

ARTICLE

“The common people have spoken with a mighty voice”: Regina’s Labour City Councils, 1936–1939

J. William Brennan

THE 1930S WERE HEADY TIMES for social democrats in Canada. In August 1932 J.S. Woodsworth and his fellow Labour members of parliament joined with representatives of the Independent Labour Party, Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour Party, Socialist Party of Canada, Alberta’s and Saskatchewan’s farmers’ organizations, and the Canadian Brotherhood of Railway Employees (CBRE) to found the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). Eleven months later the CCF adopted the wide-ranging Regina Manifesto in the expectation that it would appeal to reform-minded Canadians at election time. Winning a handful of seats made the CCF the official opposition in British Columbia in 1933 and in Saskatchewan in 1934, but in the 1935 federal election only seven of the new party’s candidates were victorious.¹

1. The scholarly literature on the founding of the CCF and its electoral fortunes in the 1930s is extensive. It includes Ivan Avakumovic, *Socialism in Canada: A Study of the CCF-NDP in Federal and Provincial Politics* (Toronto 1978); J. William Brennan, ed., “Building the Co-operative Commonwealth”: *Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada* (Regina 1984); Michiel Horn, *The League For Social Reconstruction: Intellectual Origins of the Democratic Left in Canada 1930–1942* (Toronto 1980); S.M. Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan* (Berkeley 1950); J.T. Morley, *Secular Socialists: The CCF/NDP in Ontario, A Biography* (Kingston 1984); Alan Whitehorn, *Canadian Socialism: Essays on the CCF/NDP* (Don Mills 1992); Nelson Wiseman, *Social Democracy in Manitoba: A History of the CCF-NDP* (Winnipeg 1983); Walter D. Young, *The Anatomy of a Party: The National CCF, 1932–61* (Toronto 1969); and Leo Zakuta, *A Protest Movement Becalmed: A Study of Change in the CCF* (Toronto 1964). There are as yet few biographies of CCFers. The most useful include Leo Heaps, *The Rebel in the House: The Life and Times of A.A. Heaps M.P.* (London 1970); Anthony Mardiros, *William Irvine: The Life of a Prairie Radical*

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While government eluded social democrats in provincial and federal elections in the 1930s, it was a different story in some of the nation's cities, including Regina. In 1935 the Civic Labour League (CLL), an informal alliance of social democrats and communists, won control of City Hall in Regina for the first time. What brought social democrats and communists together in such a common political cause? Why were they able to capture the mayoralty and a majority of the city council seats in 1935 and win again in 1936, 1937, and 1938?

The political fortunes of the left in Regina shifted in 1939. When Hitler invaded Poland on 1 September 1939, Canada entered World War II at Great Britain's side but the Soviet Union remained neutral (having signed a non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany the week before). This immediately made Canada's communists suspect in the eyes of most voters. In the December 1939 municipal election, the newly created Civic Voters' Association (CVA) and Regina's business community were able to make a patriotic appeal that proved difficult to counter, and Labour suffered a crushing defeat. All of the Labour candidates who stood for election in 1939 were defeated, and Regina's social democrats lost control of city council.

What did these Labour city councils accomplish for working-class families in Regina and for the city as a whole during the last years of the Great Depression, and what was their legacy? How does Regina's experience compare with that of other prairie cities where social democrats and communists captured the mayoralty and a majority of city council seats during the 1930s?² These questions are the focus of this essay.

(Toronto 1979); Thomas H. McLeod and Ian McLeod, *Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem* (Edmonton 1987); Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1959); Allen Mills, *Fool for Christ: The Political Thought of J.S. Woodsworth* (Toronto 1991); Walter Stewart, *M. J. : The Life and Times of M.J. Coldwell* (Toronto 2000); and Freidrich Steinger, "George H. Williams: Agrarian Socialist," MA thesis, University of Regina, 1976. Political memoirs are scarcer still. The only one which deals with the rise of the CCF in Saskatchewan is C.M. Fines, "The Impossible Dream: An Account of People and Events Leading to the First CCF Government, Saskatchewan, 1944" (unpublished memoirs, 1982).

2. Among the major prairie cities, Winnipeg has attracted the most scholarly attention. Stefan Epp has begun to examine the electoral fortunes of communists in Winnipeg in "A Communist in the Council Chambers: Communist Municipal Politics, Ethnicity, and the Career of William Kolisnyk," *Labour / Le Travail*, 63 (Spring 2009), 79–103, and in "Fighting for the Everyday Interests of Winnipeg Workers: Jacob Penner, Martin Forkin, and the Communist Party in Winnipeg Politics, 1930–1935," *Manitoba History*, 63 (Spring 2010), 14–26. Still useful are three articles by J.E. Rea: "The Politics of Conscience: Winnipeg After the Strike," Canadian Historical Association, *Historical Papers*, 1971, 276–88; "The Politics of Class: Winnipeg City Council, 1919–45," in Carl Berger and Ramsay Cook, eds., *The West and the Nation: Essays in Honour of W.L. Morton*, (Toronto 1976), 232–45; and "Political Parties and Civic Power: Winnipeg, 1919–1975," in Alan F.J. Artibise and Gilbert A. Stelter, eds., *The Usable Urban Past: Planning and Politics in the Modern Canadian City* (Toronto 1979), 155–65. There are also two brief biographies of John Queen, a key figure in the Winnipeg General Strike and twice Winnipeg's mayor (1935–1936 and 1938–1942): A.B. McKillop, "The Socialist as Citizen: John

The city of Regina was part of the new urban landscape the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) created when it built its main line across the southern prairies in the early 1880s. Founded in 1882, it grew slowly until the turn of the century, when settlers finally began to arrive in substantial numbers to take up land nearby. Regina then became an important transportation and service hub. By 1911 it was served by all three of the nation's transcontinental railways. (But since none made Regina a divisional point, their presence in the city created fewer jobs than in rival cities like Moose Jaw which did come to perform this role). Regina also became the primary retail and wholesale distribution centre for the southern half of the province's grain belt and the largest manufacturing centre (in a province where manufacturing was of relatively minor importance).³

Regina's population was growing too – from 6,169 in 1906 to 30,213 in 1911 – and becoming more ethnically diverse. Those of Anglo-Celtic origin, principally Canadians who had come to the city from other provinces or immigrants from Great Britain, were of course the largest group: 69.4 per cent by 1911. Germans were the next largest demographic group, comprising 9.1 per cent of the city's population. Ukrainians and other central and eastern Europeans accounted for another 12.5 per cent of the population.⁴

Class distinctions also became more sharply drawn, and a growing sense of working-class consciousness gave rise to trade unions and the founding of the Regina Trades and Labour Council (RTLCC) in 1906. The building trades and the printers dominated the RTLCC from the outset. Moderation was the watchword even in 1919. When some 35,000 workers in Winnipeg left their jobs in early May as part of the general strike, the RTLCC promptly canvassed member unions to see if they wanted to walk out in support: 11 of the 25 affiliated

Queen and the Mayoralty of Winnipeg, 1935," *Historical and Scientific Society of Manitoba, Transactions*, 3 (1973–1974), 61–80, and Harry and Mildred Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* (Edmonton 1997), 343–81. Much smaller Brandon has also attracted a good deal of attention: Eroll Black, "Labour in Brandon Civic Politics: A Long View," *Manitoba History*, 23 (Spring 1992), 2–16; Eroll Black and Tom Mitchell, *A Square Deal For All: Historical Essays on Labour in Brandon* (St. John's 2000); W. Leland Clark, *Brandon's Politics and Politicians* (Brandon 1981), and Tom Mitchell, "A Square Deal for All and No Railroadings: Labour and Politics in Brandon, 1900–1920," *Prairie Forum*, 15 (Spring 1990), 45–65. The literature on other prairie cities is thin. Labour's fortunes in Calgary and Edmonton municipal politics are discussed briefly in Alvin Finkel, "The Rise and Fall of the Labor Party in Alberta, 1917–42," *Labour / Le Travail*, 16 (Fall 1985), 61–96. Labour's involvement in Calgary civic politics is examined in more detail (but only to 1929) in David Bright, *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883–1929* (Vancouver 1998).

