellers advocated an economic system that favoured co-operation, lessening of the profit motive, collective ownership and worker self-management of enterprise. While moderate theologians, like John Murray, called for profit sharing in industries, radicals such as Bland did not have much faith in it as a permanent solution to the economic domination of the workers. Bland being a product of his time saw public ownership and the state's regulation of monopolies as the corrective to a competitive, profit-driven capitalism. The thinking behind this alternative was that "public ownership more extensively and powerfully than other human agencies teaches [people] to say we and ours. It teaches them to think socially." With our experience of public ownership and regulated monopolies and the clarity of hindsight that it affords us, we know the workers in these situations are

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5 Rauschenbusch, *Christianizing the Social Order*, 311.
7 Bland, 16.
8 Ibid., 28.
9 Ibid., 28.
not necessarily more empowered than those in outright capitalist organisations. Nonetheless, during Bland’s time public ownership of industries and regulated monopolies were seen as radical proposals.

A radical and potentially more socially transformative approach to the goal of worker or the community ownership of economic resources, that found some degree of favour among radical social gospellers was co-operatives. Ian MacPherson, a noted Canadian historian on co-operatives, claims that radical social gospellers such as William Ivens, A.E. Smith, William Irvine and Woodsworth were strong supporters of co-operatives and they exercised leadership during the formation stages of many co-operatives.\(^{80}\) However, as I will attempt to demonstrate in this work, co-operatives were not envisioned as the vehicles through which just social relations in economics and the Kingdom of God on earth would be attained. Rauschenbusch was the social gospeller who unequivocally supported co-operatives as an alternative to capitalism:

Thus the cooperative associations represents a new principle in economic life, clearly of higher ethical quality than the principle dominant in capitalism. They combine a wholesomely selfish desire to get ahead with genuine fraternal sympathy and solidarity, and the combination works and holds its own against the most efficient concerns in those fields where the cooperatives have learned to master the situation . . . they draw the lower classes whom capitalism has almost deprived of initiative into the management, and train them to industrial and moral efficiency.\(^{81}\)

Unfortunately, while Rauschenbusch was effusive in this praise for co-operatives as organisational models for economic justice they did not figure as central organising instruments in the operationalising of his radical social gospel evangelicalism.

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\(^{81}\) Rauschenbusch. *Christianizing the Social Order*. 387.
Social and Political Activism of the Social Gospellers

The social activism of the radical social gospellers was both prophetic and action-oriented or socially engaged. Taking their cue from the prophets of the Old Testament, whom had denounced social and economic abuses, and acts of immorality, as well as proclaimed the Kingdom of God, these social gospellers articulated a similar message for their time. The prophetic work that was carried out could be described as a form of consciousness-raising exercise, which highlighted the social, economic and political problems facing both parishioners and non-parishioners, and putting forth options for positively engaging these challenges. All available and accessible mediums were used to give voice to the message of social reconstruction, and a socially relevant theology.

Firstly and naturally the pulpit was used by these radical social Christians to spread the message of liberation. A case in point was that of William Irvine, who openly stated in his letter of acceptance of his first pastorate at Emo, in the Rainy River District in south-western Ontario, that the social gospel would be the centrepiece of his ministry. Irvine’s social Christianity was, initially, not a problem with the members of that church’s board. Other members of the radical faction of social gospel movement used their pulpit in a similar way, but met with opposition from business and conservative interests in their churches.

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82 Smillie, 340.
83 Cole-Arnal, 133.
William Ivens, a Methodist minister and radical social gospeller and later founder of the Labor Church movement in Canada, ran into difficulties with the board of his McDougall church in Winnipeg. The ostensible reason behind the Church hierarchy's problem with Ivens was his public, pacifistic opposition to World War One. It appears from petitions and letters of support from members of the congregation that Ivens was both popular and his message was all right with them. On the issue of the war, his choir wrote a letter of support that stated:

We have not as far as we are aware heard anything uttered from the pulpit at McDougall that could be misunderstood or construed as regards the War, in any way detrimental or derogatory to our beloved forces overseas. We have always held our Pastor to be a straightforward, conscientious, and hardworking man, and we believe one who is working to attain the highest ideal in the ministry.\(^{85}\)

There was evidence of the success of Ivens's social preaching and solidarity in attracting church-disillusioned working class people and other members of the community to return to the pews. A letter of support from a Theo Watts affirms the preceding conclusion:

Until nearly a year ago I was completly [sic] out of sympathy with the church in general but having been induced by a friend to hear W. Ivens I soon became convinced that here was the man with the kind of message I had been looking for a long time and soon became a regular attendant and later a member of his church. . . . There are people [at McDougall] who have never attended church before which proves that Mr. Ivens has succeeded where others have failed.\(^{86}\)

In another letter of support Watt wrote about the antagonism and loss of confidence by members of the labour movement, and the suitability of Ivens through

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\(^{86}\) Ibid., undated letter to Reverend A. E. Smith, President of Methodist Conference.
his social gospel message and esteem within labour circles to reverse the unfavourable situation.\(^87\)

The impact of the radical, social evangelical message from the pulpits of congregations ministered to by social gospellers in Canada, was the emergence of a socially conscious faction within the Protestant Church. In fact, this contribution was the start of a prophetic ministry which “exposed the church lightly hiding behind orthodoxy in political quiescence, and hit the acute situations of social injustice with a precise but abrasive word.”\(^88\) This assertion of speech from the pulpit was empowering for receptive members of the church, and for those outside whose struggles gained a degree of legitimacy knowing that God, the church and theology were on their side. Many of the letters endorsing Ivens’s ministry at the McDougall church revealed how certain parishioners and non-members felt about a progressive theology in support of the socially disenfranchised.

Other non-Church public fora were used to disseminate the social gospel. All of the main radical social gospellers were sought after as public speakers, and most were regular contributors to church publications and secular newspapers and magazines. Irvine’s commitment to getting socially critical and informed ideas on society out to the public led him to the co-founding of The Nutcracker, a bi-weekly newspaper, in November 1916, in the city of Calgary.\(^89\) The Nutcracker and its reincarnation as the Alberta Non-Partisan and later The Western Independent was an important educational outlet for progressive and radical social movements. In spite of

\(^87\) Ibid., letter dated June 7, 1918.

\(^88\) Smillie, 337.
its success in "entertaining, educating and raising the political consciousness of thousands of people, . . . its chief task was the role its played in developing a farmer-labour movement in Alberta."90 This contribution to a labour-farmer alliance was of strategic importance as evidenced by the rise of the farmers with labour support, to the control of governmental machineries at the municipal and provincial level and a notable presence at the federal level in the early 1920s.

The attempt at radicalising consciousness and awareness, and presenting social, economic and political alternatives were also affected through journalistic endeavours by Woodsworth, Bland and Ivens. In the summer months of 1913, Woodsworth wrote a series of articles in the Methodist's publication, The Christian Guardian that critiqued the low wage paid to labourers which was insufficient in providing the basic necessities of life, and pressed the church to embrace a programme of social reform, with the ultimate end being the attainment of human solidarity and the Kingdom of God on earth.91 Collective bargaining rights, public ownership of utilities, a minimum wage and the single tax were among some of the changes or themes that were advocated by Woodsworth in the above-mentioned articles, and in others written for newspapers and journals. Bland wrote a regular column in the Grain Growers Guide, the organ of the Western Canada farmers' movement,92 and it was used to expound on social gospel themes. Ivens, a student of Bland during the his student days at Wesley College in Winnipeg, took over the editorship of the Western

90 Mardiros. 41.
91 Ibid., 53.
91 Cook. 218-219.
Labour News, the voice of the Trades and Labor Council, after his departure from the ministry.\(^93\) The Western Labour News, through the influence of Ivens, was a strong supporter of the Winnipeg General Strike in May and June 1919, which was trumpeted as the commencement of the process towards brotherhood and worker ownership of industry.\(^94\) The radical social gospellers use of the printed medium as a platform to educate and inform may not have reached everyone within the targeted constituencies of the agrarian and labour movements. However, the more socially advanced and receptive members within the above social movements, and other people who knew that something was wrong with the way society was organised but analytically and prescriptively could not put a finger on it, must have found their ideas instructive and legitimating. Men of the pulpit (this space was virtually exclusively male) commanded a high degree of influence and respect for their opinion. With the social gospellers exercising a preferential option for farmers and labourers, these occupational groups were even more inclined to believe in the rightness of their claim against the status quo.

The radical social gospellers' activism was not only propagandistic and conscientising in nature. They also carried out action-oriented undertakings designed to usher into being the social, economic and political ideals of the social gospel. Trade unionism, an alternative church movement (Labor churches), and electoral politics were the primary platforms around which a social gospel practice was structured.

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\(^93\) Ibid., 81.

\(^94\) Ibid., 84.
One of the most radical developments in Canadian church history was the creation of the Labor Church in Winnipeg in June 1918 by William Ivens. This radical social gospeller saw the labouring masses and the church’s solidarity with their needs and aspiration as the catalyst for the re-Christianisation of the Church and society.\(^{95}\) The institutional church was unwilling or unable to embrace the above mandate prescribed by Ivens. In this regard Ivens felt morally obligated to create the Labor Church movement because of his desire for a creedless, non-denominational Church, the reactionary influence of the commercial and industrial elite over Church polices, support of World War One by the mainline churches, and his experience with social gospel preaching and religious socialism.\(^{96}\) Freed from the stricture of conservative Church doctrine Ivens and the other radical social gospellers associated with the Labor Churches could freely exercise the preferential option for society’s oppressed.

Between the years 1919-1921, a total of nineteen labour churches were formed with most of them located in Western Canada.\(^{97}\) These churches were located in urban centres such as Toronto, Brandon, Saskatoon, Cape Breton, Winnipeg and Calgary. It was not surprising that the message of social Christianity and labour advocacy would have found a responsive audience in these cities. The industrial working class was largely an urban occurrence, whose experience with trade unionism and collective

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\(^{95}\) Ibid., 84.


organising would make them gravitate towards a church whose message was compatible with the secularised ends sought by it. This union of the secular and the sacred was reflected in the indispensable service of the Labor Church, under the leadership of Ivens, A.E. Smith and Woodsworth toward the objectives, resiliency, and militancy of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike. During the strike the Labor Church was able to rally up to ten thousand strikers and supporters at its public meetings, and its involvement in the strike effort contributed to its non-violent and disciplined character. The latter occurred in spite of government and police provocation, harassment, and arrest of strike leaders, including Ivens and Woodsworth.

The Labor Church was an inclusive, non-sectarian entity that held out membership to anyone who believed in the vision of a just society, and wanted to take part in the transformative work to achieve it. The broadness of the Labor Church’s creed carries an implicit recognition of the demographic differences that may exist within the population, yet still having a basis on which to work for the common good of all. Article two of the Church’s Statement of Faith revealed its economic, theological and philosophical outlook which states:

Justice, equity, righteousness, a square deal to [everyone], a practical, co-operative brotherhood, in the economic as well as in every other realm of life, are the foundations and essentials of religion.

The “theology” of the Labor Church stressed human co-operation at the widest point possible, and the exercise of agency in the moral and operational sense of the word.

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98 Ibid., 97.
99 Mardiros, 30.
The Labor Church's social activism and attempt at societal transformation exposed, and served as an example of the potential of the Christian Church to be an agent and catalyst for reform.

Seeking after the political kingdom and the possibility of significant changes emanating from it, propelled radical social gospellers such as Woodsworth, Irvine, Ivens and Smith into provincial and/or federal electoral politics. The political system and the Liberal and Conservative parties came under strong critique from the radical social gospellers for their inability to give justice and effective representation to the socially marginalised or non-big business interests. Irvine's comment on electoral politics in Canada was representative of the position of the social gospel radicals:

In fact it may be said that partyism became an investment for big interests in Canada, dividends being paid in the shape of legislation and privileges to those in a position financially and morally to make the investment. Business interest no longer content themselves with financing one of the parties - they donate freely to the campaign funds of both, and so make doubly sure of purchasing influence, no matter which party happens to be elected. Thus our governmental machinery has grown to be the most farcical of institutions, being used by the wealthy as a means of attaining financial advancement, and applied to the masses for the purpose of dividing them against themselves, dividing them in fact to such an extent as to render them politically helpless. Between the parties, any difference of an economic nature has long ceased to exist. In organisation, in lack of principles, and in practical misgovernment, the Tory and Liberal parties are identical.101

Woodsworth also expressed similar views in a series of article in the Western Labour News in July-August 1919.102 Yet, these radical Christians saw the parliamentary political course as a viable course of action, albeit with changes such as initiatives and

100  Cited in Fast. 240.
recall, proportional representation, universal adult suffrage, and the repeal of property qualification for elected office. The implementation of the reforms put forward by political radicals and social gospellers would provide a greater likelihood of getting progressive voices represented in the provincial and federal legislatures.

The virtual defeat of the demands of strikers in the Winnipeg General Strike served as a catalyst for Irvine and Woodsworth reassessment of electoral politics. McNaught, a political biographer of Woodsworth, expressed the sentiment behind his change of heart:

... the collapse of the strike steeled a resolution already formed to work for the prevention of another such social catastrophe. If the utmost effort and self-denial on the part of the workers, expressed through exclusively economic action, could not achieve even their minimum demands it was more than ever evident that political action was essential... Much more vigour, he was now convinced, must be put into the attempt to capture control of the governmental machinery which, in the hands exclusively of business men and their representatives, could be used to such disastrous effect.

Irvine, notwithstanding his critique of the "partyism" in Canadian politics, found himself opting for the ballot box as the best available method of achieving social and economic justice. Mardiros stated that Irvine rejected armed revolution because of his dislike of violence, and Syndicalist industrial action with its it fabled general strike weapon (given its failure in the Winnipeg General Strike) as means to bringing about social transformation.

In the judgement of the social gospel radicals, electoral politics was not their ideal preference, but at that moment they felt like they were confronted with a

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103 Mardiros, 59; Mills, Fool for Christ, 91.
104 McNaught, 130.
Hobson's choice. In the federal election of December 1921 Woodsworth was elected to the House of Common in a Winnipeg riding under the Independent Labour Party banner in, while his comrade Irvine was elected in Calgary on the platform of the Dominion Labour Party. At the provincial level Ivens and A. E. Smith were both victorious in the Manitoba election of June 1920, on the ticket of the Independent Labour Party and the Brandon Labour Party, respectively. The late 1910s and early 1920s could reasonably be considered a highly successful and influential point for the social gospel movement, from the perspective of facilitating the entrance of hitherto excluded actors (labour and farmers) into the House of Commons and provincial legislatures. The major labour parties in central Canada, the Prairie Provinces and British Columbia were the instruments used by social gospellers, who were immersed in labour politics. Allen highlights the prominence of Labour church leaders on the winning electoral ticket of the Independent Labour Party in Winnipeg. A. E. Smith, S. J. Farmer and W. D. Bailey were social gospellers who won under the banner of the Independent Labour Party.