3. J. William Brennan, *Regina: An illustrated History* (Toronto 1989), 11–19, 21–33, 55–63; John Larsen and Maurice Richard Libby, *Moose Jaw: People, Places, History* (Regina 2001), 7–18.

4. Brennan, *Regina*, 63–66, Tables v, viii. By 1931, when the city's population was 53,209, Reginans of British ethnic origin comprised 67.3 per cent of the total, Germans 13.5 per cent and Ukrainians and other central and eastern Europeans 9.9 per cent.

locals voted to do so while 9 others remained undecided. Two weeks later it decided to take no further action. A renegade group did form a provisional strike committee; some 200 construction labourers, electricians, and railway shopmen left their jobs, but returned to work within a few days.⁵

In August of the same year, the RTLC voted by a wide margin to retain its affiliation with the international craft unions rather than join the One Big Union (OBU), a new mass industrial union committed to the use of general strikes to improve the lot of the worker. The OBU did manage to sign up a few recruits – there was an OBU unit in Regina as late as 1930 – but only a few.⁶ Another challenger to the craft unions affiliated with the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada appeared in Regina in 1930, when the CBRE, part of the rival All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL), signed up the employees of Canadian National Railways (CNR). The ACCL then established a local council in the city.⁷

Reluctant to support general strikes, the RTLC had no qualms about entering the municipal political arena. Indeed it began to do so soon after its founding: in 1914 the RTLC nominated three candidates and voted the sum of \$50 to assist in their election to city council. What animated Regina trade unionists' first tentative steps into the political arena was an ideology that historian Craig Heron and others have characterized as "labourism." "Labourism," Heron argues,

was the political expression of a distinct layer of the working class – the skilled workers in manufacturing, construction and mining, who might be referred to collectively as crafts-workers. The leadership and active membership of the labourist cause came almost entirely from this group of printers, carpenters, plumbers, cigarmakers, moulders, coal miners, and so on. In fact, there was usually a great overlap in personnel between the local craft-dominated trades and labour council or the district miners' organization and the same community's Labour Party....Like activists in the British Labour Party...these working-class politicians usually preferred to discuss issues of practical and immediate importance and seldom presented lengthy or lofty statements of their perspective on the world. It was quite common to hear labourist candidates promising simply 'a square deal' for workers.⁸

5. Walter Joseph Carl Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan: The TLC Years, 1905–1945," PhD thesis, University of Alberta, 1971, 11–15, 67–69; Jim Warren and Kathleen Carlisle, *On the Side of the People: A History of Labour in Saskatchewan* (Regina 2005), 37–40, 68–70. For a comparative study of the reaction of organized labour and working people across the prairies to the events of May and June 1919 in Winnipeg, see Tom Mitchell and James Naylor, "The Prairies: In the Eye of the Storm" in Craig Heron, ed., *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917–1925* (Toronto 1998), 176–230.

6. Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan," 85–91, 95.

7. Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan," 136; Warren and Carlisle, *On the Side of the People*, 92.

8. Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Regina Trades and Labour Council Papers (RTLC Papers), Minutes, 29 October 1914; Craig Heron, "Labourism and the Canadian Working Class," *Labour/Le travail*, 13 (Spring 1984), 46, 50. Other works which have examined the emergence of "labourism" as a political ideology and how and why trade unions embraced it

And so it was in Regina. As one of the Labour candidates, painter W.E. Cocks, put it in 1914:

We have never had a real labor representative on the city council. They have always been real estate men, contractors or business men who had the employers' interests at heart, and it could hardly be expected that they would look at things from our viewpoint....Instead of looking at questions from the standpoint of profit first and the welfare of the workers as a secondary consideration, a true labor candidate would place the welfare of the men first.⁹

By all accounts the Labour candidates waged a spirited campaign that year, but none were elected.

The following year the RTLC established a Labour Representation League (LRL). Modelled on a similar organization in Winnipeg, it was to be at arm's length from the RTLC. The LRL put only one candidate in the field: Harry Perry. A bookbinder by trade, Perry had long been active in the RTLC; by 1915 he was its vice-president and also president of the LRL.¹⁰ In an attempt to appeal to a broader segment of the electorate, Perry emphasized in his campaign speeches that he was "not only running in the interests of organized labour, but also in the interests of the working man who did not belong to any union."¹¹ Perry won a seat on city council, finishing fourth in a field of thirteen.¹²

Who voted for Harry Perry? An examination of patterns of residential differentiation in Regina based on occupation, class, and ethnicity provides an important (albeit imprecise) part of the answer. At this time – and indeed throughout the 1920s and 1930s – working-class Reginans who had come to the city from other parts of Canada, Great Britain, or Europe for the most part lived east and north of its downtown core, which was itself located south of the CPR main line. Its more well-to-do (and overwhelmingly Anglo-Celtic) citizens showed a strong preference for the residential neighbourhoods west and south of downtown.¹³ Perry's best showing was in Polling Subdivisions 1 and 5, where he finished fourth and third respectively. (Figure 1)

during the late 19th and early 20th centuries include Errol Black and Tom Mitchell, *A Square Deal For All*; David Bright, *The Limits of Labour*; Gordon Hak, "The Socialist and Labourist Impulse in Small-Town British Columbia: Port Alberni and Prince George, 1911–33," *Canadian Historical Review*, 70 (December 1989), 519–42; Mark Leier, *Red Flags and Red Tape: The Making of a Labour Bureaucracy* (Toronto 1995), and A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899–1919* (Toronto 1977).

9. Regina *Morning Leader* (*Morning Leader*), 10 November 1914.

10. SAB, RTLC Papers, Minutes, 28 December 1914, 7 January 1915, 11 January 1915; *Morning Leader*, 21 September 1915.

11. Regina *Evening Province and Standard* (*Province and Standard*), 9 December 1915.

12. *Morning Leader*, 14 December 1915. All statistics on municipal election results and voter turnout are drawn from Regina's daily newspapers. They invariably provided their readers with timely and accurate tabulations, and were quick to update the vote numbers in the case of recounts (which were infrequent in any case).

13. Brennan, *Regina*, 71–83, 126. This description of the ethnic and class characteristics of

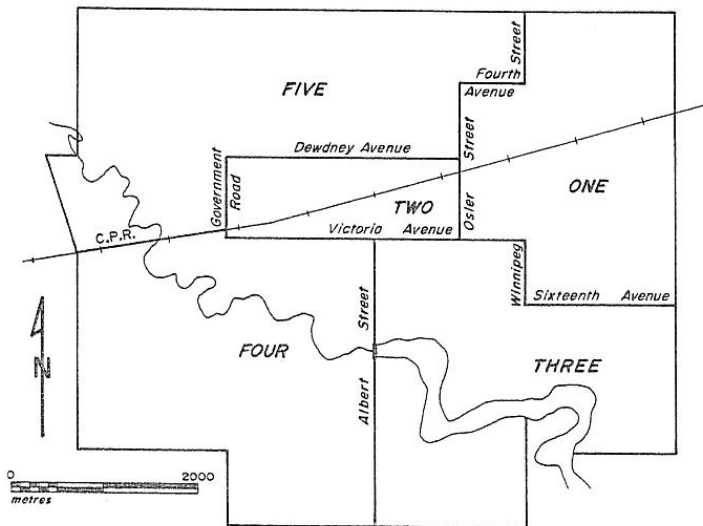


Figure 1: Polling Subdivisions, 1915

Regina's various neighbourhoods must admittedly be an impressionistic one. There is not the same kind of detailed census data available for Regina as that which underpins John H. Taylor's study of Winnipeg, Edmonton, and Vancouver in "Urban Social Organization and Urban Discontent: The 1930s," in David Jay Bercuson, ed., *Western Perspectives I* (Toronto 1974), 33–44, or Jean Barman's analysis in "Neighbourhood and Community in Interwar Vancouver: Residential Differentiation and Civic Voting Behavior" *BC Studies*, 69–70 (Spring–Summer 1986), 97–141. Barman was also able to make use of popular histories of some of Vancouver's neighbourhoods, but for Regina there is only one of any value: *Regina North Side Stories* (Regina 1982).