The farmers took control of the Ontario government in 1919, and that of Alberta in the early 1920s and the agrarian Progressive Party became the second largest party in the House of Commons. Two of the primary agricultural leaders in the Prairies, E. A. Partridge and Henry Wise Woods, were social gospel proponents. Their social, economic and political reform agendas was inextricably linked to the

105 Mardiros. 100.
106 Ibid. 114.
attainment of the Kingdom of God on earth.\textsuperscript{109} It was in the ideological or consciousness-raising area that the social gospel prepared the farmers for eventual rise to political power.\textsuperscript{110} The social gospellers educational work with farm organisations, which emphasised co-operation and a common humanity assisted the western farmers in shedding an individualistic approach to social and economic problems, to one favouring a co-operative and Christian social ethics framework.\textsuperscript{111} The social gospel was credited with the breakthrough of the Progressive Party in the federal parliament, and labour and farmers' representative at the provincial level. This political development, according to Allen, was interpreted as a "sign that real religion, full of prophetic passion, true brotherhood, and an urgent sense of justice was possessing the people."\textsuperscript{112}

**The Parting of Ways with the Institutional Church**

It is significant to note that most of the prominent radical social gospellers (Smith, Woodsworth, Irvine, and Ivens) were no longer affiliated with the mainline churches by the year 1920. Salem Bland was the only well-known radical social gospel advocate who remained within the confines of the Methodist Church. Bland's action was probably motivated by his previliging of the pulpit "as the natural nursery


\textsuperscript{110} This statement in no way diminishes the important organisational role played by the social gospel luminaries such as. William Irvine to the farmers' movement in getting it, especially the United Farmers of Alberta (U. F. A) to change its political neutrality policy and enter politics. See Mardiros, 84-108.

\textsuperscript{111} Allen, *The Social Gospel*, 182.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 218.
of all the great reforms, all the big and vital reconstructions. However, fellow radical gospellers such as Woodsworth, A. E. Smith, Ivens and Irvine did not share Bland’s optimism about affecting meaningful social, economic and political reconstruction through the Church. The mainline churches’ tacit or open support of the federal government’s war effort during the World War One military campaign overseas played a part in Woodsworth, Smith, Irvine, and Ivens leaving the ecclesiastical fold. Irvine’s condemnation of the war as a manifestation of capitalist greed and partisan politics brought him into conflict with some of the parishioners and the Unitarian Church’s hierarchy, which led to his salary being cut. Irvine left the Unitarian Church soon after this incident. In the case of A. E. Smith, the proximate cause of his estrangement from the Methodist Church in Brandon was his “inflammatory sermons” in support of the workers during the Winnipeg General Strike 1919.

However, the ultimate cause behind the above-mentioned social gospellers’ exodus from the Church could be summed up in Woodsworth explanation that it “was not one of doctrine and discipline. It was the much more serious question of unorthodoxy in economics and politics.” Woodsworth’s letter of resignation to the Methodist Church gave voice to the differences that the radical churchwomen and churchmen had with institutional Christianity:

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the interest of the community was made subservient to the interests of the Church ... the Church, ... was becoming increasingly commercial. This meant the control of the policies of the Church by men of wealth, and in many cases, the temptation for the minister to become a financial agent rather than a moral and spiritual leader. It meant that any thing like a radical programme of reform became in practice impossible. In my own particular work among the immigrant peoples, I felt that I, at least, could give more effective service outside denominational lines. Intellectual freedom was not sufficient- I must be free to work.117

Therefore, it was the Church's alignment with the hegemonic commercial and political forces, and its exclusive preoccupation with institutional interests, plus the social gospellers' need to carry out a programme of social and economic transformation of society, that pushed them outside the jurisdiction of the mainline churches.

With the demise of the Labor Church movement by 1926, A. E. Smith, Woodsworth, Irvine and Ivens's connection to religion and the pulpit in particular, as instruments for serious societal changes was severed. However, the ethic of solidarity of Jesus of Nazareth, the immanence of God in humanity or history, and the self-management of the labouring classes over the productive process which were inherent to the social gospel became the essence of the "new politics" of these Christian radicals.118 Staples also concurs that the social gospel continued to influence their social, economic and political orientation:

Naturally their political thought was affected by their experiences. While their new choice for reform- the political party- began to influence the focus and direction of their thought, elements of both their religious and class background continued to act as important determinants. What remained of their social gospel convictions in particular, and their religious background in general, was a deep respect for the dignity of the individual -man and woman- made in the likeness of God. This drove them to fight for social change and provided the

117 Ibid. 9.
zeal and dedication with which they pursued it. What remained of their former vocation was a general habit of reflecting on the world, coupled with the ability to communicate their beliefs to the populace whether from a pulpit or a platform. Political life to them became a secularized ministry, which gave them the opportunity to proselytize their particular version of society.\(^{119}\)

With the radical social gospel theology being an expression of Christian Socialism, the intellectual and political shift from the earthly Kingdom of God to the Co-operative Commonwealth of politics appeared seamless and without any discernible crisis of faith.

Chapter Three

The Struggle for the Good and Just Society

If there is no struggle, there is no progress. Those of us who profess to favor freedom yet depreciate agitation are [people] who want the crops without plowing up the ground. They want the rain without thunder. They want the ocean without the awful roar of its many waters…. This struggle may be a moral one or a physical one, but it must be a struggle. Power concedes nothing without a demand.

Frederick Douglass- Abolitionist, and statesman

The purpose of this chapter is to highlight the congruence in principles of the co-operative commonwealth and the Kingdom of God philosophical outlooks. It will be argued that the co-operative commonwealth of economic co-operation should have been the approach used by the advocates of the radical social gospel. It was more in line with their stated aim of achieving justice, human kinship and solidarity in early twentieth-century Canadian society. Moreover, by integrating the co-operative commonwealth and the Kingdom of God ideals, in a purposive, pragmatic and process-oriented manner, the social gospel radicals could have laid the foundation for oppressed social groups to develop the capacity for economic and social self-management. This process could have increased the people’s receptivity to new cultural practices, for the emergence of a cultural revolution. By establishing co-operatives as organizational forms and expressions of an ethical stance, the people would have had the means of meeting their material needs, while engaged in the day-to-day practice of affecting the good and just society of the future.

The notion of the co-operative commonwealth was interpreted differently by the advocates of the co-operative movement and non-Marxian socialists. Nonetheless,
these two groups of social idealists shared at least one thing in common - the co-operative commonwealth ideal. This phenomenon was a reaction to and social corrective for the economic, social and political oppression brought on by capitalism, against those without land or the tools to make their own livelihood. The weakening of the artisans guilds and the peasant economy, the exodus of young people from the countryside to the urban centres to subsist by wages, and the dissolution of local social ties caused by among other things, the new monetary and financial system that negated barter and payment-in-kind were some of the consequences of industrial capitalism in Europe and North America.\textsuperscript{120}

Ideological support and legitimacy for the new industrial and social order that was emerging found stout defenders, or justification in the texts of prominent British intellectuals. The state of nature political ideas of Thomas Hobbes, the laissez faire economic postulations of the political economist Adam Smith, and the social Darwinist interpretation of Charles Darwin's natural selection were used by elites to support their claim that competition and possessive individualism were the most natural of human behavioural traits.\textsuperscript{121} It was the preceding intellectual climate of economic, political and social liberalism that gave rise to the counter-response that was predicated on community, production for use, social solidarity, and an ethical economic practice.

The co-operative commonwealth of the non-Marxian socialist variety was based on the collective control of the main instruments of production, with a requisite

\textsuperscript{120} Brett Fairbairn, Social Bases of Co-operation: Historical Examples and Contemporary Questions. Co-operative Organizations and Canadian Society: Popular Institutions and the Dilemma of Change, Murray Fulton, Ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto, 1990), 64.

\textsuperscript{121} Craig, 14 – 15.
central planning or central regulative system. Laurence Gronlund envisioned the new co-operative social system evolving out of the existing capitalist order, and it represented, in his view, the highest and final stage of social evolution. Under the co-operative commonwealth the different elements that constitute society will be regenerated, so as to unleash the reign of justice and equity for all. Gronlund pointedly distinguished the socialist commonwealth from communism. Under his outline of the co-operative commonwealth, it was only the instruments of production that would be placed under collective control, unlike all property being held in common under communist rule. Furthermore, while communism ascribed to the doctrine of consumption based on need, Gronlund argued for it being measured by performance.

Gronlund formulated his ideas on the co-operative commonwealth during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, and in many ways were consistent with the major tenets of social democratic thought (as a distinct form of socialism) which by that time were gaining intellectual and political currency. For the main radical social gospellers in Canada such as Irvine, Bland, Woodsworth and Ivens, it was the non-Marxian co-operative commonwealth ideal that they embraced. Woodsworth in his rendering of the story of the Labor Church identifies the co-operative commonwealth as the polity that would replace an individualistic and selfish capitalist system, where justice, good will and the “consent of the governed” would prevail. The aforementioned radical social gospellers were men who abhorred violence as a method

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123 Ibid., 104.
124 Ibid., 105.
of social change. When one considers their general Christian Socialist orientation, it was not at all surprising that the non-Marxian co-operative commonwealth ideal would have been more to their liking, than the revolutionary, proletarian socialism of Karl Marx.

Woodsworth wrote a series of articles during the 1919 Winnipeg Strike that became the basis of a seditious libel case against him. In one of these articles Woodsworth generously and favourably quotes a British Labour Party document on the general outline of the good society or the co-operative commonwealth:

We must insure that is to be presently built up a new social order, based not on fighting but on fraternity – not on the competitive struggle for the bare means of life, but on a deliberately planned co-ordination in production and distribution for the benefit of all who participate by hand or brain – not on the utmost possible inequality of riches, but on a systematic approach toward a healthy equality of material circumstances for every person born into the world – not on an enforced dominion over subject colonies, subject classes or a subject sex, but in industry, as well as government, on that equal freedom, that general consciousness of consent, and that widest participation in power both economic and political, which is characteristic of democracy.126

The positions advanced by the British Labour Party at that time were consistent with content of the Independent Labour Party’s manifesto for the 1925 Canadian federal election.127 This Independent Labour Party document called for the establishment of the co-operative commonwealth in Canada, and this party was the one that Woodsworth represented in Parliament. Therefore, central planning, state or public ownership of utilities and “essential large scale industries,” universal social

127 Ibid. . 19-20.
programmes, nationalization of the banking system were just some of the basic components that made up Woodsworth's vision of the socialist commonwealth.

As mentioned earlier, a rival conception of the co-operative commonwealth also existed. It was found within the co-operative movement in Europe and to a lesser extent in North America. Co-operators in late nineteenth century Britain saw the achievement of the co-operative commonwealth as a process, which would start with the distribution of consumer goods, and gradually grew to encompass production and an ever-wider area of economic activities. This projection of an egalitarian and ethical social arrangement was largely inspired by the long-range outlook of the founders of the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, who established the first successful consumer co-operative in 1844. Including the words "equitable pioneers" in the name of their project was indicative of their social and political commitment to reform and the interest of the British working class of the day. An examination of the 1844 statues of the Rochdale Pioneers clearly revealed their desire to create a comprehensive and integrated co-operative complex. One of the statutes stated that its aim was "to establish a self-supporting home colony of united interests or assist other societies in establishing such colonies" that would facilitate the development of consumer, industrial, agricultural and housing co-operatives. Life for the workers in mid nineteenth century British society was virtually "nasty, brutish and short" as a result of the impact of an industrializing, competitive and individualistic capitalist hegemony.

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The Rochdale Pioneers did not develop their social outlook within an ideological vacuum. Gregory Baum states that the Rochdale co-operators were eclectic in the ideological sources from which their social philosophy of co-operation was drawn:

Like conservatives, supporters of co-operatism treasured social solidarity, community, and co-operation; and like the radicals, they opposed hierarchy, promoted egalitarianism, and called for co-responsibility. Like conservatives, they feared centralization (as did the anarchists) and shied away from the class struggle as a strategy that undermined social solidarity. Yet like liberals and radicals, they endorsed the Enlightenment principle that people were responsible for their history and hence that human progress was possible.\(^{131}\)

Co-operators were critical of the profit motive of the new economic and social order that divorced ethics from economics. Capitalism and its relentless drive for profit destroyed an individual's sense of responsibility for actions injurious to the public good, if profit could be legally procured from such activities.\(^{132}\) The co-operators saw this development as being detrimental to social and personal morality, and the engendering of solidaristic ties. Political power was also in the hands of the dominant social groups, so politically and economically the workers and other submerged classes were largely denied the means of self-determination. Yet there were working people who thought that there was an alternative to the existing state of affairs.

The early working-class co-operators saw the co-operative commonwealth with the co-operative enterprise as its operational vehicle, as an antidote for a

\(^{130}\) Ibid., p. 5.


\(^{132}\) Bonner, 475-476; Craig, 53-54.
triumphant capitalist society. However, economic co-operation as expressed through
the co-operative was not an end in and of itself, as articulated by the co-operators Fred
Hall and W.P Watkins:

But where does all this co-operative activity lead? What is the goal for
which co-operators are aiming? Is it merely a more satisfying
economic system? It is that; but it is something more. Is it a more
satisfying economic system because it solves most of the present day
problems of industry and commerce? It is that; but it is something
more, for co-operation has other aims than economic ones. The earnest
co-operator seeks to apply co-operative methods to all purposes of
social life, and does so because he/she believes that by working with
others for the common good, [human’s] highest qualities are enlisted
and developed; and in the employment and development of these
qualities the [individual] becomes a better person, and the quality of the
human race is improved.133

Therefore, the co-operative commonwealth of economic co-operation was also driven
by social and moral imperatives. Reconstructing society to emphasize collective
goals, without unduly sacrificing individual ones, was embedded in the ideal of the co-
operative commonwealth.

Political goals were implicitly built into the co-operators’ vision of the co-
operative commonwealth. If politics is taken as a construct that is preoccupied with
the acquisition, exercise and maintenance of power for self-determined ends, then the
co-operators’ democratic, self-management principles stood as a critique of early
nineteenth century political systems where property qualification and gender restricted
the exercise of the franchise. By championing and practicing the “one person, one
vote” method in the governance of a co-operative’s affair, irrespective of one’s
economic stake, co-operators were advancing a practice of political and economic
equality that was alien to their society. Collective self-management and participation
in decisions that impacted on one’s life were seen as inalienable rights of political and co-operative citizenship. Thus the co-operative was used as the platform for the actualization of these political principles.