It should also be noted at the outset that in the 19th and early 20th centuries the municipal franchise in Regina (as in other cities) was quite restricted. When Regina was incorporated as a town in 1883 only men (and unmarried women and widows) who owned property assessed at a value of at least \$200 for tax purposes were eligible to vote; candidates for alderman or mayor had to own property worth at least \$500. These same provisions were included in the Territorial ordinance incorporating Regina as a city in 1903, in Regina's special charter enacted by the Saskatchewan legislature in 1906, and in the province's omnibus *City Act* which replaced it in 1908. A 1912 amendment to the *City Act* reduced the property qualification for candidates to the same level as it was for voters (\$200). In 1915 the vote was extended to all men and women who either met the property qualification (still fixed at \$200) or paid at least \$100 annually in rent. The municipal franchise would be further widened in 1917: henceforth any resident who paid at least \$10 in licence fees could also vote. In 1920 the \$200 minimum for property owners would be dropped altogether.

During the period examined in this article Regina's city council was comprised of ten aldermen and a mayor. Aldermen served for two years, but their terms were staggered so that half had to seek re-election each year. The mayor was elected for one year. When Regina adopted the ward system in 1934 and then abandoned it in 1936 all members of city council were obliged to seek re-election. See Brennan, *Regina*, 39–41, 84, 143–45, 206.

Through the war years and the 1920s the RTALC continued to throw its organizational and financial support behind the one or two trade unionists who annually sought a seat on city council. The RTALC also worked closely with the LRL as long as the latter remained in existence (until 1917), and with the Dominion Labour Party (DLP) and the Canadian Labour Party, both of which sought to make inroads in Saskatchewan in the 1920s. The Regina branch of the DLP was founded in 1922 but disappeared within a year. A branch of the Canadian Labour Party appeared in 1923 and enjoyed somewhat greater longevity.¹⁴

The results at the polls can be briefly summarized. Harry Perry won reelection five more times under the LRL and Canadian Labour Party banners before finally stepping down as an alderman in 1927. None of the other three Labour candidates elected to city council during these years – typographers James Habkirk, Gordon Merlin, and William Vennels – served more than a single term, however, and the Canadian Labour Party was completely shut out in the 1927 and 1928 municipal elections.

Allied with these few Labour aldermen was Regina school teacher M.J. Coldwell, the future leader of the federal CCF. He was first elected to city council as the candidate of the North East Ratepayers' Association in 1921, and won again in 1923, 1926, and 1928. In 1929 Coldwell and other social democrats in Regina, including another school teacher, Clarence Fines, joined with the RTALC in establishing an Independent Labour Party (ILP) modelled on a party of the same name which had appeared in Manitoba nine years earlier. Its founders envisioned that the ILP would eventually contest elections at all levels in Saskatchewan. What drew trade unionists and school teachers like Coldwell and Fines together in such a political venture? Was it the disappointing results for Labour in municipal elections (not to mention provincial and federal ones) that convinced the RTALC to turn to what Craig Heron calls “the articulate middle classes” in the hope of making a broader appeal among voters in Regina? And why were Coldwell and Fines drawn into the Labour camp? Coldwell's biographers argue that from his arrival in the city in 1919 he took a keen interest in the plight of working-class Reginans, whose children he taught at Haultain School on the city's North Side and whose votes launched his career in municipal politics. As for Fines, he was by his own admission influenced by Coldwell's example.¹⁵ The ILP's first test at the polls came in

14. SAB, RTALC Papers, Minutes, 12 June 1916, 13 November 1922, 26 November 1923; Correspondence, H. Perry to RTALC, 18 October 1924, E. Ross to H. Perry, 29 October 1924; *Morning Leader*, 21 March 1922, 22 November 1923.

15. *Morning Leader*, 28 September 1929; *Regina Daily Star* (*Daily Star*) 28 September 1929, 30 September 1929; Walter D. Young, “M.J. Coldwell: The Making of a Social Democrat,” *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 10 (August 1974), 52–59; Stewart, *M. J. Coldwell*, 69–88; Fines, “Impossible Dream,” 37–53.

Only one Labour candidate was nominated in Regina in the three provincial and three fed-

the 1930 civic election. It put two candidates in the field: M. J. Coldwell and Garnet Menzies (another typographer), and both were victorious.

By this time Regina was beginning to feel the full impact of falling wheat prices and the drought that was devastating much of southern Saskatchewan. Unemployment in the city reached unprecedented levels in 1930 and 1931, as retail and wholesale firms dependent on the farm trade began to let men go. So did the General Motors automobile assembly plant, which opened in 1928. It was the largest private employer in the city, but it ceased production altogether in August 1930 and laid off its entire staff of 850. Building construction also came to an almost complete standstill. In 1929 the city had issued a record \$10 million worth of building permits; two years later the total was only a tenth of that, and skilled and unskilled construction workers alike faced bleak prospects. By June 1931 fully 23 per cent of all adult male wage earners (3,872 men) in Regina were out of work and looking to the city to provide them with relief.¹⁶

What they received was hardly generous. Grocery relief was based on an allowance of \$18 a month for a family of four, provided in the form of a voucher; it was subsequently reduced to \$16 in 1932. There were other vouchers covering rent and fuel, and relief recipients were required to promise to repay the amount of their debt. The city initially distributed relief itself, but in September 1931 turned the work over to a private body, the Civic Relief Board.¹⁷

The cost of providing even this minimal assistance grew dramatically. In 1929, 1930, and 1931 the city spent a total of \$543,505 on direct relief. Expenditures in 1932 alone added another \$621,150, and by 1935 the accumulated cost of direct relief in Regina stood at \$4,754,216. The provincial and federal governments assumed two-thirds of the cost of direct relief at this time, but limited their contribution to the actual relief payments. The city was responsible for all of the associated administrative expenses, and for the cost of providing medical care to those who were on relief. Thus Regina was actually funding close to half of all relief expenditures. Until 1931 it met its share entirely out of current revenues, but in succeeding years capitalized half or more of the cost of direct relief.¹⁸

The distribution of relief in Regina did not long escape criticism from the ILP or from local Communists. The Communist Party of Canada (CPC) had been

eral elections that took place during the 1920s. Harry Perry finished fourth in a field of five in the city's two-member constituency in the 1921 provincial contest. See Saskatchewan Archives Board, *Saskatchewan Executive and Legislative Directory, 1905–1970* (Regina 1970), 133.

16. Brennan, *Regina*, Table XI; *Census of Canada*, 1931, VI, 1268.

17. City of Regina Archives (CORA), City Council Minutes, 25 September 1931, 6 October 1931; James M. Pitsula, "The Mixed Social Economy of Unemployment Relief in Regina during the 1930s," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, 15 (2004), 100–108.

18. Brennan, *Regina*, 137.

active in Regina since the early 1920s, but its efforts went largely unnoticed until 1930 when a branch of the National Unemployed Workers' Association (NUWA) appeared in the city.¹⁹ Its persistent lobbying of city council on the subject of relief soon began to attract the attention of the local press.²⁰ So did the May Day rally (Regina's first) which the NUWA organized the following year. It drew a crowd of 8,000 and ended in violence when some onlookers took exception to the presence of a red flag at the head of the parade that made its way through downtown Regina once the rally was over.²¹

These stirrings on the far left provoked a response from some of the city's businessmen, who established the Regina Taxpayers' Association (RTA) in September 1931. There was talk initially of sponsoring candidates in the upcoming municipal election. None were, but the RTA did press city council to practice "rigid economy." Since all but the two ILP aldermen were wedded to fiscal orthodoxy, council did not need much convincing: in October 1931, it cut civic salaries by 10 per cent. Regina's school boards, public library, and city-run General Hospital promptly followed suit.²²

In the 1931 civic election local Communists put a candidate in the field for the first time: Herbert Court. Court came to prominence as part of a Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL) delegation that had complained to city council about police mistreatment of the unemployed.²³ Court ran for mayor and finished last in a field of four. The following year a third Labour alderman – Alban C. Ellison – was elected to city council (in an April 1932 by-election). British-born, Ellison had served in the Royal Navy during World War I, and had been practicing law in the city since 1921. He had also helped to establish

19. The founding of the NUWA and its activities (and those of its successor, the National Committee of Unemployed Councils) during the 1930s are discussed at some length in Stephen L. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag: The Workers' Unity League of Canada, 1930–1936* (Toronto 2012) and John Manley, "'Starve, Be Damned!' Communists and Canada's Urban Unemployed, 1929–1939," *Canadian Historical Review*, 79 (September 1998), 466–91.

The RCMP had paid more attention to the communist presence in Regina, dispatching Constable John Leopold to the city for a time. Posing as a house painter named Jack Esselwein, Leopold became "Organizer and Literature Agent" of the communist cell in Regina, and also participated in the founding of the local branch of the Canadian Labour Party in Regina in 1923. Library and Archives Canada (LAC), Canadian Security Intelligence Service, CSIS Records, RG 146, file 117-91-87, J.W. Esselwein to A.B. Allard, 12 March 1922, J.W. Esselwein to A.B. Allard, 3 January [1923], J.W. Esselwein to A.B. Allard, 23 November 1923. For a more detailed biography of Esselwein, see Steve Hewitt, "Royal Canadian Mounted Spy: The Secret Life of John Leopold/Jack Esselwein," *Intelligence and National Security*, 15, 1 (Spring 2000), 144–68.

20. *Daily Star*, 18 June 1930, 4 July 1930, 9 January 1931, 8 April 1931.

21. *Daily Star*, 2 May 1931; *The Worker* (Toronto), 9 May 1931.

22. *Daily Star*, 4 September 1931, 7 November 1931; CORA, City Council Minutes, 27 October 1931, 1 December 1931.

23. CORA, City Clerk's Correspondence Files, File 3898 (a), H. Court to city council, 27 February 1931.

the Royal Canadian Navy Volunteer Reserve (RCNVR) unit in Regina in 1925. Ellison was elected under a new party label, the Co-operative Labour Party (CLP). With ILP branches in Saskatoon, Weyburn, Moose Jaw, and Melville by 1931, party leaders decided that it would henceforth concentrate on provincial politics. The CLP was established to carry on the work in civic elections.²⁴ The RTLC was one of the founding members of the CLP, along with the local ACCL council, but it soon afterwards withdrew. The RTLC would, however, continue to make token financial contributions to Labour candidates in subsequent elections.²⁵

Labour's growing political strength prompted Regina businessmen to found the Civic Government Association (CGA) in October 1932. It was modelled on a similar organization in Calgary, though in some respects it was more an offshoot of the RTA. The CGA purported to be concerned only with encouraging greater citizen participation in local politics, but its real *raison d'être* was to prevent Regina's socialists from capturing City Hall. To this end it endorsed a slate of aldermanic candidates in the fall civic election, three of whom were elected.²⁶ During the campaign the CGA had called for financial retrenchment. In 1933 its successful aldermanic candidates initiated a wide-ranging review of the civic administration that resulted in further salary cuts – from 10 per cent to 50 per cent on a sliding scale, with the highest paid staff absorbing the greatest blow. Some civic departments were merged, all in the interest of "economy."²⁷

While Labour had gained a secure foothold on city council by the early 1930s, it was not yet prepared to contest the mayoralty. James McAra, a successful businessman, and James Balfour, a prominent lawyer, successively held Regina's highest elected office during the early Depression years. Then in 1933 Cornelius Rink, a small businessman who had briefly served on city council before World War I and in the mid-1920s, was swept into the mayor's office on a populist platform. Rink promised to help the unemployed and the small taxpayer by replacing relief vouchers with cash payments, providing work for the jobless, and cutting city taxes. Voter turnout in 1933 was the highest in the city's history (65.3 per cent) and "Honest Connie" piled up large majorities in Regina's traditional working-class neighbourhoods: Polling Subdivisions 1–6 and 14–20. (Figure 2) The four "business" candidates seeking the mayoralty split the vote in the downtown and in the well-to-do neighbourhoods to

24. *Daily Star*, 16 September 1931, 6 April 1932; Fines, "Impossible Dream," 81–82, 88–89.

25. W.J.C. Cherwinski argues that the RTLC withdrew because social democrats such as Clarence Fines and members of the ACCL (notably the CBRE's John Toothill) were exercising too much influence within the CLP. See Cherwinski, "Organized Labour in Saskatchewan," 260–61.

26. *Daily Star*, 31 October 1932, 1 November 1932, 5 November 1932, 19 November 1932.

27. CORA, City Council Minutes, 17 January 1933, 23 February 1933, 27 February 1933, 2 March 1933.

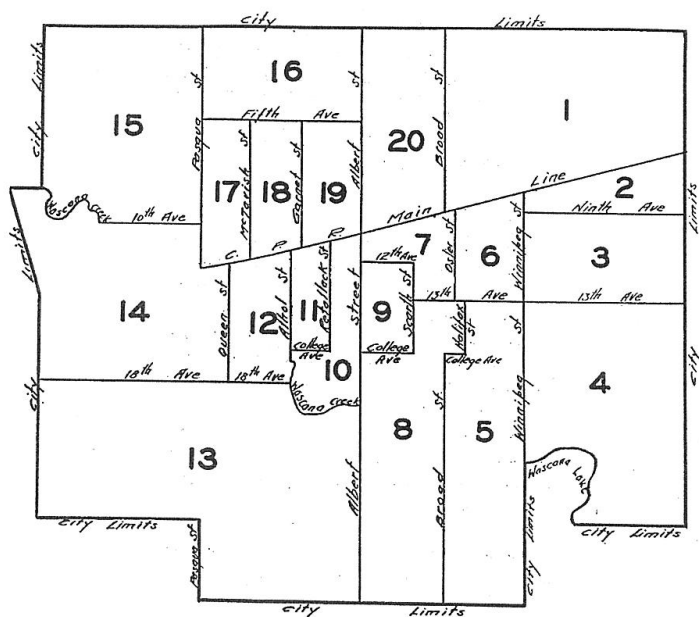


Figure 2: Polling Subdivisions, 1927–1934, 1937–1939

the west and south. Mayor Rink won a second term, albeit by a substantially reduced margin, in 1934.²⁸

Labour put up a full slate of aldermanic candidates for the first time in 1934, but they did not run under the CLP banner. The CLP had decided to put all of its efforts into provincial politics in support of the CCF. The CLP merged with the CCF's constituency organization in Regina, and the CLL took its place in the municipal political arena.²⁹ Two of the CLL's candidates, Clarence Fines and

28. J. William Brennan, "A Populist in Municipal Politics: Cornelius Rink, 1909–1914," *Prairie Forum*, 20 (Spring 1995), 63–86; "From 'Honest Connie' to 'Rockpile Rink': The Political Rise and Fall of Cornelius Rink in 1930s Regina," *Urban History Review/ Revue d'histoire urbaine*, 40 (Spring 2012), 29–44.

29. *Daily Star*, 27 August 1934, 28 August 1934; *Regina Leader-Post (Leader-Post)*, 29 August 1934, 30 October 1934. The roots of the CCF in Saskatchewan went back to July 1932, when the ILP and the United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) founded the Farmer-Labour Party. Members of the Farmer-Labour Party (including its leader, M.J. Coldwell, and Clarence Fines) were among those who met in Calgary a month later to establish the CCF. The Farmer-Labour Party did not adopt the CCF label until after the 1934 provincial election. Coldwell served as leader of the Farmer-Labour Party until 1934. He then ran as a CCF candidate in the 1935 federal election (in Rosetown-Biggar) and was elected to the House of Commons. He would succeed J.S. Woodsworth as leader of the national CCF in 1942. See Fines, "Impossible Dream," 91–107; George Hoffman, "The Saskatchewan Farmer-Labour Party, 1932–1934: How Radical Was It At Its Origins?," *Saskatchewan History*, 28 (Spring 1975), 52–64; Lipset,

Dr. Denis Sweeney, were successful. The CGA won the other three seats. With two CLL and three CGA aldermen serving the second year of their two-year terms in 1935, Labour now had four seats on city council and its opponents six.