It should be pointed out that the early co-operators listed political neutrality as a cardinal principle. They did not commit themselves to partisan politics. Gurney interpreted this approach by the Rochdale Pioneers as an acknowledgement of the overwhelming power of the state and the realization that the conquest of political power was not imminent. Moreover, by eschewing partisan politics, the co-operators privileged the option of the “long” revolution with its privileging of collectivistic economic and social forms, which would constitute the embryonic structures of the good and just society of the future.

Even insurrectionary socialist and co-operative critic such as Engels acknowledged in 1895 the shortsightedness of his belief in imminent, revolutionary change:

*History has decided against us and all those who believed the way we did…. The time for surprise attacks, for small revolutions created by small conscious minorities leading the unconscious masses is over…. But in order that the masses understand what they have to do, long persistent work is necessary [emphasis mine]….*

The co-operators approach to building the co-operative commonwealth with its political neutrality and organic growth and evolution was not evidence of political

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133 Cited in Bonner. 472.
134 Gurney. 139.
135 Ibid. . 139.
quietism. In the words of the French co-operator and co-operative commonwealth idealist, George Poisson:

It [the co-operative commonwealth] claims to be establishing itself from now onwards and day by day, and lends no credence to the notions of a great upheaval that would be no more than the seizure of political power. The Co-operative Republic starts from society as it is now.... It revolutionizes other social relations. It begins as private property and ends as public property. It substitutes the administration of affairs for the government of [people] because it tends to deprive the state of its compulsory attributes and abolishes class divisions. It practices the ethics of solidarity.... In a sentence, the Co-operative Republic is known to be self-sufficient in its own field of action, and to contain in rudimentary form the solution to the social problem, which it will accomplish by its own natural and complete development.137

The above statement by Poisson was an attempt to distinguish the aims and method of insurrectionary socialism and the co-operative commonwealth.

Therefore, the co-operative commonwealth as conceptualized by the co-operative movement was a long-term, democratic, people-centred and solidaristic model of social and economic development. Its proponents saw it as the answer to a social order that was destroying communal ties and ushering in unprecedented forms of social and labour alienation.

The Kingdom of God and the Co-operative Commonwealth Ideal

The Kingdom of God ideal and the co-operative commonwealth of the co-operative movement shared a number of characteristics, which would have being a good fit for the social gospel radicals in Canada. Though the co-operative commonwealth of socialism shared similar traits, its exclusive reliance on the hegemonic political process as the way to deliver its ends would tend to nullify or
weaken its broader emancipatory goals. Progressive social movements that have transformed themselves into political parties have generally accommodated themselves to the operational logic of the dominant system in which they are located. One needs to look no further than the New Democratic Party in Canada, when it runs provincial administrations. Both the social gospel's Kingdom of God and the cooperative commonwealth placed emphasis on an ethic of solidarity, social evolution of society, education, ambivalence toward the state, and people being the architect of their own freedom.

An ethic of solidarity and human fellowship was central to the co-operative commonwealth and Kingdom of God outlooks. Both ideas subscribed to the belief that people's highest level of moral and social development can only occur in the context of community. It was through human community and social interaction, according to these two perspectives that empathy, redemptive love, justice and cooperation were possible. By positing an ethic of solidarity the Kingdom of God and co-operative commonwealth advocates demythologized and interrogated possessive individualism, and by extension a capitalist economic and social order that sacrificed the interests of the community (especially the socially marginalized groups whom are usually in the majority), for the sectional claims of a privileged minority.

An ethic of solidarity in economics naturally led the social gospel and the co-operative movement to a strong critique of capitalism. Both the end-state projections of the Kingdom of God and the co-operative commonwealth supported economic production being undertaken to satisfy human needs and not principally for profit. Actually profit (or surplus for co-operators) was primarily reinvested in the co-

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Cited in Bonner, 481-482.
operatives, and secondarily paid out as a patronage dividend. Economic solidarity made both perspectives partial to collective ownership and control of the productive process by its participants. This approach to economic planning and management was detrimental to the functioning of a capitalist order that favoured hierarchical control, the accrual of profit to non-member owners, and the removal of ethical considerations in economic decision-making.

The ethic of solidarity that permeated the Kingdom of God and co-operative commonwealth rationalization extends throughout other spheres in society. Therefore, the social and political (power management) spheres would also be imbued with the spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood. Thus purposive and active involvement of the people in creating the path to a just and free society was one of the cornerstones in both viewpoints on social emancipation. Undoubtedly, the co-operative commonwealth ideal was more pronounced in its privileging of participation and self-management of economic and social endeavours. Its co-operative principles that placed an accent on democracy and participation were responsible for the emphasis placed on people being the architect of their own freedom. Poisson, the French co-operator, argued that the realization of the co-operative commonwealth was not an inevitable occurrence, since it was dependent on the conscious and voluntary actions of co-operative members.138

However, the social gospel's Kingdom of God ideal was not any less emphatic in encouraging a participatory-democratic culture. This principle was embedded in its stress on co-operation, equality and sisterhood/brotherhood. The social gospel advocates were also mindful of the ways in which the economic and political realms
were organised, which effectively worked against meaningful participation by subordinate social groups. It was for this reason that Rauschenbusch prefers "community ownership [of productive resources] to control and ownership by a centralized Federal government." Furthermore, Rauschenbusch, arguably the main North American propagator of the social gospel:

Believed his program of co-operative ownership and socialization of property not to be new, but as old as civilization itself and a contribution of the most advanced religious and Christian social orders of the past. According to Rauschenbusch, Israel, the early church, and the reforming sects and monasteries of medieval Europe were all structured as co-operative commonwealth.

With the economic, social and political exclusion that abounded in the milieu of the social gospel, it could not help but be partial to co-operative and participatory social relations.

Another point of convergence in the co-operative commonwealth and the Kingdom ideals was the role social evolutionary thought played in their conceptions of people and society having the capacity to become progressively better. Utopian schemes of individuals such as pre-Rochdale co-operator and industrialist, Robert Owen, with detailed and elaborate blueprints fell out of favour by the late nineteenth century, under the sway of ideas about social evolution, with societal structures taking on more progressive and desirable forms. When the co-operators in the nineteenth century and the first decades of the twentieth century thought of the co-operative

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138 Ibid. 481.
139 Peitz. 144.
140 Ibid. 144.
141 Bonner. 479.
commonwealth, they mentally visualized it is an organism that would grow over time to encompass increasingly greater parts of their lives.

It should be recalled that many of the early conceptualization of social Christianity could be integrated within a general notion of progress. The Kingdom of God as the spiritual and social concretisation of God's immanence in history, was the Christianization of evolution and the evolutionary process in the eyes of some social gospel theologians.\textsuperscript{142} Cataclysmic social and political upheaval was not a necessary ingredient in achieving the Kingdom of God or the co-operative commonwealth. The conscious evolution and development of just and equitable embryonic forms in the old society would in the judgement of social gospel and co-operative advocates gradually displaced the unjust structure.

Education for moral and mental development was another point of similarity between the Kingdom of God and co-operative commonwealth ideals. Education was important to the co-operative and social gospel movements, because through this process the people would become conscious of the inequality that afflicted almost all aspects of society. They would be more likely to become aware of the way in which their attitude and behaviour were shaped by the system, and in turn assisted in it propagation. With an emancipatory educational process in place marginalized social groups could acquire the knowledge, skills and attitude to help in bringing about the Kingdom or the co-operative commonwealth.

Lastly, there was a certain degree of ambivalence toward the state and the political system by the co-operative and social gospel movements. Most co-operators reserved an important role for the state, but were skeptical of it being an instrument for
the attainment of co-operative ideals. Dr. J. P. Warbasse, a co-founder of the Co-operative League in the United States, did not share the belief that the state was of material necessity in achieving co-operative goals. Warbasse viewed the people's dependence on the state as something that was inspired by material and psychological factors. His argument was that "as yet people do not think they can do without it [the state]. The lame man cannot be suddenly deprived of his crutch, nor the slave his master. The lives of the people has been adjusted to the state." However, with co-operative organization of the people, the need for the state will gradually decrease, and it will eventually atrophied and vanished away, in the judgement of Warbasse.

The radical social gospellers were quite critical of the political system as the instrument for bringing about justice and equality in Canada. They saw it as being too closely linked to the interests of the dominant social classes. Rauchenbusch advocacy of co-operative and community ownership over state control and ownership of property was indicative of the ambivalence of some of the principal social gospellers in Canada and the United States toward the state. This orientation if followed to its logical conclusion could have guided both movements toward developing the co-operative, rudimentary structures of the good and just society.

**Contextualising the Co-operative Movement in 19th and 20th Century Canada**

It should not be surprising that co-operative thought and practice would be present in Canada as early as the nineteen century. Canada as a settler-colonial society imbibed on the intellectual ideas and social practices that emerged in the metropolitan

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142 Hopkins, 127.
143 Bonner, 483-484.
centres of Europe. Immigrants from Europe also served as conduits for the ideas current in Europe. The historical record points to Stellarton, Nova Scotia, as the site of the first co-operative store in the year 1861. This Rochdalian co-operative store was the Canadian pioneer experiment in modern, contractual, and voluntary economic co-operation. About ten more stores were created within the next thirty years, with most of them being concentrated in the Cape Breton mining areas. Just as economic and social inequity in Europe was the motivating factor in co-operative formation, the same situation was operational in Canada. Frustration with the high prices charged by company stores led the mine workers in late nineteenth century Nova Scotia, and their labour organization, the Provincial Workmen's Association to set up co-operative retail stores. Canadian farmers, whom were at the mercy of the banks, railway and marketing agencies viewed collective action as a beneficial tool. During the early years of the 1900s, farmers utilised co-operatives as a key part of their empowerment strategy, but the greatest success at large-scale co-operative formation occurred among the grain growers on the Prairies. Financial success crowned the efforts of the three provincial Prairie farmers' co-operatives, the Grain Growers Grain Company (Manitoba), the Alberta Co-operative Elevators, and the Saskatchewan Co-operative, in the years before 1915.

Unfortunately, the co-operative actions of farmers, workers and consumers in Ontario, the Maritimes and Western Canada did not add up to a national, integrated

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144 Cited in Bonner, 484.
145 Ian MacPherson, "Patterns in the Maritime Co-operative Movement. 1900-1945". Academi
5, no. 1. 1975: 68.
146 Ibid., 68.
147 Ibid., 69.
148 MacPherson, Each for All, 11.
149 Ibid., 5.
movement. One of the primary reasons for the absence of a movement of this nature was the differing end that co-operators ascribed to co-operatives. Co-operators were divided into three groups: one element saw economic co-operation as a total reform movement, but were divided on the question of political neutrality; the majority of co-operators viewed co-operatives as system-stabilizing entities; and the occupational co-operators who held co-operatives as functional tools for farmers, and not part of a wider movement. With such wide-ranging perspectives, which also betrayed the political predisposition of co-operators in English-speaking Canada, a movement for social reform would have required skilled, visionary yet pragmatic leadership, so as to maintain operational unity.

Samuel Carter and George Keen, two pioneer leaders of the Co-operative Union of Canada, had a comprehensive and integrated vision of the use of co-operatives for social and economic transformation. Keen outlined this outlook of the future thus:

The ideal Canadian city is a well thought-out and systematically developed scheme of co-partnership houses, occupied by workers engaged in labour co-partnership factories, buying their merchandize from their own co-operative store. Then the age of the exploiter will disappear and the reign of a happy, contented and cultured people will begin.

Notwithstanding, the positive orientation of Keen and other co-operators towards creating diverse forms of economic co-operation, they were under the influence of the British co-operators, who proclaimed consumer co-operation as the most superior expression of economic solidarity. This position was also another source of division within the ranks of co-operators in English-speaking Canada.

\[^150\] Ibid. 47.
The retail co-operative sector across English-speaking Canada had the potential to become a vibrant part of the consumer goods market. However, it was confronted by market, operational, philosophical and strategic challenges, which served to limit the scope for growth and development. Co-operative stores that were owned by the United Farmers Co-operative (Ontario) and the Maritime United Farmers were faced with the individualistic predisposition of the farmers, rural diversity, and the lack of business acumen, and familiarity with organisational matters by their members. The region of Southern Ontario posed a challenge to the economic viability of consumer co-operatives. Private chain stores, such as Loblaws, with their centralized and hierarchical management system and economies of scale were formidable competitors to the decentralized, localised and democratic co-operative stores. Furthermore, the Southern Ontario workers were more interested in the “bread and butter” focus of the trade union, while other potential beneficiaries of co-operation did not viewed the economic status quo as injurious to their interests.

However, toward the closing months of the First World War, a heightened interest in consumer co-operatives was observable throughout Canada. The profiteering and the resultant inflationary prices of manufactured goods inclined many Canadians toward co-operatives. When this was added to the favourable press coverage of the British consumer co-operatives’ fair price-setting behaviour, a wave of enthusiasm for consumer societies emerged. This groundswell of support for co-operation was more than a psychological manifestation. George Keen of the Co-

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151 Ibid. 37.
152 Ibid. 76.
153 Ibid. 81.
154 Ibid. 63-64.
operative Union of Canada became extremely busy attending to the varied needs of existing and newly-formed co-operatives. Between 1920 – 1924, over one hundred and fifty new stores were opened in the Prairie Provinces, Ontario, British Columbia, and the Maritimes. Still there persisted an uneven development of the co-operative movement regionally with the Prairie Provinces being the strongest. Organisationally, the producer co-operatives were the most robust.

**The Social Gospel and the Co-operative Option**

Claiming ignorance of the postulations and benefits of economic co-operation was not available to the social gospel radicals as a reason for not embracing it as the principal tool for social emancipation. Social gospellers such Irvine and Woodsworth were voluminous readers who kept abreast of the progressive or reformist ideas and practices of their time. Even barring the existence of evidence of their familiarity co-operative ideas, one could credibly argued that if they did not know, then they ought to have known.