Labour finally won control of city council in the 1935 municipal election. This was also the first time Labour nominated a candidate for mayor, and Alban C. Ellison won handily, polling 4,314 votes to 3,586 for the incumbent, Mayor Rink, and 2,782 for Charles Dixon, the stronger of the two traditional “business” candidates seeking the mayoralty this time.

As for Cornelius Rink, he was hobbled by his record in office. Rink had always claimed to be the champion of Regina’s “outsiders,” those who lived in the working-class neighbourhoods east and north of Regina’s downtown. In 1933, when he first won the mayoralty, Rink had seemed a fresh alternative to the more orthodox members of Regina’s business elite who had held office previously. But two years later Rink was the incumbent, with a record to defend, and an unpopular one at that. He had promised to substitute cash for relief vouchers and to provide work for Regina’s unemployed, but he had failed to deliver on either promise. To be sure, city council had agreed in March 1935 to do away with grocery vouchers “as soon as possible.” But J. G. Gardiner’s ruling provincial Liberal government was typically two to three months behind in paying its share of the cost of direct relief in Regina, and the city had been obliged to borrow to cover the shortfall. Paying grocery relief in cash would have entailed more borrowing, and this was out of the question. At year’s end the voucher system was still in effect.³⁰

The provision of clothing to those who were on relief had also become a controversial issue during Rink’s term as mayor. Clothing was at this time only available through private charity. In 1929 one of the city’s daily newspapers, the *Leader-Post*, had established a Community Clothing Depot which collected and distributed used clothing. Then in 1931 the operation of the Clothing Depot had been turned over to the Regina Welfare Bureau, which was established that year to coordinate the efforts of the various charitable organizations then engaged in relief work. Most of what was given out continued to be second hand, but beginning in 1933 the bureau launched a fund-raising campaign so that it could also purchase new garments. Complaints from those on relief were inevitable: much of the clothing was of poor quality, it often did not fit properly and could not easily be exchanged, and the whole system was judged demeaning.³¹

Agrarian Socialism, 79–85; Stewart, *M.J. Coldwell*, 107–42.

30. CORA, City Council Minutes, 5 March 1935; *Leader-Post*, 6 June 1935, 10 June 1935, 9 December 1935; *Daily Star*, 8 June 1935, 20 November 1935.

31. CORA, City Clerk’s Correspondence Files, file 4210(b), City of Regina relief regulations, 1934; file 4210(a), Regina Union of Unemployed to city council, 16 January 1934; City Council Minutes, 16 January 1934; Pitsula, “Unemployed Relief in Regina,” 110–17.

By 1934 Regina's unemployed organizations and the Labour aldermen were demanding that the Community Clothing Depot be abolished, and that the Civic Relief Board introduce an "open voucher" system in which such vouchers could be redeemed at any retail outlet in the city.³² The mayor also favoured the change, and in October city council instructed the Civic Relief Board to begin issuing vouchers for clothing upon the recommendation of the Welfare Bureau's investigators. The bureau refused to co-operate, however, and Rink was obliged to back down.³³

Rink's promise to find work for the unemployed and pay them in cash had also proven impossible to implement and again for financial reasons. Instead there had been a "credit work" scheme. Under this scheme, men were put to work on city projects but received no pay; their wages were simply credited against their entitlement to relief. There were two relief strikes, in May and October 1935, to protest against this new policy. Even the CLL aldermen joined in the chorus of objections to what was termed "slave labour."³⁴

In the election campaign that fall, the CLL sought to capitalize on Reginans' dissatisfaction not just with Rink's record as mayor, but with the legacy of his predecessors as well. It promised to abolish the Civic Relief Board and the voucher system. The CLL also vowed to restore the cuts in civic salaries which had been imposed earlier in the Depression, and inaugurate a "work and wages" scheme. In contrast, Rink had little to offer voters in 1935, apart from a folksy appeal to voters to preserve the status quo. "Don't throw away your old shoes," he told an audience late in the campaign. "Hang onto them and you'll be comfortable." Reginans ignored Rink and voted for change.³⁵

Another factor that influenced the outcome of the mayoralty and especially the aldermanic elections in 1935 was the division of the city into wards. That measure was approved by Reginans in a special vote the year before. This clearly benefited the CLL, since the ward boundaries roughly conformed to the existing class divisions within the city. This enabled the CLL to concentrate its efforts in those neighbourhoods where Labour had traditionally done well. The CLL made a clean sweep in Wards One and Three and elected one

32. CORA, City Council Minutes, 15 February 1934, 3 July 1934.

33. CORA, Special Committee of the Whole Council Minutes, 4 October 1934, 5 October 1934, 18 October 1934; City Council Minutes, 25 October 1934; City Clerk's Correspondence Files, file 4210(e), J. G. Nickerson to Mayor and aldermen, 10 October 1934; Pitsula, "Unemployed Relief in Regina," 118–20.

34. *Leader-Post*, 6 March 1935, 20 March 1935, 22 March 1935, 3 October 1935, 5 October 1935, 7–8 October 1935. The frustrations of men on relief were giving rise to strikes in other cities, such as Calgary (in 1933), Edmonton (in 1934) and Prince George (in 1935) to cite only three that have drawn the attention of historians. On this see Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 207–209; Finkel, "Labour Party in Alberta," 86–87; Gordon Hak, "The Communists and the Unemployed in the Prince George District, 1930–1935," *BC Studies*, 68 (Winter 1985–86), 56–58.

35. *Leader-Post*, 15 November 1935, 21 November 1935.

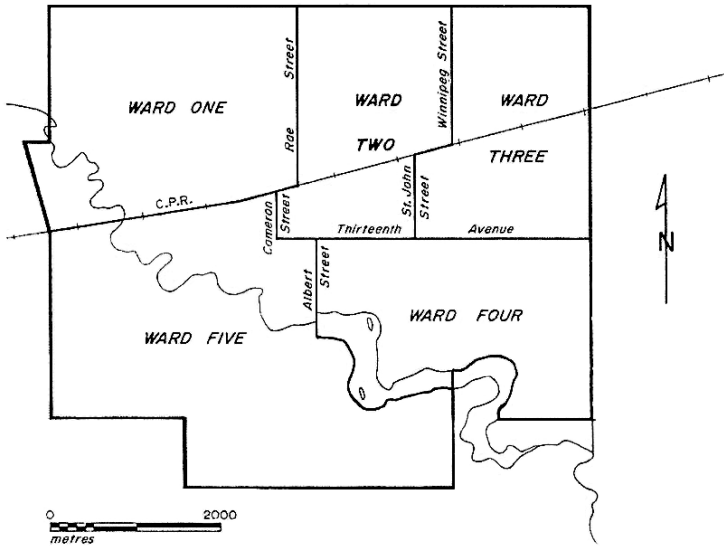


Figure 3: Wards, 1935–1936

alderman in each of Wards Two and Four. Conversely, the ward system forced three incumbents opposed to Labour into the same ward, Ward Five. The same pattern was repeated in the mayoralty vote, with Ellison winning Wards One, Three, and Four handily. Rink obtained a majority in Ward Two, but it was a slim one. Charles Dixon carried Ward Five. (Figure 3)

Labour was also better organized than its rival. While the CGA inexplicably decided to disband with the advent of the ward system, the CLL created five new ward-based political organizations and a Central Labour Council that was comprised of four representatives from each ward. The ward organizations were responsible for nominating the CLL's aldermanic candidates, the Central Labour Council chose a candidate for mayor, drafted a platform that would be referred to the ward organizations for their approval, and co-ordinated the CLL campaigns across the city.³⁶ Voter turnout was somewhat higher in 1935 than it had been the previous year, 61 per cent as opposed to 58.4 per cent. This might be taken as proof that the CLL's new city-wide organization had done its job in getting out the vote, but the prospect of being able to elect a Labour mayor might have also been a factor.

Among those who sat on the Central Labour Council were T. G. McManus and Peter Mikkelsen. McManus most certainly was a member of the CPC. He

36. *Leader-Post*, 12 September 1935, 30 October 1935, 16 November 1935; *Worker*, 2 November 1935.

had twice run unsuccessfully as a communist Candidate for alderman in 1933 and 1934; in the former contest he finished 16th in a field of 21, while in the latter he placed 13th in a field of 21. Mikkelson had long been active in local organizations of the unemployed; by 1935 he was president of the Regina Union of Unemployed and also sat on the Saskatchewan CCF's Political Directive Board. Freidrich Steininger describes Mikkelson as a "known Communist," but the Royal Canadian Mounted Police came closer to the truth when they labelled him a "Left Winger of the C.C.F. and Communist sympathizer."³⁷ Mikkelson and McManus were nominated by their ward organizations (Wards One and Three respectively) and both subsequently won seats on city council.

This might seem surprising, for the CPC had for a period rejected any co-operation with the various Labour parties scattered across Canada and, after 1932, with the CCF. To Canada's Communists, following the party line in the early years of the Depression, all social democrats were to be disparaged and dismissed as "social fascists." However, as is well known, the party line changed in the summer of 1935, when the goal of international Communism became the creation of a broad-based "Popular Front" to resist the spread of fascism in Europe and elsewhere. In Canada, as Stephen Endicott and John Manley have noted, this shift of philosophy and tactics had actually begun within the CPC two years earlier. At the same time, as historians of the CCF have noted, some social democrats also began to see the merits of co-operating with the Communists, informally if not formally.³⁸

In Regina such mutual interest in working together had first manifested itself in March 1935, when the city's CCF council and local Communists agreed to jointly press for more generous relief payments and the adoption of a national non-contributory unemployment insurance scheme, and also to oppose "forced labor and the disfranchisement and partial disfranchisement of workers whether employed or unemployed." It was also agreed, the *Leader-Post* reported, that "while this 'united front' is in force the two parties will refrain from attacking and criticizing each other."³⁹ Not surprisingly, the wording was somewhat different in *The Worker*, the Communist Party's newspaper:

Both parties agree that while this united action agreement is in force the two parties will abstain from attacking, insulting, or criticizing the organizations and individuals participating loyally in the united action; nevertheless each party will maintain its complete independence in order to develop its propaganda and assure its own recruiting.

37. Steininger, "George H. Williams," 160; Gregory S. Kealey and Reg Whitaker, eds., *R.C.M.P. Security Bulletins: The Depression Years, Part II, 1935* (St. John's 1995), 614. For a list of the 20 representatives elected to the Central Labour Council see *Daily Star*, 26 October 1935.

38. Endicott, *Raising the Workers' Flag*, 302–319; John Manley, "'Communists Love Canada!': The Communist Party of Canada, the 'People' and the Popular Front, 1933–1939," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 36 (Winter 2001/2002), 59–86; Young, *Anatomy of a Party*, 255–65; Steininger, "George H. Williams," 152–60.

39. *Leader-Post*, 15 March 1935.

In the interests of united action, each party reserves the right to denounce those who, having made these definite pledges, tend to evade the application thereof, as well as those who, during the action, take an attitude or commit acts which may be detrimental to the success of the activities engaged in.⁴⁰

Some within the CCF must have had misgivings about co-operating with the CPC in this way, because the party's central office subsequently sought to clarify the extent of this agreement:

When there has been oppression or injustice in any community, the local CCF organizations have organized in company with other protesting groups to eliminate this condition. In the City of Regina, relief tenants were threatened with evictions and forced labor. The local CCF organization collaborated with other working class groups, one of which was the Saskatchewan Union of Unemployed and another, the Communist Party. This was no political arrangement between the CCF or either of these groups and any efforts to make it appear as such can only be considered as manoeuvres, whether these efforts are made by the capitalist press or the communist press.⁴¹

A United Action Committee (UAC) was soon established, and wasted no time in presenting its list of demands to city council. These, as it turned out, were more modest: that the relief food quota be increased by 25 per cent, that "forced labor" (Mayor Rink's unpopular "credit work" scheme) be abolished, and that landlords be prohibited from evicting tenants who were on relief. The UAC received a sympathetic hearing from the Labour aldermen, but not from the rest of city council.⁴²

The On-to-Ottawa Trek had also drawn social democrats and Communists closer together through the Citizens' Emergency Committee (CEC). It was created on 13 June, the day before the Trekkers arrived in Regina, to provide moral and financial support while they were in the city. The UAC was one of the founding members of the CEC, along with the CCF's Regina council and the local branch of the Co-operative Commonwealth Youth Movement. So were the local units of the CPC and several of its affiliated organizations including the CLDL, Canadian League Against War and Fascism, Ukrainian Labour-Farmer Temple Association, Women's Labour League, and Young Communist League. Social democrats Alban Ellison, United Church minister Samuel B. East, CNR clerk (and member of the CBRE) John Toothill, and Peter Mikkelson all played an active role in the work of the CEC. Ellison, East, Toothill, and Clarence Fines also spoke at public meetings to rally support for the Trekkers. In doing so, they often shared the platform with Regina's most prominent Communist, T.G. McManus.⁴³

40. *Worker*, 19 March 1935.

41. SAB, United Farmers of Canada (Saskatchewan Section) Papers, VIII, file 31, Central Office to CCF Campaign Managers, Candidates and Directive Board Members, 11 June 1935.

42. *Daily Star*, 3 April 1935; *Leader-Post*, 4 April 1935.

43. For a list of the founding members of the CEC, see SAB, Regina Riot Inquiry Commission Records (RRIC Records), Exhibit # 59, Citizen's Emergency Committee minutes, 13 June 1935. In

If the turnout at the various public rallies that took place over the next three weeks was any indication, Reginans had shown considerable support for the Trek. The city refused to sanction a tag day, but the Trekkers held one anyway and collected \$1,446.⁴⁴ While there was reportedly a rush by Regina businesses to purchase riot insurance as the Trekkers approached the city, local businessmen do not appear to have become unduly alarmed. There are no references to the Trek in the minutes of the Regina Board of Trade until 19 June. Then the discussion was confined chiefly to “the organization of the present Citizens’ Committee and ways and means of counteracting the extreme element represented in it.” It is not clear what steps, if any, were taken to this end, but the Board does not appear to have discussed the Trek again. Local service clubs spurned an invitation from the CEC to help organize a picnic for the Trekkers, but their response was not a hostile one. “We’re in sympathy with the boys but not with the movement,” the president of the Rotary Club was reported to have declared.⁴⁵ Of course the riot that occurred on 1 July doubtless alarmed many among the business community.

The Worker was quick to draw a link between the CLL’s dramatic victory in the fall civic election and the On-to-Ottawa Trek: “The men elected are known for the part they have played in the struggles of the workers and in the support and defense of the camp boys. The election was undoubtedly an unequivocal endorsement by the citizens of that stand.”⁴⁶ Stephen Endicott is of the same opinion: “the workers and their allies in Regina exercised their democratic rights in an act of poetic justice to elect a pro-labour majority to City Council in the autumn of 1935, including T.G. McManus, leader of the local Communist Party.”⁴⁷ However, such a conclusion is hard to justify in the case of Alban Ellison, Clarence Fines and Garnet Menzies: each was a popular figure with a considerable political following in the city long before the Trekkers arrived. Menzies had in fact remained silent during the tumultuous events of June and early July 1935, yet still finished first in Ward Two. Only John Toothill, Peter Mikkelson, and T.G. McManus perhaps owed their

addition to the CEC minutes (which cover the period 13–28 June) Regina’s two daily newspapers contain much detail about the activities of the CEC and about the several public demonstrations which took place in Regina while the Trekkers remained in the city.

The most detailed accounts of the On-to-Ottawa Trek are Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator and the State* (Montreal 1987); Victor Howard, “We Were the Salt of the earth”: *The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Regina 1985); and Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Calgary 2003).

44. *Daily Star*, 17 June 1935; *Leader-Post*, 17 June 1935. This was the largest sum any town or city would contribute during the On-to-Ottawa Trek.

45. *Daily Star*, 13 June 1935; *Leader-Post*, 21 June 1935; SAB, Regina Board of Trade Papers, file 17 (k), Council minutes, 19 June 1935.

46. *Worker*, 28 November 1935.

47. *Worker*, 28 November 1935; Endicott, *Raising the Workers’ Flag*, 299.

election victories to the active role they had played in supporting the Trekkers' cause.