However, this type of reasoning is not necessary to make a case for the social gospellers awareness of co-operatives. As early as 1914, Woodsworth wrote a pioneering adult education text that extolled the virtues of co-operatives among farmers (and other disempowered social groups). He argued that co-operators, “seek to place capital in their hands by a system that will enable them to retain a larger share of the profits of their labour ...[and] to moralize trade, moderate competition and

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155 Ibid., 65-66.
156 Hart, 95; Mills, *Fool for Christ*, 177.
advocate [people] as citizens and unite them in [comradely] sympathy.\textsuperscript{157} This statement was certainly not coming from a man who was ignorant of co-operative ideals. It should be noted that Woodsworth's membership and involvement in a co-operative store in Gisbson's Landing, British Columbia led to a conflict with the town's leading merchant, who was also a Methodist.\textsuperscript{158}

Irvine was just as emphatic about the value of organizing through economic co-operatives. At the close of the year 1920, Irvine and his family moved to New Brunswick from Alberta. He maintained his involvement with the farming community in general and co-operatives in particular. An article by Irvine in the Morning Albertan entitled, "The Maritime Farmers' Co-operative" captures the vision and radical-democratic possibilities that he saw in co-operatives:

The Maritime United Farmer Co-operative is a whole system which consist of a community co-operating to form a store, and then a community of stores co-operating to form a great system of commerce that will do business at cost of production plus cost of handling. In this co-operative chain it is impossible for one of the stores in the chain to fail unless the whole chain is broken...

Pretty soon this co-operative will become the chief or perhaps the sole distributing agency for the Maritime Provinces.... People are beginning to see that it is even more important that they take a hand in the management of their business affairs than it is to elect a representative to parliament [emphasis mine]. It is just as foolish to leave the manufacturing and distributing of the necessities of life to the caprice of a profit hungry individual as it would be to leave our government in the hands of a kaiser. It seems as if a real democracy in industry and commerce might be reached through the co-operative ideal.\textsuperscript{159}

Irvine may have been overly optimistic about difficulty of the failure of even one co-operative store within the system. However, his understanding and awareness of the

\textsuperscript{158} McNaught, 81-82.
potential benefits of co-operatives were quite sound. Woodsworth’s political pragmatism ought to have inclined him towards a largely co-operative solution. In his political pamphlet, Reconstruction: From the Viewpoint of Labour, he supported the use of varied tactics to increase the power base of producer groups. He said that, “we must attack all along the line, using both political and industrial power and any other legitimate power at our disposal.” Co-operatives clearly fell within the sphere of “legitimate powers at our disposal.”

Furthermore, Woodsworth’s advocacy of reform as a short-term method of improving the disenfranchised material condition should have pointed to co-operatives as suitable vehicles to deliver the anticipated benefits. His support for reform was premised on the notion that it would strengthen the people’s resolve to work for the ultimate objective of structural transformation. Whether it was the delivery of financial services, food distribution, housing solutions or construction, or workers’ self-management, co-operatives properly managed with the appropriate legislative or regulatory environment could have provided an ameliorative impact.

There was an impediment to the social gospel radicals embracing a comprehensive and integrated co-operative strategy. Irvine, Woodsworth and A.E Smith vacillated or were confused over the issue of whether the ownership of the means of production with its suffocating class relations was the primary contradiction of capitalism. In an article in the Western Labour News on the 8th of August 1919, Woodsworth identified the capitalist ownership of the means of production as the

159 Cited in Mardiros, 82.
161 Ibid. 5.
cause of societal oppression.\textsuperscript{162} He suggested national, provincial, municipal or co-operative ownership and control of the means of production as the solution.\textsuperscript{163} However, in the same year he wrote in a pamphlet "our modern economic problem is generally recognized to be not primarily one of production but one of distribution."\textsuperscript{164}

When Woodsworth wrote about the socialization of the means of production, he was really focused on state ownership of industry and commerce on behalf of the people. It was in this context that the distribution of the proceeds of collective labour became privileged. According to Staples, Irvine's position on public ownership moved back and forth between an emphasis on production or distribution, over the course of his political career and activism.\textsuperscript{165}

The social gospellers' statist preoccupation, no doubt influenced by their belief that any large-scale social and economic changes would be effected through control of the political machinery, made a co-operative solution seemed non-viable. When Woodsworth envisioned parts of society's resources under co-operative ownership,\textsuperscript{166} he was probably thinking about the agricultural sector. Woodsworth was always interested in a farmer-labour alliance, and he knew that the farmers were strongly-oriented toward private ownership. However, at the same time, the farmers knew that co-operatives were not a threat to private ownership in the agricultural sector. The farmers' marketing co-operatives were the evidential basis of this outlook, because they did not interfered with the farmers' status as independent commodity producers and private landowners. Irvine and Woodsworth support for the nationalization of the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[162] Staples. 73-75.
\item[163] Ibid., 81-83.
\item[164] Woodsworth. Reconstruction. 7.
\item[165] Staples. 186-188.
\end{footnotes}
banks and insurance companies precluded co-operatives being the predominant form of ownership in these two areas.

Woodsworth was aware of the work of mutual insurance companies and credit unions as instruments of democratic control and management. Woodsworth knew about the use of mutual insurance companies as a way to facilitate collective economic empowerment. He cited the case of the Co-operative Hail Insurance Plan, which was operated by the Municipal Hail Insurance Commission. The premium it charged to farmers amounted to only 20 -25% of what capitalist insurance companies were charging. The operation and usefulness of credit union was something with which Woodsworth was acquainted. He placed the text, The Co-operative Peoples’ Bank, by Alphonse Desjardin (the father of credit unions in North America), on his reference list on co-operative organizations in rural Canada. Therefore, the lack of knowledge and awareness of co-operatives was not the social gospellers’ problem. It was the absence of faith in their efficacy as emancipatory tools.

However, given the era that the social gospel movement was at its zenith, 1914-1928, one may feel inclined to wonder whether the opportunity was there for the social gospel movement to have served as the catalyst for an integrated and comprehensive co-operative movement. I contend that the basis for the emergence of such a movement was there. Yet it would have required a high degree of organizing, leadership and management skills; a healthy dose of pragmatism; an expansive vision of the future; and both a critical consciousness-raising and functional adult education programme. It should be recalled that on the conclusion of World War One, there was

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166 Woodsworth, Reconstruction, 9.
167 Woodsworth, Studies in Rural Citizenship, 25.
a groundswell of support for co-operatives, albeit consumers retail co-operatives. This period also coincided with heightened social activism in Canada.

If the social gospel radicals had embraced a co-operative vision as the principal weapon of struggle, they could have used their involvement or association with the labour and farmers movement to spread and inculcate the "gospel" and practice of economic and social co-operation. The rising social discontent and agitation of the pre- and post-war period by the exploited working class, farmers, and women would have made them amiable to the social gospel's message of solidarity, co-operation and justice. Walter Young in his text, *Democracy and Discontent*, affirms the appeal of the social gospel's message:

Farmers and workers responded to the social gospel, for it made sense to them at a time when it seemed nothing else did. With the strength of the gospel it reinforced views expressed by agrarian and labour leaders. It offered a solution to pressing problems that were consistent with moral values. Disturbed by the failure of their honest toil to reap its just reward, the farmer and the worker sought an answer that was both readily applicable to their situation and easily understood. The social gospel offered an explanation consistent with both religious belief and much that the political radicals were saying.  

With this positive reception to the social gospel's emphasis on justice and co-operation, its challenge would have been to facilitate a practical and accessible manifestation of these ideals to members of the labour movement. Here is where economic co-operatives could have stepped into the breach, to become the economic arm of a two-pronged strategy of co-operative economic self-management and political empowerment. At the centre of the grievances of the farmers and workers was their economic and political disenfranchisement. This situation left them

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168 Ibid. 30.
powerless to exercise any meaningful control over their lives. Of the two groups – farmers and workers – it was the latter that most needed to embrace the co-operative approach. The farmers were already using co-operatives to further their economic interests.

Trade union organizing got a boost with the end of the conflict in Europe. In fact, 1919 witnessed a 50% increase in the ranks of organized labour, with membership now standing at 378,000 workers. Furthermore, many within the union’s rank and file and leadership were agreeable to the goals of consumer co-operation. This ideological orientation towards co-operatives was a tremendous opportunity for the radical social gospellers to mobilize workers into a programme of self-reliance and democratic, economic self-management. The labour and socialist parties that were emerging on the scene were not an impediment. Young found that the “socialist parties were, for the most part, prepared to support any other group or movement that aimed to improve the existing conditions of the working class.”

There probably were labour or socialist parties with a Marxian perspective, which would not have looked favourably on the linking of the working class’ empowerment with co-operative development.

The use of co-operatives by a labour organisation was not without historical precedence in Canada. In the late 1800s the Knights of Labor trade union movement advocated, as well as organised consumer and workers co-operatives as a part of its

170 MacPherson. Each for All, 64.
171 Young, 10.
overall strategy of effecting labour and societal reform. The Knights of Labor partisans obviously did not see a contradiction between the roles of worker and owner embodied in the same person. Furthermore, that dual identity did not present itself as an impediment to the elimination of capitalist hegemony in Canada. On the contrary, consumer societies and workers co-operatives were an attempt at creating the seeds of a future working-class economic hegemony. Kealey and Palmer argued that, "such self-sustaining ventures had tangible and symbolic significance, and stood as testimonies to the capacities of common working people, reminding all of the potential of self-management." Canada's labour movement, therefore, had a tradition of the working class using co-operatives as weapons of struggle.

However, the social gospel radical's emphasis that Canada's social economic and political structures must be radically overhauled, militated against any crude accommodation to the hegemonic discourse. This fear of political quietism reflected the general concern that some labour and Marxist activists would have had with co-operatives. A much larger question that would have confronted the social gospellers if that they had taken the co-operative route was that of the long-standing political neutrality of co-operatives. The urban consumer movement divorced itself from the economic and social issues that were relevant to potential members from the working class. This led many workers to conclude that trade unions and political parties were more conducive to rectifying their grievances with capitalist society.

173 Ibid. 368.
174 MacPherson, Each for All, 103.
The notion of political neutrality, one of the founding principles of the Rochdale Pioneers, did not seem like a realistic goal to workers and farmers. The latter, many of who were co-operators, entered politics under the banner of The Progressives in Ontario and Western Canada. On the problematic of political neutrality, David Laycock argued that, "once the logic of co-operation becomes a matter of public debate, linked to the larger debate over what democratic social relations entail, co-operatives’ decisions and public activities have highly political contents and effects." 175

It was this realisation by many co-operators in Britain and continental Europe during the early years of the twentieth-century that led them to argue for the co-operative movement’s entrance into electoral politics. Therefore, a co-operative economic strategy by the social gospellers would not have necessarily precluded an active engagement with the political system. By becoming involved in partisan politics, a transformative co-operative movement led by the social gospellers, would have being in a strong position to champion the economic and political interest of the working class and other socially marginalised groups. Irvine was a tireless organiser and propagandist for the farmers in Alberta and Ontario becoming involved in parliamentary politics. Ivens, Woodsworth, Smith and Irvine became labour-endorsed politicians in parliamentary bodies at the provincial level (Ivens and Smith) and at the federal level (Irvine and Woodsworth).

They were willing to become politicians in spite of their misgivings about the usefulness of electoral politics. Their action would suggest that the "political

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neutrality" stance of the co-operative movement would probably not have hindered the social gospel radicals in exercising the political option, allied with co-operative economics. The radical social gospellers in linking themselves to a political movement or parties would not have being doing something that was unheard of in the international co-operative movement. The National League of Co-operatives (La Lega Nazionale delle Co-operative) in Italy was one such movement. In 1907, it formed an alliance with trade unions and mutual aid societies to improve the conditions of labour, secure universal social benefits (for example old age pensions, and state support for co-operatives “through public works, tax concessions and credit.”176 Furthermore, it became actively involved in local and national politics, and was particularly allied with the socialist who controlled many local municipal council.

Politics (in the broadest sense of the term) was deeply embedded in the idea of the radical expression of the Canadian social gospel. If the social gospel radical had embraced co-operative economics as the motive force for change, some form of engagement with the political system would have emerged. Bland, Irvine and Woodsworth tried to establish a moral relationship between the ideas of the social gospel and that of co-operation, democracy and socialism.177 This type of association between these categories was essentially political in impact. Their political efficacy can be deduced from their use in getting workers, farmers, urban intellectuals and other progressive middle-class elements to join the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation at its inception in the 1930's. Laycock made the claim that Irvine, Woodsworth, Bland and Ivens’ conflation of co-operation, democracy and socialism

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with the social gospel as the common denominator was "undoubtedly instrumental in winning C.C.F. [Co-operative Commonwealth Federation] support from a good number of god-fearing farmers."\(^{178}\)

The social gospel's message of solidarity, economic and social justice, democracy and experiencing the good life on earth had political resonance among workers and farmers during the first twenty-five years of the twentieth century. Smith, Ivens, Bland, Irvine and Woodsworth's popularity among the working class and other socially marginalised groups during their affiliation with the mainline churches was an indication of the positive reception to their political-cum-social evangelism. Ivens and Woodsworth's leadership role in the Winnipeg General Strike was evidence of the level of trust and esteem with which they were held among the working class. Iven's founding of the Labor Church in Winnipeg was a clear indication of the political orientation of the radical social gospel. Highlighting a few of the politically-oriented manifestations of the social gospellers' work was done to suggest that, they combining a co-operative economic strategy with political participation would not have being embraced with much difficulty.

A critique of the social evangelism of the social gospel by Laycock goes to the heart of what constituted the missing link in their programme of creating the Kingdom of God on earth. He correctly claims that the social gospellers optimistically proclaimed humanity's capacity for brotherhood/sisterhood, co-operation and self-development, which indeed provides hope for the future, but it gave "no substantive

\(^{177}\) Laycock, 26.
\(^{178}\) Ibid., 26.
direction regarding processes and institutions."\(^{179}\) Although the radical wing of the social gospel movement called for governmental planning and ownership of the commanding heights of the economy, plus electoral politicking by farmers and workers, the social go spellers’ failure to articulate alternative processes and institutions that undermined capitalist hierarchical rule was quite glaring.

It was not enough to simply call for central planning, state ownership of resources and universal social benefits, if the goal was the manifestation of the Kingdom of God on earth. The nature of the social, economic, political and moral relationships between people and their organizations, as well as that between each other was paramount in the construct of a liberatory discourse, or a gospel of freedom. Having a radical labour or farmer’s party in a hegemonic parliamentary body tends to lead to the former’s structures and processes mimicking or conforming to hierarchical thrust of the latter. The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation that Irvine and Woodsworth were instrumental in establishing also had the same experience. The futility of utilising a hegemonic institution such as the House of Commons, as the exclusive vehicle for radical reform dawned on Irvine at the end of the fourteenth parliamentary session:

I want to comment on what would appear to be the reason for this stultifying suffocating influence in parliamentary life.... Thoughts and feelings which only end in words debilitate the emotions and overshadow the mind with deadly pessimism.... Idealism has no place in a practical institution of this kind. Parenthetically I would remark in regard to that attitude of mind, which I know is characteristic of many honourable gentlemen, that the impractical is usually that which a stupid person is afraid to put to the test lest it might be found to work.\(^{180}\)

\(^{179}\) Ibid., 26-27.
\(^{180}\) Cited in Hart, 140.
Woodsworth also had reservations about the usefulness of Parliament as a democratizing body. Interestingly enough, according to Mills, Woodsworth in 1932 saw societal renewal coming out of the economic sphere:

It would be economic forces that would initiate the establishment of new, authentic democratic forms. That is, the emphasis was upon democracy arising not from out of the existing parliamentary state and being imposed on the surrounding economy and society but rather as welling up from the point of production itself through unions, co-operatives, and wheat pools. It was this emphasis upon economic democracy that contributed to Woodsworth’s interest in the occupational and vocational emphases of group or co-operative government.  