On election night a parade of victorious Labour candidates and their jubilant supporters wound its way from the East End through downtown Regina to the steps of City Hall. "The common people have spoken with a mighty voice," John Toothill told the crowd which now numbered 1,000, "the bankers and the bondholders across Canada will tremble in their shoes tonight."⁴⁸ T.G. McManus' interview with a *Daily Star* reporter was directed closer to home:

One of the first things that must be done is to eliminate that clique established at city hall over a period of years....Commissioner Westgate and that inner ring that, in the past, haven't even troubled to carry out the decisions of council are going to get it.

Regina's two daily newspapers took all of this in stride, comforted perhaps by mayor-elect Ellison's reassuring words the day after the election.

The fact that Regina is to have a council dominated by labor for 1936 need cause neither citizens nor civic employees any apprehension....I'm taking the stand of the British Labor party. We will concentrate on the immediate task of maintaining the standard of living of the people. Ours was a platform of improvement of conditions for all classes, and that we will live up to.⁴⁹

The CLL briefly lost control of City Hall early in 1936, when the right of two of the newly elected aldermen to take their seats was challenged in the courts on the grounds that the *City Act* prohibited any person who was indebted to the city from holding municipal office. Peter Mikkelson and T. G. McManus were on relief, and of course had been required to sign notes promising to repay. Before the court could render a verdict, the CLL members of city council attempted to establish the principle that the acceptance of relief did not constitute a debt to the city, but to no avail. Mikkelson and McManus were duly convicted and unseated. By-elections followed, and two new CLL aldermen were elected in their place in May 1936. One of the newcomers was Samuel East; in 1935 he had attempted to lead a convoy of Trekkers out of Regina in defiance of the RCMP.⁵⁰

Mayor Ellison and his Labour colleagues also favoured cancelling all outstanding relief debts. However, the city's right to do so was successfully challenged in the courts by a new "citizens" group which appeared early in 1936, the Regina Home Owners' and Taxpayers' Association (RHOTA).⁵¹ In the

48. *Leader-Post*, 27 November 1935.

49. *Daily Star*, 26 November 1935, 27 November 1935; *Leader-Post*, 27 November 1935, 28 November 1935. Since 1910 there had been two City Commissioners in Regina. One was the city's most senior bureaucrat; R. J. Westgate held this position from 1929 until 1944. The mayor was *ex officio* the other City Commissioner.

50. CORA, City Council Minutes, 22 January 1936, 19 March 1936, 7 April 1936; *Daily Star*, 16 January 1936; *Leader-Post*, 8 April 1936.

51. CORA, City Council Minutes, 22 January 1936; *Daily Star*, 23 January 1936, 29 January

end, the CLL-dominated council did abolish the Civic Relief Board, and established a committee of city council to carry out the work. It also initiated a half-yearly cash payment for clothing and, most important of all, replaced food vouchers with cash.⁵²

It might have been expected that a Labour city council would want to pay relief in cash instead of vouchers, but why did it proceed when its predecessor had not? For one thing, the cost no longer seemed so daunting. In January 1936 the province's Liberal government, now headed by W. J. Patterson, announced that it would henceforth cover 80 per cent (rather than two-thirds) of the cost of actual relief payments, thanks to a more generous schedule of federal relief grants to the provinces.⁵³ Initially this commitment was to remain in effect only until 31 March 1936, when the federal government's existing relief agreements with the provinces expired. In fact, the city's share of the cost of actual relief payments remained at 20 per cent for the remainder of the Depression. (Of course Regina continued to be responsible for all administrative costs, and this would remain a sore point with city council as will be seen.)

Mayor Ellison and his CLL colleagues were also encouraged to act by Saskatoon's experience. In that city significant cost savings had been realized by adopting cash relief. Indeed Saskatoon's relief officer was "loaned" to Regina for several weeks so that he could reorganize Regina's relief bureaucracy, primarily by reducing the number of staff employed in administering relief by nearly two-thirds.⁵⁴ Some of the more radical CLL aldermen also wished to reform civic finances. Samuel East and John Toothill proposed that the city unilaterally reduce the interest payable on \$1.5 million worth of municipal debentures due on 1 August 1936 from 5 per cent to 3.3 per cent. However, even some of their Labour colleagues were critical of such a step and nothing came of it. Prudent financial management actually permitted a modest reduction in the city's portion of the mill rate, which had risen to 27.4 by 1935. In 1936 the city's portion was set at 26.34; the overall rate (for a public school supporter) was 50, compared to 51 the previous year.⁵⁵ The CLL had also promised to inaugurate a "work and wages" program and a housing rehabilitation

1936; *Leader-Post*, 23 January 1936, 31 January 1936, 1 February 1936, 5 February 1936.

52. CORA, City Council Minutes, 6 January 1936, 3 March 1936; *Daily Star*, 4 March 1936; *Leader-Post*, 4 March 1936.

53. *Daily Star*, 9 January 1936; *Leader-Post*, 9 January 1936.

54. CORA, City Council Minutes, 17 March 1936; *Daily Star*, 9 January 1936, 18 March 1936; *Leader-Post*, 18 March 1936.

55. CORA, City Council Minutes, 7 July 1936; *Daily Star*, 8 July 1936; *Leader-Post*, 26 June 1936, 8 July 1936, 9 October 1936; City of Regina Financial Statements, 1935, 1936. The "mill rate" is the amount of tax payable per dollar of assessed value of a property. It is based on the "mill," which is the equivalent of one-tenth of a cent. The amount of property tax owing is calculated by multiplying the assessed property value by the "mill rate" and dividing it by 1,000.

scheme, but in both cases there was not much the city could do without the financial assistance of the senior governments.

Regina did derive some benefit from a 1934 federal scheme to stimulate economic recovery through the construction of public works of various kinds; \$19.5 million of the \$40 million authorized under the *Public Works Construction Act* was to be spent on public buildings. R.B. Bennett's government had approved two projects for Saskatchewan; one was a new federal office building in Regina. Construction began in the fall of 1935 and employed several hundred jobless men, including substantial numbers of skilled tradesmen, through most of the following year.⁵⁶

A housing rehabilitation scheme would also create jobs for unemployed men in the building trades, and provide Reginans with better housing at the same time. With regard to the latter, the situation was becoming critical by the time the CLL took control of City Hall. Regina's population had grown (albeit modestly) through the early 1930s, reaching 53,354 by 1936, but few new houses had been built and many older ones were falling into disrepair. However, the existing federal legislation, the 1935 *Dominion Housing Act*, was no help. It provided 20 year federally backed mortgages at an attractive interest rate of 5 per cent, but the home buyer had to come up with 20 per cent of the purchase price as a down payment. Only the well-to-do could qualify for such a mortgage, and there were few of them in Depression-era Saskatchewan. During the years the *Dominion Housing Act* was in force (1935–1938) only two *DHA* mortgages were taken out in the entire province.⁵⁷

And so when William Lyon Mackenzie King's federal Liberal government launched a \$50 million home repair program in co-operation with the banks and mortgage companies in October 1936, the CLL welcomed the announcement. Mayor Ellison announced that the city would do all it could to ensure that the scheme was implemented in Regina without delay. By year's end only a few Reginans appear to have applied for a loan, however. And to the CLL's considerable disappointment those who might have benefited most from the scheme – Regina homeowners who were on relief – were deemed ineligible to apply at all.⁵⁸

Some of the more radical members of the CLL – both aldermen and rank-and-file supporters – were not satisfied with what the party had managed to accomplish during its first year in office. In the heady days following the 1935

56. Patrick Harvey Brennan, "Public Works Relief in Saskatchewan Cities, 1929–1940," MA thesis, University of Regina, 1981, 175; Janet Wright, *Crown Assets: The Architecture of the Department of Public Works, 1867–1967* (Toronto 1997), 172–76.

57. *Leader-Post*, 16 December 1935; Brennan, *Regina*, 126–28, Table III; John C. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy* (Montreal 1993), 66–87, 111.