It was quite insightful of Woodsworth to prescribe a liberatory economic “tonic” as medication for a sick capitalist society. However, it was one thing for Woodsworth to advance a position that was the outcome of his moral/speculative reasoning on what ailed society. Yet it was something else to make a non-hierarchical, democratic and egalitarian economic doctrine and practice the centrepiece of social evangelism and radical political change. An alternative economic process and institution that could drive a movement for societal reconstruction was the missing link in the social gospellers’ activist tool kit, during their tenure in the mainline churches and sojourn in politics.

If the social gospellers had embraced co-operative economic forces as the revitalising power for a just and equitable society, they could have started with consumer co-operative stores and credit unions. With the former, the consumer goods needs of the urban workers, progressive church members and others could be met by their collectively-owned economic institutions. As the membership in and annual
turnover of the consumer co-operatives grew, a countervailing force to the power of
the private merchants could have developed. By pragmatically responding to the
organizational and competitive challenges of the private chain-stores, and seeking an
alliance with the farmers' wholesale and retail co-operative operations, the foundation
for that democratic revitalizing force could have been laid. By having members being
exposed to self-management principles and practices it would have challenged the
notion that people from socially-marginalised groups cannot exercise agency in
collective self-governance. This type of practice in the economic arena would
undoubtedly have influenced similar expectations, in regard to members' relationship
with the political system.

Exercising greater control over the financial affairs of community life should
have naturally led the social gospellers to establish collectively-owned financial
institutions such as credit unions. Desjardin created the first caisse populaire or credit
union in Quebec in 1900. As early as 1914 Woodsworth referred to the benefits of
credit unions:

Credit societies in Europe have found property security a necessity in the loan business, but they have proven that personal security is much better and have thus been able to reach the poorest of the poor, provided they had a good character. Thus the business enterprise has become an uplifting moral force.\textsuperscript{182}

However, it was a testament to the resiliency of "the two solitudes" that the credit
union idea from Quebec entered English-speaking Canada via the United States in the
1930s, rather from than the francophone parishes in Quebec. Members of the
working-class and the farming communities in English-speaking Canada could have

\textsuperscript{181} Mills, Fool for Christ. 109.
\textsuperscript{182} Woodsworth, Studies in Rural Citizenship. 30.
most certainly benefited much earlier from this credit institution, if not for the longstanding conflict and divide between the two settler-colonialist nations—the English and French in Canada.

Credit unions could have provided the co-operators with a pool of funds to finance the creation or development of consumer co-operatives and worker-owned businesses. While credit unions have, for the most part, focused on consumer loans to members, this practice did not precluded loans for business purposes. Credit unions would have also provided community-owned alternatives to banks, which served as pillars holding up the edifice of capitalist hegemony. The radical social gospellers were very critical of the privately-controlled banking system. Government ownership of the banks and insurance companies was advanced by social gospellers such as Irvine and Woodsworth as the answer to these institutions exploitation of society. The latter social gospeller was aware of collectively-owned, democratic alternatives to state and private ownership of banks and insurance companies. Woodsworth highlighted the Grain Growers Grain Company’s desire, as expressed in its Sixth Annual Report, to create co-operative banks and mutual insurance companies to finance their operations and to insure their properties, respectively.183

One can only speculate, as to the reason behind the social gospellers’ failure to adopt economic co-operation as the way to bring about the Kingdom of God. The fact of their awareness and involvement in co-operatives cannot be contested. They probably believed that economic co-operation was inadequate as a tool to reconstruct Canadian society along the lines of solidarity, co-operation, economic equity and love. There would have been plausible reasons for them to reach such a conclusion.
Firstly, Canada did not have a national co-operative legislation. This situation was largely the result of the vociferous and effective lobbying of the federal government by retail merchants between 1908-1914. A federal legislation governing co-operative activities would have made it much easier to establish a national integrated movement. The task was thus left to the provinces to set up legislation regulating co-operatives within their individual jurisdictional boundaries. Therefore, an extra-provincial and integrated co-operative movement with the social gospel radicals as the catalyst would have been confronted by this legislative challenge.

Secondly, the parochialism and insufficient business skill of co-operators were limiting factors to an integrated and comprehensive vision of co-operation. The democratic and local autonomy inclination of retail co-operatives made local members suspicious of any attempt at centralization. Some form of structural and operational adjustments was necessary to withstand the bruising competition and economies of scale of the large, capitalist grocery retailers. A suitable response would have been a local network of co-operatives stores, with strategic direction provided from the corporate or central office. Furthermore, many co-operators were not richly endowed with the requisite financial, human resources and organizational management knowledge and skills to make economic co-operation a formidable

183 Ibid., 26.
184 MacPherson, Each for All, 31-33.
185 Ibid., 55.
competitor to capitalist businesses.\textsuperscript{186} The Knights of Labor's various co-operative ventures suffered from similar managerial deficiencies.\textsuperscript{187}

Lastly, the ideological inclination of many farmers as independent commodity producers would have probably served as an impediment to the social gospellers, fashioning of a coalition of labour, farmers and other interested parties behind economic co-operation. Many farmers did not have a problem with capitalism and liberal democracy, but just the way these systems operated to constrain their interests.\textsuperscript{188} Farmers as owners of productive resources and the employer of labour occupied a similar position as private industrialists' vis-à-vis their employees. Workers wanted a greater share of the profit from economic activities, and this was a source of conflict between farmers and labour organizations.\textsuperscript{189} Farmers also had their own co-operatives that were profitably meeting their farm supplies and household needs. The social gospellers would have been confronted by the need to construct a community of interest between labour and farmers.

If the radical social gospellers had employed co-operative economics as the strategic option to bring about the Kingdom of God in Canada, the challenge highlighted above could have been overcome. The absence of a federal legislation governing co-operatives could have become a major policy item of the farmers and labour representatives that sat in the provincial legislatures and the House of Commons in the 1920s and 1930s. The provinces could have been pushed to force the issue onto the agenda of federal-provincial meetings. In the 1920s the Alberta,

\textsuperscript{186} Ibid. 83 and 102.
\textsuperscript{187} Kealey and Palmer. 369.
\textsuperscript{188} Hart. 50.
\textsuperscript{189} Ibid. 80.
Manitoba and Ontario legislatures had significant farmers, and to a lesser extent, labour representation. These political representatives could have been the force used to get favourable provincial and federal legislation that could help an integrated and comprehensive approach to economic co-operation. Furthermore, these labour and farmers representatives could have used their influence to push for financing programme to provide capital for co-operative start-ups and already existing ones.

The weaknesses in the co-operative and business education of members could have been addressed though an adult education programme organised by the social gospellers. Organising educational programmes was something upon which the social gospellers placed a high priority. However, the primary focus of their adult educational programme was on developing critical consciousness of social oppression. It would not have being difficult to integrate functional business training, so as to equip the workers and farmers with the knowledge and skills to self-manage their co-operative enterprises.

All in all, the co-operative discourse and the social gospel’s Kingdom of God theology could be described as two kindred spirits. They both wanted a just society where human co-operation, ethics in economics, social justice and freedom become the predominant themes that guided the organisation of society. It was unfortunate that the social gospellers did not, at least, try the approach of economic co-operation as the way to bring about the Kingdom of God. This need not have been exclusive of an alliance with a political movement or party, as the political arm to push for favourable legislation. This legislation would have been for specifically co-operative
matters, as well as for issues that facilitated the economic and social rights of socially-marginalised Canadians as a whole.
Chapter Four

Chant down Babylon: The Social Gospel and Adult Education

Emancipate yourself from mental slavery,
None but ourselves can free our minds
Have no fear for atomic energy
‘Cause none of them can stop the time
How long shall they kill our prophets?
While we stand aside and look
   Redemption Song – Bob Marley, Reggae icon

Breaking asunder the shackles that bound the consciousness and consequent actions of a dominated people or social groups should be of primary importance on the agenda of social movements working for radical social, economic and ideological transformation. Without pandering to idealism, ideas can be forceful. Hence Bob Marley’s call for freeing ourselves from mental slavery through collective or individual action. As I reflect on the task of writing this chapter on the radical social gospel and the lack of a sustained and systematic programme of adult education, the progressive Canadian adult educator Budd Hall’s comment on emancipatory adult education and social movement seems rather instructive:

Political and social movements and popular actions of all kinds have to pay attention to the education of the citizens and to reflect on their own actions. The failure of political action programmes to have strong adult education components has resulted inevitably in their weakening. . . . It is the combination of social transformation and education that has created the kind of knowledge which forges the person and communal commitment for sustained engagement.\(^{190}\)

Anything less would constitute movement suicide, or grossly retard the potential for effecting a just and free society. An adult education programme with the explicit aim of undermining the allegiance of disempowered people to the dominant

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system, and induce the type of "commitment for sustained engagement" suggested by Hall, must developed concrete programmes for the here and now, through which the people can express and experience the new ideas and future desired state of affairs. In the case of the radical social gospel, its adult education programme under the auspices of the Labor Church movement ought to have linked its conscientizing education effort simultaneously with a programme of co-operative formation and development. This was the approach of a religiously inspired social movement – The Antigonish Movement – in the Maritime Provinces in the 1920s through to the 1940s. Moreover, this movement of adult education and co-operative formation and development (which will be dealt with later in the chapter) argued that it would be difficult to get socially marginalized adults to study, if there was no immediate and functional need motivating this engagement. Hence the need to combine adult education with the creation of co-operatives that address pressing socio-economic challenges, that were impinging on the people’s lives. When people’s physiological, security and affiliative needs are addressed, individually or collectively, they are much more likely to respond to higher order needs such as self-esteem and self-actualisation.

However, the value of co-operatives as vehicles for social and economic development is their fostering and satisfaction of all of the people’s essential needs from the outset. The degree to which this phenomenon is effected and experienced may be equal, but they come as a package since collective self-development forms the core of co-operatives and transformative adult education programme. If progressive

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social movements are truly committed to radical restructuring of society, then the
moral and mental development of oppressed social groups, and organising around
their immediate material needs, are challenges that must be rectified. That is all part
of the Herculean task of building the road as we travel. With the social gospel’s desire
to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, it must of necessity evolve out of or be
constructed on the ashes of the old system. Given the fact that social gospel
luminaries such as Irvine, Woodsworths, Ivens and Bland abhorred violence, the
method through which the Kingdom of God was going to be established in Canada
would be evolutionary and non-violent. Furthermore, with the economic, ideological
and political stranglehold of the dominant social groups on mainstream institutions
(church, economy, legislatures and mass media), the social gospellers would need to
find a way to counter and replace the paramount discourse.

Educational Thrust of the Prophetic Ministry

The prophetic orientation of the radical social gospel made the core of its
social evangelism an educative one. Like the prophets of the Old Testament, the
radical social gospellers spoke out against the social and economic oppression in
society, the hypocrisy of the Church in temporal and clerical matters, and the moral
debasement of the citizenry. These themes were educational in the social gospellers
attempt to inspire an awareness of social wrongs, as well as prescribing a way out of
this state of affairs. Changing the mindset and behaviour of the people for the earthly
realisation of the Kingdom of God was a radical educational project.

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192 Marshall, 69.
The substantive social, political, economic and ethical imperatives that were inherent in the social gospel's teachings can be contrasted with the form and content of education that was offered by the conventional gospel and the Church. According to Studwick, "traditionally, the education of church members in matters of belief and practice has been thought of as the transmission of a deposit of knowledge. Encapsulated in stories, decisions, and judgements from the past, reinforced by liturgical repetition, this knowledge has been transmitted from generation to generation by the sermon or lecture and the corporate assumptions of the group." This type of adult education was no different from what would have been taught to the children. Furthermore, its content did not prepare the congregation for a socially informed engagement with the material world. Individual salvation, rather than social salvation, was the basis of the Church's educational effort. A prophetic ministry based on the ethical pronouncements of Christ, through consciousness-raising would have had to come from a religious manifestation that privileged social redemption.

Undoubtedly, the radical social gospel movement represented that religious expression. Its adult education for critical consciousness and action became the motive force for attaining social solidarity and the just and moral social order. However, credit should be given to the religious colleges of the mainline churches, such as the Methodist's Wesley College and Victoria College in Winnipeg and Toronto, respectively, for fostering the rebellious spirit that became the social gospel. By exposing the students to historical or higher criticism and incorporating Darwinian evolutionary thought in theological reformulations, the progressive instructors at these

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colleges paved the way for a gospel of social change and involvement. A.E. Smith was one such beneficiary of the new theology in the church-controlled colleges. Prior to Smith’s attendance at Wesley College, his religious orientation was evangelical and fundamentalist, but during his stay at the college he came under the influence of higher criticism, and the social role of the biblical prophets. Woodsworth’s academic tenure at Wesley College, and the teachings of Salem Bland also stirred his social gospel commitment. Irvine and Ivens also attended Wesley and were very much caught up in the exhilarating atmosphere of the critical re-examination of the Bible and the application of scientific tools to verify the authenticity of its content.

The transformative power of ideas must have been imprinted upon the minds of the social gospel radicals, who came to critical consciousness by way of an educational process, albeit a formal and structured one. Ideas can have a phenomenal impact on society. Duckworth, an important figure in the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) in the first half of twentieth century, placed the social gospel’s influence on education and society on par with the European Reformation:

It certainly had its impact on progressive and adult education and in seminaries of larger denominational colleges and churches. It liberalized Protestantism. It gave greater reality to the clerical vocation. It underlined morality in economics, politics and society. It developed social legislation arising from widespread adult education among labour and white-collar folks. It debunked fundamentalist theology and Christology. It brought forth meaningful literary productions and drama and songs.

194 Petryshyn, 61-63.
195 McNaught, 6.
196 Mardiros. 18-20.
An ideational impact of this scope, as suggested by Duckworth, if harnessed behind a counter-hegemonic, pragmatic and long-term programme of education and alternative institution building, could have tipped the societal balance of power to the advantage of the disempowered social groups and their allies.

**Critique of Education by the Social Gospel Radicals**

Every hegemony for the sake of its perpetuation and survival must control or exercise influence over the educational system within its jurisdiction. The ruling social groups in Canada were no different in desiring an educational product that in the grand scheme of things privileges its interpretation of reality. If contrary or alternate views were presented, they were pointed to as evidence of cultural pluralism or freedom of expression, if they did not come as a material threat to the elites' social and economic dominance. Cole-Arnal, a progressive Lutheran minister, argued that the "evolution and development of Canada’s school system reflected a... Ruling class bias...[and] the inclusion of the underprivileged was advocated in the name of transforming the uncouth and rebellious attitudes of the commoners into the more civilised behaviour and values of their social better." Education for functional roles in the world of work and the appropriate social mores were factors behind the type of education that was deemed necessary for socially marginalised adults and children.

Radical social gospellers such as Irvine expressed a similar sentiment as Cole-Arnal about the purpose of education as seen by the hegemony, and put forward his view on what it should be about:

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198 Cole-Arnal, *Set the Captives Free*, 76.
Education in a democracy is of supreme importance. At this stage democracy is more a problem than a solution. It remains to be worked out. The great benefits which democracy is destined to bestowed will naturally be equalled by the responsibilities it will bring. Responsibility must be removed from the shoulder of the few to the shoulders of all, and this implies a universal fitness for responsibility which education alone can give. In other words, if we are going to have a democratic state, we must democratise education, and bring about educational institution into line with democratic ideals.

The aim, in so far as there is an aim in modern education is to maintain the status quo, its autocracy and injustice not withstanding, while the inequality of opportunity in respect of obtaining an education is the glaring for comment.199

Education, in the period of the social gospel movement, closely mirrored the broader society in its skewed opportunity structure, ethos, and hierarchical form of organisation. It was not only the children from socially dominated groups that lacked access to society’s formal educational resources. Their parents shared similar experience.

Writing in 1914, Woodsworth stated “we have no Dominion Department of Education. This may be explained from the historical standpoint, but the fact is that as yet education in Canada is not considered of sufficient importance to demand federal stimulus or support.”200 The “historical standpoint” that Woodsworth was probably referring to was the British North America Act, which gave the provinces exclusive jurisdictional responsibilities over education. Nevertheless, Woodsworth criticism that the federal government’s failure to have a ministry of education signalled its attitude toward equitable access to formal education by all Canadians. Federal spending and the earmarking of financial resources in areas where it does not have

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199 Irvine, 39.
200 Woodsworth. Studies in Rural Citizenship. 42.
jurisdiction can actually influence the provinces to create programmes, so as to access these funds. Education financing in contemporary Canada is a co-responsibility of the federal government and the provinces, though the latter still have exclusive rights to this area of public policy. Around the time of Woodsworth's critique of the federal government's educational priorities, the latter had approved $10,000,000 expenditure for agricultural education.\textsuperscript{201}

However, this positive move on the part of the federal government could not reverse the longstanding experience of unequal access to education by poor and working-class adults and children. Some of the above financial resources would go toward adult education, but it was geared towards improving the technical competency of farmers in agricultural techniques and method. Furthermore, the targeted spending on agricultural education would not diminish the fact that oppressed groups in Canada, through the payment of taxes, have been largely subsidising the high school and post-secondary education of the superordinate groups and the very few farm or working-class children that entered these levels of schooling.\textsuperscript{202} However, as education was inadequately provided to children of the dispossessed classes, it was hardly likely that it would have been any better for their parents. Nonetheless, Woodsworth recognised the utmost importance of education in social development clamoured "strenuously for a genuinely public system of education, for both juvenile and adult".\textsuperscript{203}

The Labor Church, Adult Education, and Psychological Liberation

The radical social gospellers and the Labour church movement made a
significant contribution to Canada's tradition of adult education for social transformation. However, except for James R. Kidd article that links the social gospel with adult education in Canada, there does not seem to be an automatic association between the two. William Ivens and the Labour Church privileged education as an important element in social evangelism and the quest to set up the earthly Kingdom. In the Labor Church's declaration of what it stands for on education, it stated: "we seek to know and spread the truth. We believe that knowledge can only make [people] free."204 The radical social gospellers (in Gramscian form) utilised different sites of resistance to influence the mind-set of its constituency for the Kingdom. Within the context of the Labor Church, its hymns and prayers were used as educational tools to conscientise members and supporters about the capitalist hegemony. The following excerpt captures the educational uses that Labor Church songs were put to:

Workers of Canada, why crouch ye like craven? 
Why clutch an existence of insult and want? 
Why stand to be plucked like ravens? 
Or hoodwinked forever by twaddle or cant? 
Think on the wrongs ye bear 
Think on the rags ye wear, 
Think on the insults endured from your birth, 
Toiling in snow and rain, 
Rearing up heaps of grain, 
All for the tyrant who grind you to earth?205

Using hymns and prayers in the above manner to inculcate a radical consciousness of oppression and freedom was a strategically brilliant move by the Labor Church. It used a form that was familiar to people who grew up within a Christian milieu, and subverted it with a socially transformative content that placed the

203 McNaught, 45. 
204 Woodsworth, The First Story of the Labor Church, 16.
responsibility for achieving the good life on the oppressed. Furthermore this good life would not come in the sweet hereafter, but on earth through study and struggle. As an atheist who spent the formative years of my life in a predominantly Christian country, I know that one can thoroughly enjoy the lyrics and beat of a gospel song. Labor Church songs probably had similar effect on its members and supporters. However, in their case, they were getting lessons in politics or economics or sociology and were amiable to the influence. The prayers also had messages of social redemption. There was one in particular that rebuked self-interested motives and behaviour, and the social and cultural barriers that divided working people, while also promoting the virtue of solidarity, education and the vision of a better society.206

Given the lack of availability of adult education207 or one that interrogated the socio-economic and political structures in Canada, it was not surprising that the social gospel radicals associated with the Labor Church would have created classes to counter the discourse of the capitalist hegemony. Furthermore, workers in the urban labour movement were partial to an alternative view that promotes the need for social, economic, ethical and political transformation. The economic difficulties of the World War One years and those of the immediate post-war years were accompanied by labour militancy and independent political organisations.208 International political events such as the Russian Revolution of 1917, the local Winnipeg General Strike, and the One Big Union (syndicalist) movement provided a radicalising influence on many

205 Cited in Pratt. 17.
206 Woodsworth, The First Story of the Labor Church, 2-3.
208 Ibid. 74-75.
workers in the Canadian labour movement. Therefore, the Labor Church coming on the heels of the Winnipeg General Strike, and having strike leaders such as Ivens and Woodsworth at their helm, was swept up in this general atmosphere of social radicalism. Workers and other disaffected elements (for example, soldiers and the unemployed) were conducive to the educational programme of the Labor Church.

The Labor Church in Winnipeg, a city that was the hotbed of labour and socialist militancy, organised classes with subjects ranging from Economics, Religious Education, Public Speaking to Liquor Legislation. The Labor Church drew members with a wide range of political or ideological positions, and this created some tension around the content of its educational programme. Woodsworth cited an example in the conflict over the children Sunday school curriculum:

The parents who had taken their children from the regular “Sunday Schools, decided that they must have one of their own. A hall was engaged and a “superintendent” appointed. . . . One group said: “We don’t like to give up the Bible and the old teaching altogether. There is some good in the old, but we want a new application.” The other group said: “we are tired of that old dope. We want to teach the children Marxian economics.” Then a man made a happy suggestion: “Don’t you think we could mix them up a bit.”

The majority of the Labor Church’s members were pragmatic, and desired to negotiate a path between orthodox Christianity and orthodox Marxism, with the message of Jesus rendered comprehensible to the social, economic and political oppression experienced by early twentieth century Canadian society. Unfortunately for the social mandate of the Labor Churches, this tension over the content of the educational programme, and the part that religion should occupy in it, remained throughout the

209 Pratt, 40.
210 Woodsworth, The First Story of the Labor Church, 10-11.
duration of this social gospel-inspired church movement. Ivens responded to the critique of Marxian members about too much religion in the adult education classes by arguing that religion was necessary to provide the inspirational force behind the attainment of socialism.\textsuperscript{212} Moreover, Ivens declared that religion far from being an opiate was the creation of the people and closely reflected their situation.

Nevertheless, the educational work of the radical social gospellers continued through the different Labor Churches. Ivens's preoccupation with his duties in the Manitoba legislature led him to ask Woodsworth to serve as secretary of the Winnipeg Labor Church. Woodsworth immediately undertook the restructuring and re-organisation of the adult learning programme. Pratt catalogued his endeavours:

He conducted six study classes each week in Industrial History and Economics. A special subject for presentation and discussion at all branches on one particular Sunday was "a Co-operative Commonwealth." Other special programs included: "University Sundays," when all platforms were manned by University Professors, each of whom spoke on the contribution being made by his department to the welfare of the nation; "Parliament Sunday," with Labour members of the legislature speaking on current legislation of interest and concern to labour people.\textsuperscript{213}

Children being the future necessitated the purposive action of the Labor Church in attempting to conscientise them at the weekly Sunday school sessions. Their curriculum, developed by Woodsworth, dealt with among other subjects Canada's political economy, evolution and modern science, and the social gospel.\textsuperscript{214} Including the children in this counter-hegemonic educational process was important to the effort of breaking the stranglehold that the dominant social group's worldview. By exposing

\textsuperscript{211} Ibid., 11.
\textsuperscript{212} Ibid., 62-63.
\textsuperscript{213} Ibid., 57-58.
\textsuperscript{214} Ibid., 60-62.
working-class children to an oppositional discourse, at this early stage of their
development, it increased the likelihood of them exercising critical moral agency as
adults.

Winnipeg was not the only centre with an active adult educational programme. A Labor Church in Brandon (The Brandon People's Church) under the leadership of A. E. Smith had a conscientisation lecture programme between 1920–1922. It had themes such as "The Communism of Jesus, Modern Religion versus Materialistic Socialism, The Industrial Revolution, Private Property and the common Good, Leon Trotsky and his Theories [and] The Russian Revolution." These topics had a decidedly socialistic emphasis; but the Brandon Church lectures did not seem to have alienated its members. Based on the wide range of activities organised by the Labor Church in Brandon, Allen claimed that it was probably more successful in "meeting the spiritual needs of members than in most of the other Labour churches." It was to the credit of A. E. Smith's leadership that the accommodation of a developing materialist perspective and attention to the spiritual yearnings of the people co-existed in the same organisation.

Shortly after Smith's defeat in the 1922 Manitoba provincial election, he was offered and accepted the leadership of a Toronto Labor Church. One of his main responsibilities was to organise classes in economics, sociology and history, coupled with the public education of the workers through public meetings. Later in the year, the Labor Church merged with a labour organisation, and A. E. Smith had to administer an adult learning programme for over 300 young and older adult

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215 Petryshyn, 71.
216 Allen, The Social Passion, 166.
students.\textsuperscript{218} It was also at this moment that A.E. Smith was steadily moving out of the orbit of the social gospel movement and into that of the Communist Party. Before the end of January 1925, he had become a full-fledged Communist Party member. By the latter part of 1924, the Labor Church in Toronto was close to folding, and A. E. Smith was contemplating the political direction in which he should travel.\textsuperscript{219}

Many social movement organisation tend to experience periods of heightened activities, which is followed by inactivity or decline in the vigour of its activism. The Labor churches, as a whole, were not exempted from this phenomenon. By 1922 the churches were losing their vitality and membership level was on a downward course. Some of the Winnipeg branches had closed, but in one form or another the study groups were still functioning. During the winter of 1922, a Winnipeg Labor Church-sponsored university class was conducted under the theme, "short studies in Current Social and Economic Evolution."\textsuperscript{220} There was no indication from Pratt about the number of people that attended the classes. It is safe to speculate that the turnout was not as great as during the early years of the Labor Church.

This falling off of members and supporters' enthusiasm for this social gospel organisation could be partially attributed to Ivens and Woodsworth legislative responsibilities. Ivens was a member of the Manitoba Legislature from 1920-1936 and Woodsworth was elected to the House of Commons in December 1921; therefore, he was able to function as secretary of the Winnipeg Labor Churches for only six

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{217} Petryshyn, 69.
\item \textsuperscript{218} Ibid., 70.
\item \textsuperscript{219} Allen, The Social Passion, 167-168.
\item \textsuperscript{220} Pratt, 68-69.
\end{itemize}
months. The loss of these key leaders was fatal for the Winnipeg Labor Church. Calgary's Labor Church suffered a similar fate when Irvine won a seat in the Federal election of 1921. Irvine, A.E. Smith, Woodsworth and Ivens represented the intellectual heart and soul of the radical social gospel expression; to not have their knowledge, enthusiasm, and skills was bound to have weakened the Church. This is not to imply that the Labor Church would not have experienced organisational atrophy with them being there. However, as the brain trust of the Labor Church, they might have made the necessary adjustment to preserve the radical church experiment.

While the Labor Church and its adult learning programme was primarily an urban phenomenon, the social gospel radicals were also concerned with the challenge of radicalising the consciousness of the rural inhabitants. The manifestation of the earthly Kingdom and the attainment of universal brotherhood and sisterhood could undoubtedly be applied to the rural and urban spheres. Furthermore, Woodsworth's *Studies in Rural Citizenship* was an adult education work, which McNaught claims, "stands as one of the first important documents in this field [adult education]." The significance of *Studies in Rural Citizen* as an adult education text can be deduced from the decision by the Canadian Council of Agriculture in adopting it as the primary teaching material for a number of courses designed for its rural constituency.

Woodsworth problematised the unavailability of educational opportunities for people in the rural areas - adults and children alike. For rural children, he criticised the administrative and governance structures, outdated curriculum, non-existent
teacher development programmes, and small unconsolidated schools and school
districts (which resulted in high average operational costs) as difficulties, which
undermined the rural population's acquisition of an education that would facilitate
rural development. Governmental inattention to education for children was of
relevance to the cultural development and growth of the rural adult population.

Although, the rural educational infrastructure formed a crucial part of the
means of reproducing itself ideologically, Woodsworth argued that the schoolhouse
could be a site of resistance and location for a programme of adult education:

What can be done in the school? Rather, what cannot be done? The
teacher and the parents can get together. The farmers can meet to
discuss agricultural matters; their wives to discuss home economics.
Men and woman alike to discuss politics or at least matter of public
concern that should be the very life of politics. Young people can meet
for social time. The long winter evenings can be utilised to splendid
advantage by providing night classes or lectures on literary or scientific
or social topics... The building belongs to the community and should
be used for anything that will elevate the life of the community.

Oftentimes the procuring of qualified staff to work in rural or even urban alternative
adult education programmes stood as an impediment to the course of action suggested
above by Woodsworth. However, the Methodist social gospeller did not see teacher
availability as a problem. For Woodsworth, there were enough university graduates
among the clergy to turn each rural schoolhouse in "a sort of people's university".
Having the clergy embrace the role of adult educator would be consistent with a
socially relevant theology, which did not saw a separation between the spiritual and
the temporal. Yet the idea of a "people's university" strongly implied that
Woodsworth saw the need for a community-controlled adult educational process for

226 Ibid. 58.
social development. Even if Woodsworth proposition were premised on the state providing adult educational services, the desired end result would still be community self-management of a crucial area of their basic need – adult education.

Adult education for social emancipation was certainly a pioneering contribution made by the radical social gospellers towards the progressive stream of adult educational thought and practice in Canada. Unfortunately, this social gospel legacy is insufficiently researched. Even James Kidd’s attempt to make a link between the social gospel and adult education in Canada was only tenuous. However, what cannot be denied was the radical social gospellers' realisation of the role of critical consciousness through adult education in the struggle for freedom by workers, farmers and women. By organising courses, lectures, public meetings and utilising newspapers, they played the role of “organic intellectuals” in the Gramscian sense of the term.

As organic intellectuals, the principal figures in the radical social gospel camp used their knowledge and skills to help advance the interests of working people and the poor. The significance of Irvine, Woodsworth, Smith, Irvine and Bland's commitment to social justice may be measured by the fact that as university educated men, they could have become apologists for the ruling class. University education was a scare commodity and it could have served as a passport to lives of relative material comfort, if they had aligned themselves with the dominant social groups in Canada.

In spite of the radical nature of the adult educational programmes promoted by the social gospel leaders, the absence of a practical component that linked learning to

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227 Ibid. p. 58.
the solution of immediate material needs of the masses was a strategic mistake on their part. In that regard they differed from Amilcar Cabral and the leadership of the anti-colonial and social revolutionary struggles in Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde who instructed their movement to keep “always in mind that the people are not [merely] fighting for ideas, for the things in anyone’s head. They are fighting to win material benefits, to live better and in peace, to see their lives go forward, to guarantee the future of their children….“ The preceding statement was not an expression of an anti-intellectual animus. It was exhorting the revolutionary activists to avoid becoming unduly preoccupied with the ideology that inspired the struggle for freedom, while neglecting its concrete manifestation in the lives of the people.

Woodsworth, Irvine, Iven and Bland advocated the realisation of the co-operative commonwealth as the basis upon which social, economic and political justice would be achieved in Canada. Yet the adult education programmes that the radical social gospellers were identified with and promoted did not place co-operatives at the centre of their programme to assist the socially marginalised in restructuring inequitable economic relations. A grassroots co-operative economic development programme would have complemented the electoral strategy of the social gospel radicals. Furthermore, the adult learners would have found practical relevance to their daily lives, and an opportunity to put into practise the content of their learning experience. The “war of manoeuvre” or cultural revolution put forward by Gramsci was indicative of the part that a strong educational programme of social change should follow.

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Co-operative and Adult Education

Example of the Antigonish Movement

In Antigonish, Nova Scotia, a Roman Catholic inspired expression of the social gospel arose in the 1920s using the twin forces of adult education and co-operatives as the instruments of social, economic and cultural development in the Maritime Provinces.\(^{229}\) Very much like the Protestant-inspired social gospel movement in Western Canada and Ontario, the Antigonish Movement was to a large extent triggered by the negative impact of urbanisation and industrialisation. Rural depopulation and the resulting exodus of young people in search of economic opportunities in the New England states and Upper Canada was another key factor in the emergence of the Antigonish Movement.\(^{230}\) Since the socio-economic upheaval were affected by changes in the material environment, the social corrective administered by the Antigonish reformers should of necessity be similar – albeit of a progressive character.

The Antigonish reformers were similar to their Protestant social gospel counterparts in the realisation that education was important to the socially marginalised understanding of their social, economic and political predicament. The Antigonish organisers saw adult education for the disempowered sections of the population as a process that awakened the people’s consciousness of their oppression and equipped them with the tools to engage in collective self-development.\(^{231}\) Moses Coady, the first director of the St. Francis Xavier University’s Extension Department –


\(^{230}\) Ibid. 98.
(the organisational formation that led the Antigonish phenomenon) centred his pedagogical approach to learning on the basic activities that affected the people’s quality of life. In this learning-by-doing standpoint, the people’s need for good housing, affordable consumers goods, accessible financial services and insurance products, and producer groups’ desire for just reward for their goods became the core element of the adult education programme. Combining adult education with the search for solutions to the economic and social challenges of life was reinforced during the first year of operation of the Antigonish Movement’s study clubs. At first the participants’ support was lukewarm. This not-too-enthusiastic reaction was attributed to the failure of the extension workers to incorporate a problem-solving pedagogical thrust centred on community economic development. Alexander Laidlaw in his research on the Antigonish Movement concurred that the Extension Department realised that it was difficult to get adults to enter a programme of study, if there was no immediate and functional material incentive as a motivator. It was the absence of a practical element in the adult education programme of Ivens, Woodsworth, Smith and Irvine that was the key in them not eliciting wider and sustained support among the disenfranchised. Although, the radical social gospellers engendered a critique of Canada’s political and economic system, their educational approach did not equipped the people with the knowledge, skills and attitude to met their pressing material needs. Whether it was the socialist co-operative commonwealth of the radical social gospellers or that of the co-operators, self-

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231 Ibid., 105.
233 Laidlaw, 138.
management experiences were essential building blocks in the construction of the new and just society that was envisioned.

While the vision of Antigonish leadership was not as system altering as that of the Protestant radical social gospellers, the former took the steps that would prepare the people to grasp and shape the future in their own image and interests. Social movements with an emancipatory agenda are usually faced with the challenge of inadequate leadership and managerial capacity, as they experience rapid growth in membership, state-inspired political repression of the leadership, and/or the leadership being preoccupied by other things. Some of these preceding issues were relevant to the Labor Church and its adult education programme. However, the Antigonish Movements' response to this predicament was the creation in 1933 of a six-week residential programme called School for Leadership. Knowledge in critical areas such as how to operate a business, co-operative history and principles were taught, as well as the imparting of skills in organising and managing community social and economic development projects.234 Spreading leadership capabilities throughout a social movement is important in facilitating a participatory democratic ethos, as well as preventing the quick demise of an organisation in the absence of the principal leaders. In the case of the Labor Church movement in Western Canada, Ivens' imprisonment for his involvement in the Winnipeg General Strike, and his, Woodsworth, Smith and Irvine's responsibilities as elected politicians robbed the movement of their leadership and was a factor in its decline.

Co-operatives, as organisational formations, provided the members of the Antigonish Movement with a “living laboratory” for executing the self-help ideas
taught in the adult education classes. This experience allowed them to experiment with retail, producer, housing and financial co-operatives (that is, credit unions), which reflected an attempt to respond collectively to fundamental material needs. These co-operatives were established in both rural and urban areas, although some forms were more successful in one sphere rather than the other.\(^{235}\) Even with the Antigonish Movement's overt avoidance of partisan politics, its members acquired political knowledge and skills that were used to advance their interests. Alexander highlights the co-operators better understanding of the way in which their votes could be exercised, the development of skills in political lobbying, and the use of their newly acquired sense of agency in working in the labour movement.\(^{236}\)

If political conscientisation is viewed as a process, one cannot be impatient with the socially marginalised whose early political awakening may incline them to activism that is within the acceptable boundary of the dominant discourse. With the Antigonish co-operators and their leadership, the reforming of society was their primary objective. They argued for the co-operative ownership of wealth in combination with a state and capitalist ownership.\(^{237}\) However, with social change being a process rather than an event, there was no need for radical minds to despair when social groups embrace reform. When reform has played itself out, coupled with the consistent political education of the oppressed, they may be more receptive to a programme of radical social change.

\(^{234}\) Alexander, 81.
\(^{235}\) Lotz and Welton, 105.
\(^{236}\) Alexander, 99.
\(^{237}\) Lotz and Welton, 107-108.
With the radical social gospellers their programme of adult education was more transformative, than that of the Antigonish co-operators. However, the absence of collectivistic, self-help components that addressed the here-and-now-material needs of their largely urban constituency made their message merely prophetic in impact. It was probably the realisation by the social gospel radicals that industrial action and the prophetic lambasting of the system was not enough to bring forth the Kingdom of God that propelled them into the political arena. Even their misgivings about the political system, with its domination by big business, could not prevent the use of the mainstream political process as the instrument to achieve the co-operative commonwealth. The formation of independent political parties to represent the interest of the dispossessed was, nonetheless, a good strategic move.

Yet when a radical adult education programme did not facilitate a co-operative economic thrust and the construction of autonomous, people-controlled economic and social infrastructure, the radical ideals of the social gospel and the co-operative commonwealth was not destined to fulfil their potentialities. Building the embryonic structures of the good and just polity in the sphere of civil society was paramount to the Kingdom of God and co-operative commonwealth ideals. With political representation in the legislative bodies, the social gospel advocates could have pushed for laws that would facilitate the growth of the people-controlled economic sector. Legislation and public programmes that supported worker-owned business, co-operative financial institutions, and co-operative housing are just a few of the initiatives that could have benefited the co-operative commonwealth in its infancy. But the most important of all things would have been the role that an independent
adult education programme would have played in fostering the consciousness within the populace of the benefits that should be delivered by the political process, plus the requisite knowledge, skills and attitude in building the Kingdom of God/co-operative commonwealth. The Antigonish Movement demonstrated that the people would respond to education when it is allied to a programme and vision of self-help and material betterment.
Chapter Five

Conclusion: Where Do We Go From Here?

We gonna chase those crazy baldheads [oppressors] out of town
Chase those crazy baldheads out of town
I and I build the cabin
I and I plant the corn
Didn’t my people before me
Slave for this country
Now you look me with a scorn
Then you eat up all my corn

Crazy Baldhead - Bob Marley

The era of the social gospel in Canada is an important part of its social and church history. Yet this phenomenon from the 1890s to the 1920s is little known among Christians and non-Christians and deserves to occupy a prominent place in the social studies and history texts of the country’s elementary and secondary schools. The social gospel experience would certainly not be out of place among the fur trade, the building of the transcontinental railway and the forging of Confederation - seminal events in Canada’s settler-colonialist history. Michael Valpy, The Globe and Mail religious and ethics reporter, writing in an article on the intervention of religious figures into the political world argues with justification that “Canada’s welfare state and Canadian socialism were in large part the product of the intellectual Christian left known as the Social Gospel Movement.”238 Canada’s welfare state and its health care infrastructure element in particular, is oftentimes seen as a defining part of the

Canadian character. A movement with such an impact on Canada’s social history needs to be better known.

The above assertion is premised on the belief that there are vital lessons that can be drawn from the social gospel movement. Those individuals and social organizations that identify themselves as change agents can use the insights, achievements and failures of the social gospel movement in our contemporary struggles against the unholy alliance of capitalism, patriarchy and white supremacy. Historical events and the logic of the processes embedded in them are not phenomena to be observed with awe, or to be summarily dismissed. Whether they are good or bad, when measured by our moral yardstick, they can be instructive in our journey toward social emancipation, justice and the attainment of the good society. In this regard, the legacy of struggle bequeathed to us by the social gospel movement in general, and radical social gospellers in particular, can be a source and a force for progressive societal change. The issue of the relevance of the social gospel to present-day activism will be elaborated on later. The purpose of this historical research was to explore the argument that the social gospel would have better advanced the cause of universal solidarity, co-operation and the Kingdom of God by embracing a comprehensive co-operative economic development programme. To a certain extent there is a certain degree of speculation - albeit a reasoned one – about advancing this approach to social and economic emancipation. However, the opportunities were there for the social gospel radicals to use co-operatives as the primary vehicle to empower the working class and progressive farmers against the capitalist hegemony in Canada.
Democratizing political and economic relations was paramount to the social evangelism of these radical Christian adherents.

Therefore, an economic practice that did not provide the scope for the workers, farmers, and consumers having direct ownership and control in their hands should have raised concern for social gospellers like Bland, Irvine and Woodworth. These three social gospellers expressed positive opinions on the virtues of co-operative economics and its capacity to bring about just social relations. Yet it was in state ownership and control of large-scale industries and natural resources that they located the antidote for a rapacious and dehumanizing capitalism.

Forging a “brotherhood economics,” as was the stated aim of the Labor Church movement, ought to have inspired a deep reflection on the organizational form that would have coupled a radical ethical stance with economics. The libertarian, non-authoritarian impulse that fired the “social passion” of the social gospellers should have made co-operative economics a logical choice. The influence of Guild Socialist thought on Irvine, with its accent on worker ownership and management of their industry, was another factor that should have engendered a rethinking of a state-controlled economic infrastructure. The work carried out by the principal social gospel radicals with co-operatives points to an understanding and respect for the potential of co-operatives in transforming the lives of their members.

The seductiveness of the belief that a progressive political party in control of the machinery of state could have undertaken the nationalization of the “commanding heights of the economy” must have been inviting to the social gospellers. At this period in time, extensive state ownership and control had yet to prove itself a failure at facilitating worker and citizen self-management and empowerment. However, long
before the advent of the former Soviet Union and social-democratic governments, anarchists such as Mikhail Bakunin, Peter Kropotkin and Pierre-Joseph Proudhon were critical of state ownership of societal resources. Yet to Smith, Irvine, Bland, Woodsworth and Ivens the acquisition of governmental power appeared as the quickest and most effective way to bring about a just society.

The failure of the Winnipeg General Strike definitely helped in pushing them towards this position. Though when one uses the word "failure" in regard to the General Strike it needs to be qualified. To the workers, a general strike was an attempt to force the employers to recognize basic trade union rights, and not an ideological posturing aimed at transforming the broad structural relations of power in Winnipeg and Canada. The Winnipeg workers' understanding and use of the general strike was not the same as that of anarcho-syndicalist workers and labour organizations in North America. For the latter, this weapon of struggle was key to forcing the collapse of capitalist economic and political hegemony. Therefore, for the social gospellers to have read the outcome of the General Strike as a futile weapon of struggle and to have endorsed the political kingdom as the exclusive instrument to democratise society was somewhat shortsighted. They could have seen the undesirable ending of the General Strike as a motivation towards building the capacity of progressive and oppressed actors within civil society to self-manage their own social, cultural, and economic institutions. Building an alternative hegemony centred on solidarity, co-operation, justice and love would be the ends of this non-authoritarian institutional building. The fact that the workers were confused or ignorant of the implication of a general strike suggested the need for an extensive programme of adult education. It would have served the dual purposes of radical consciousness-raising and provided the knowledge.

239 Young, 22-23.
skills and attitude for economic and social self-management, among the socially-marginalised and progressive elements in society.

As the African dub-poet, Mutabaruka, indicates, “a revolt ain’t a revolution,” and the objective lesson of the Winnipeg General Strike definitely bore this out. A revolt may be a momentary event that merely registers the oppressed frustration against the system. However, a revolution is a process that requires technical and political capacity building of the change agents, commitment to the long haul and the use of multiple sites of resistance to bring forth the new society. A cultural revolution or the construction of an alternative hegemony must emerge from within civil society, even while it is engaging the state in the legislature and other arenas. According to Kealy and Palmer the Knights of Labor movement in Ontario demonstrated to us the necessity of the struggle for an alternative culture:

The movement culture generated by the Knights of Labor thus provided Ontario’s workers with their first explicit confrontation with the potential and possibility of a working class unity that could change the world in which they lived. Manifesting itself in the initiation rites, the rhetoric and the public display of the Order, the movement culture spawned a trenchant critique of society, as it was then constituted. Whether we look toward the impassioned writings of labour’s brainworkers, the diligent efforts of Knights of Labor organizers, or the committed prose or poetry of countless forgotten men and women, we cannot help but see this accomplishment and recognize how vitally it shifted the existing terms of class experience, drawing unskilled workers, women, and the Irish from the periphery into the centre of the nineteenth-century labour movement. As Raymond Williams has argued, this process of wanting and actively struggling to convince others that a new human order is seriously possible is central to any attempt to create alternatives. It is part of a long history of resistance “where intention and consequence, desire and necessity, possibility and practice, have . . . bloodily interacted.”

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240 Kealy and Palmer. 326-329.
Kealy and Palmer could have also have added that beside the educative thrust of the Knights of Labor, their "co-operative plan" that encouraged the formation of consumer and producers co-operatives was part and parcel of the attempt to build an alternative hegemony within civil society.

Unfortunately, the social gospellers did not privilege the co-operative in their notion of the co-operative commonwealth. Though the progressive Catholic theologian Gregory Baum stated that the social gospel's "democratic, self-determining and anti-hierarchical" message created a spiritual link to co-operative movement that was not sufficient to lead it to using co-operatives as the principal instruments for social and economic reconstruction. We do not know and can only speculate on what impact a comprehensive and integrated co-operative movement with a radical and systematic adult education programme, would have had on the nature and course of progressive civil society social movements of today. During certain historical moments the preferred course of action taken by the advanced or vanguard sections of civil society may cast a long shadow over the way that contemporary actors challenge the hegemony. The almost exclusive political party focus of Canada's progressive and left-wing forces may in part be attributed to the path taken by the social gospellers such as Bland, Woodsworth, Irvine and Ivens in establishing the social democratic, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation. A.E. Smith's movement into the ranks and leadership of the communist party was indicative of this undue reliance on the political process as the way to bring about social emancipation.

The opening was there for the social gospel movement to use the co-operative ideal and a systematic adult education programme allied with a radical political party to serve as a one-two punch in challenging the governing elites. An indication of this

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Baum, Co-operatives, 152.
possibility was the emergence of the Antigonish Movement using co-operatives and adult education (but without the political component) to help in improving the lives of people in the Maritimes. During the period 1932-1938, the Antigonish Movement had created 142 credit unions, 39 co-operative stores, 11 co-operative fish plants, 17 lobster plants and had about 10,000 members in the study groups. Though the Antigonish co-operative experience did not have the comprehensive and integrated character to utilize possible synergies and economies of scale, it pointed to the potentialities of a co-operative-cum-adult education movement. Even with organized labour (a target constituency of the social gospel) embracing business unionism as opposed to social unionism after the 1920s, the social gospel radicals still had over a decade with which to conscientise many of the unions’ rank-and-file into a progressive formation.

The Social Gospel’s Lessons to Contemporary Clergy

We have probably heard, at one point or another, the exhortation about ignoring the lessons of the past. In regard to the social gospel movement, Cole-Arnal’s comment is instructive:

During every epoch, the difficult yet exhilarating call to follow Christ on the road to liberation has presented specific challenges and visions and the present is no different in that regard. The oppression-liberation struggle has a tenacious continuity in Canada that provides us with resources of knowledge, analysis, and inspiration. The unique challenges of today grow out of that past, and our faith calls us to confront these issues with wisdom and courage. In light of past struggles and current commitments, we must consider the most

242 Alexander. 88.
243 Young. 23.
effective strategies that would move us towards a world of justice and shalom.244

Beside the introduction of the prophetic ministry into the Canadian religious experience, the social gospel phenomenon offers some pointers to today’s progressive clerics and laity.

Firstly, any Christian-inspired religious movement for social justice that aims at having the broadest appeal must be inclusive and respectful of the multi-religious character of Canadian society. The social gospel movement was the chief architect behind the construction of the church union movement in Canada at the turn of the century, until its manifestation as the United Church (an amalgamation of Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist churches) in 1925. However, the prime motivation behind church union was the perceived need to maintain Protestant Christianity as the dominant religious expression because of the exploding immigrant population in Canada at that time.245 The advocates of church union believed that “a national-church would ensure that Canada was a Christian society,”246 by effectively using their resources for conversion, proselytizing, and social intervention in society.

A socially-engaged clergy of today with a prophetic and action-oriented approach must be ecumenical in scope. A Christian hegemonic posturing will not work in major urban centres of Canada, where the presence of non-Christian faith groups is prominent. It is necessary for the current prophetic religious voices to form strategic alliances with non-Christian faith groups. Cole-Arnal concurs with the preceding standpoint:

244 Cole-Arnal, 186.

245 Marshall, 153.

246 Ibid, 154
It seems to me that expansion of such MTC-type bodies [MTC is a liberationist, Christian group that works with working class and progressive movements in Quebec] must involve reaching beyond Christianity to other faith groups. Given the history of religious crusades and oppressive imperialism in the name of religion past and present, movement towards such a broader alliance presents difficult challenges. Nonetheless, there exist significant hopeful signs.247

One of the “hopeful signs’ alluded to by Cole-Arnal was the Ontario-wide Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition which had Jewish, Muslim, Jain, Buddhist, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican and Lutheran faith groups within its ranks. The Toronto Star columnist, Jim Coyle, was not only impressed with the diverse religious voices but, “it was that they were so blunt in denouncing the Ontario government’s social policies and its refusal to even to listen to dissenters.”248

It will not be an easy task in creating an alliance between different faith groups for the purposes of social reconstruction. However, this challenge can be made more manageable by identifying the radical and progressive forces within those faith communities, and then engaging in common conscietsising and action-oriented programmes. Initially working with progressive-minded religious peoples, some of the ideological barriers and the resultant conflicting prescriptive or policy may reduce preferences that flow from the former. The gap between progressives over moral issues such as reproductive choice, sexual freedom, and patriarchy are more likely to be smaller, than if all religious elements are brought together initially.

Secondly, the progressive clergy must include race and racist oppression at the centre of any analysis of what ails Canadian society. This was a major failing of the

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247 Cole-Arnal. 190.

social gospel experience in Canada. White supremacy was not interrogated for the impact that it had on the lives of the First Nations, African, South Asian and Chinese people living in Canada. Mardiros commented that a "surprising feature of the progressive and radical movements of the period is the almost complete lack of concern for Canada's native population, whose plight was rarely mentioned."\textsuperscript{249}

The social gospel radicals' exclusive preoccupation with "class," "the oppressed," or "the exploited" as the categories through which an analysis of Canada's political economy was understood was one reason for their anti-racist myopia. Woodsworth's economistic view of the struggle was representative of his faction of the social gospel movement. He privileged the experience of the industrial and agrarian workers and the farmers, almost all of whom were of European extraction, as the exploited groups \textit{par excellence} in Canadian society.\textsuperscript{253} Therefore, the limited employment opportunities of non-white groups, plus the enmity of the white working class to workers of other races did not count as economic exploitation. In that view, introducing race into the analytical equation would have probably complicated the binary division of the oppressor (the capitalist and political elites) and the oppressed (the workers and farmers).

The radical social gospellers failure to account for race in their social analysis of oppression and liberation could also be attributed to a white-supremacist, mind-set. Woodsworth's thoughts on a multiracial and culturally pluralistic society were epitomized by the following comment:

\begin{quote}
It is generally agreed that the races are not likely to mix...We confess that the idea of a homogenous people seem in accord with our democratic institutions and conducive to the general welfare. This need not exclude small communities of black or red or yellow peoples. It is
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{249} Mardiros. 51.
well to remember that we are not the only people on earth. The idealist may dream of a final state of development, when white and black and red and yellow shall have ceased to exist, or have become merged into some neutral grey. We may love all [people] yet prefer to maintain our own family life...We, in Canada, have certain more or less clearly defined ideals of national well-being. These ideals must never be lost sight of. Non-ideal elements there must be, but they should be capable of assimilation. Essentially non-assimilable elements are clearly detrimental to our highest national development, and hence should be vigorously excluded. 250

Non-whites were essentially interlopers and were only acceptable as assimilable, "honourary whites" in the Great White North if Woodsworth's outlook was the conventional wisdom. The social gospel's notion of the "brotherhood of man" would have amounted to a farce, if all national groups were not included. Since the fight against racism was not central to the social gospel ministry, one must conclude that its ideas of freedom, justice, co-operation and universal love were incomplete, at best.

Interestingly, in recent times scholars have started conducting research in the United States of neglected voices in the social gospel movement's historiography, who were excluded on the grounds of race and/or gender. One such work is that of Susan Lindley who brought to voice the social gospel contributions of an African male and female and a European female. 251 Today's progressive clergy must not only resurrect the "neglected voices" of the past. They must include race and gender as key elements in their interrogation of structural oppression and give their support to movement aimed at challenging exploitation centred in these categories.


The task of eradicating this deep-seated oppression will require dedication, trust, self-criticism and social-engagement. Cole-Arnal captures this difficulty by the congregation of the progressive Trinity-St. Paul United Church in Toronto:

Chiyeko [an African person] was saddened by what she felt was the "subtle" survival of racism and added that the racial mix on a Toronto subway was not replicated in her church. She wondered if the motives behind good programs might be more a response of charity than justice. Margaret, often echoing this sentiment, added that she and others, who are middle class, needed to seriously reflect upon their own involvement in oppression.\(^\text{252}\)

As the reggae-dancehall artiste, Buju Banton lamented "it's not an easy road" to justice, liberation and solidarity. However, a progressive clergy that wants to play the role of catalyst in a society-wide freedom movement must face this challenge.

Lastly, a progressive ministry must learn from the shortcomings of the social gospel radicals, in that the latter did not try to actualise co-operation and solidarity in the day-to-day activities of the oppressed. It is commendable that some religious voices in Ontario are speaking in a prophetic manner against governmental oppression in this province and Canada. Dow Marmur, a rabbi and former member of the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition, wrote an open letter to provincial premier, Mike Harris, that reflects the voice that some religious elements are giving to the concerns of the socially marginalised:

Though we all like tax cuts, I believe that more and more of us regard the price as being too high. We fear that the very fabric of our society is at stake, for we have not seen that more spending power in the pockets of the better-off ensure a just and compassionate Ontario. Justice and compassion are the foundations of faith and the criteria of decency. Our prophets and sages have taught that a civilized society is judged by how it treats its victims, not by how it rewards its victors. If the federal government isn't doing enough, this should be an added incentive for

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\(^{252}\) Cole-Arnal, 156.
the provincial government to do more, much more. I have seen you respond with discomfort, even anger, to insinuations that yours is a heartless government. Indeed, I find it difficult to imagine that you don’t care for hungry children and homeless families. Yet, the effect of the policies of the government you lead doesn’t seem to reflect it.253

Organising against the shredding of the social safety net by the provincial and federal governments is a moral and political imperative on the part of progressive people. However, we must balance that work with co-operative economic endeavours that make the voiceless and others active, phenomenal beings in our own liberation process. The clergy and social movements of the day should be cognisant of the fact, that the socially marginalised relationship with the welfare state as clients is often-time one of humiliation and powerlessness. As workers or consumers of services provided by the welfare state, a person may have a greater sense of power. However, social assistance recipients as clients may equally despise the infrastructure of the welfare state as a right-wing demagogue.

While we fight to maintain universal social programmes, the emphasis should also be place on the creation of democratic, non-authoritarian economic and social institutions that can serve as civil society’s response to triumphant gloating of the present political and economic elites. The Greater Toronto Area (G.T.A.) is an excellent region (the fifth largest metropolitan area in North America) for the progressive clergy to work with others in building a comprehensive and integrated co-operative movement. If co-operation, justice and solidarity of religion is going to be of any substance, then the socially engaged Church must see “the Kingdom of God,” “the just and good society” or “the co-operative commonwealth” as an end that will evolve from the social and economic institutions that are built by the

counterhegemonic forces. Co-operatives in their various manifestations are the social corrective for capitalist hegemony and political domination. Co-operatives are not without their problems and contradictions that emerge from operating with the institutional context of a capitalist society. Gregory Baum identifies these peculiar challenges:

Cooperative enterprises of production and consumption are not wholly independent of the capitalist system. In the first place, we notice that as soon as these enterprises become large and are operated by a full-time professional staff they want to do well for the sake of the owners: they begin to imitate the competitive methods of capitalism and run organizations for profit. If on the other hand, a cooperatively owned enterprise affirms itself against capitalist principles, it can be easily punished by the dominant system: for in buying materials and selling its products, the enterprise depends on the market and hence is vulnerable to any pressure the large corporations may want to exert.254

These possible challenges presented by Baum are not insurmountable because a conscientised, pragmatic and broadly organized citizenry can counter the machinations of the elites. This is why it is essential, just like social gospellers did, to organize adult educational programmes for critical consciousness. However, unlike the social gospel radicals, the adult education programmes must be systematic and provide participants with the knowledge and skills to operate their economic and social institutions. Co-operatives should be seen as transitional instruments, with the capacity to take us from the state of oppression to the realm of freedom. Hence, the reason to privilege the cultural revolution, and its attendant co-operative economic and social institutions as the embryonic framework for the building and evolution of the good and just society.

All in all, the radical social gospel in Canada has left us with a legacy of struggle by a conscientised ministry. However, imperfect it was as a social phenomenon, it has suggested the orientation that progressive cleric may take in destroying the hegemony today. In the social gospel’s imperfection or shortcomings are objective lessons for both religious and non-religious radicals and progressive forces in Canada to undertake the task of a libertarian, and non-hierarchical social, economic and political reconstruction. A conscientised clergy of today can be a catalyst in making co-operation, solidarity, love and justice the cornerstone of a “new” social gospel.
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