58. *Daily Star*, 19 October 1936, 9 November 1936, 2 December 1936; *Leader-Post*, 17 October 1936.

municipal election, both John Toothill and T. G. McManus had looked forward to great changes at City Hall. McManus had gone so far as to predict that a purge of city officials would soon follow. To be sure, there were some dismissals among the civic relief staff as already noted. But there was no “purge”: all of the senior city officials – most notably City Commissioner R. J. Westgate – kept their jobs. This did not sit well with some of those in Ward Three who had voted for John Toothill, but when he was challenged to explain why Westgate and the others were still in office six months after the CLL had come to power, he responded rather meekly that “these people have not been removed yet, but we have hopes.”⁵⁹

As the 1936 municipal election approached, there were also signs that the popular front was proving to be an uneasy alliance. Social democrats in the CLL came to believe that the Communists were trying to take over the Central Labour Council (the CLL's central governing body) and influence the selection of candidates in the various wards. Their misgivings seemed to be confirmed when 300 CLL supporters in Ward Three met to choose a candidate. Alderman Samuel East faced three challengers, all of whom were Communists: T. G. McManus, Jack Guest, and William Beeching. The first two withdrew before the vote was taken; McManus made a point of expressing his displeasure with East's record when he appealed to those present “to support...Beeching because he stands for cleaning out city hall.” When Beeching went on to win the nomination by 85 votes, East attributed the outcome to the fact that the Communists had packed the meeting.⁶⁰

Ellison was quick to make the same claim, and declared that because of what had happened to East he would run as an independent rather than accept the CLL's nomination. The CLL thereupon chose Dr. Denis Sweeney, who had been a Labour alderman in 1935, as its candidate for mayor. At the same time, Beeching withdrew from the Ward Three contest, and the CLL proceeded to nominate Samuel East in his place. This whole affair left the Labour aldermen in a quandary, as Clarence Fines admitted to M.J. Coldwell: “The C.L.C. [Central Labour Council] is endorsing Sweeney, and are putting up a real battle. The aldermanic candidates are remaining neutral officially but supporting Ellison quietly.”⁶¹

Ellison made Communist influence within the CLL one of the central features of his campaign. “I stand to carry out the wishes of the people of Regina and not those of the Communist party,” he told voters. “The only reason I am

59. *Daily Star*, 7 July 1936.

60. *Daily Star*, 7 November 1936; *Leader-Post*, 7 November 1936; LAC, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation/New Democratic Party Records (CCF/NDP Records), file 65-1, C.M. Fines to M.J. Coldwell, 17 November 1936.

61. *Daily Star*, 12 November 1936, 14 November 1936, 16 November 1936; *Leader-Post*, 10 November 1936, 12 November 1936; LAC, CCF/NDP Records, file 65-1, C.M. Fines to M. J. Coldwell, 17 November 1936.

not the official Labor candidate is because I would not desert Alderman East and leave him to the mercy of these rats.”⁶² The mayor also pointed to Labour’s accomplishments during its first year in office. Sweeney did too, but of course he had not been a member of city council in 1936 and Ellison had.

As it turned out, Ellison won handily over Sweeney and Cornelius Rink, who ran under the RHOTA banner. Sweeney managed to carry only Ward Three; Ellison swept the others, including well-to-do Ward Five. (Figure 3) The RHOTA’s aldermanic candidates were successful in Wards Two, Four, and Five, and in the year ahead could count on the support of incumbent aldermen W. J. E. Adamson and J. H. Taylor. With the new city council evenly split, Mayor Ellison, who was nominally an independent, had the deciding vote.⁶³

In 1936 Regina also decided by a narrow margin to return to the at-large system of electing aldermen. It was the RHOTA that had taken the initiative here: it launched a petition drive in April 1936 and by October had collected more than 3,000 signatures, enough to convince city council to consult the voters. RHOTA and the CLL did not pay much attention to this issue during the campaign, and neither did Regina’s two daily newspapers. In Wards One and Three voters preferred the status quo; in Wards Two, Four, and Five a change to the at-large system was demanded.⁶⁴ (Figure 3)

Fresh from his decisive victory, Alban Ellison declared that he would support and seek to implement the CLL’s platform in the year ahead. He also predicted that 1937 would “see an end to unemployment as far as skilled tradesmen are concerned” and expressed the hope that “I will be successful in obtaining the co-operation of the superior governments in providing work for our unskilled workers.”⁶⁵ But it was not to be. In central Canada, in particular, there had been signs of economic recovery from 1933 on, but in Saskatchewan (where the economy was so dependent on the fortunes of wheat) there had been none. Dry year had followed dry year, and the result had been a succession of poor crops. Only 110 million bushels of wheat were harvested in 1936; in 1937 the harvest was smaller still – 36 million bushels – and net farm income reached minus figures again for the fifth time since 1930.⁶⁶ Hard times, and the unwillingness (or inability) of the provincial and federal governments to provide the necessary financial assistance, made it difficult for the mayor and his Labour colleagues to accomplish much in 1937.

62. *Leader-Post*, 17 November 1936.

63. *Leader-Post*, 24 November 1936.

64. CORA, City Council Minutes, 29 October 1936; *Daily Star*, 24 October 1936; *Leader-Post*, 17 April 1936.

65. *Daily Star*, 24 November 1936.

66. John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Saskatoon 1980), 216–18, Appendix G; A.E. Safarian, *The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression* (Toronto 1959), 66–132; Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary 2005), 282.



In 1937 Labour held five of the ten council seats (Aldermen Derby, East, Fines, Menzies, and Toothill). Mayor Alban C. Ellison, who had run and won as an independent, held the balance of power.
Saskatchewan Archives Board, R-B 4069.

The provision of relief remained their greatest priority and challenge. While the province was still assuming 80 per cent of the cost of actual relief payments, the cost of any medical care and all administrative costs remained the sole responsibility of the city of Regina and indeed of all urban centres in Saskatchewan. These were not inconsiderable sums, as City Commissioner R.J. Westgate revealed in a report to city council early in 1937. Over the period 1930–1936, Regina had spent a total of \$2,589,966 on relief. The provision of medical care, administrative costs, and interest payments on civic debentures issued to help pay for the city's share of relief together accounted for 37 per cent of that sum.⁶⁷

And so in 1937 Regina took the lead in drafting a resolution to be considered at the forthcoming annual convention of the Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association (SUMA) that declared the status quo was no longer acceptable to Saskatchewan's towns and cities. Instead, it requested that the

67. *Leader-Post*, 8 January 1937.

provincial government increase its share of the cost of relief payments to 90 per cent and henceforth assume half the cost of both medical care and the overall administration of relief as well. It proposed that a committee of SUMA be established to present these requests to the province, and ended with a veiled threat: if the provincial government was unwilling to agree to these changes, this committee would be authorized "to make arrangements for the taking over of Relief by the Provincial Government on the 1st July 1937." Not all of the delegates at the SUMA convention were disposed to present the provincial government with such an ultimatum, and a compromise resolution was ultimately approved. It urged the province to assume a larger share of the cost of relief (restating the formula which the city of Regina had proposed), but made no threat that the province would be left to carry the entire burden of relief costs if it rejected SUMA's request.⁶⁸

Undeterred, Regina's mayor decided to proceed on his own, and gave notice that from 1 July on the city would pay only 10 per cent of the cost of relief. This had no effect on W.J. Patterson's provincial government. It was hardly in a position to assume a larger share, particularly in a year when widespread crop failure promised to dramatically increase the numbers needing assistance, in rural Saskatchewan particularly.⁶⁹ The existing 80 per cent/20 per cent formula remained in place for Regina and for all other towns and cities in Saskatchewan.⁷⁰

In 1937 Mayor Ellison and his Labour colleagues also advanced another scheme to alleviate Regina's acute housing shortage. This time they proposed that the city itself construct some 200 houses. Implementing this \$750,000 scheme was contingent on a federal loan, or a federal guarantee of an issue of municipal debentures, but Mackenzie King's government refused to provide either. The city of Regina could not therefore proceed.⁷¹ Yet there were two bright spots in Regina's (and Saskatchewan's) otherwise bleak economic situation in 1937. One was General Motors' announcement on 3 September

68. CORA, City Council Minutes, 1 June 1937; *Saskatchewan Municipal Record*, 9, 3 (July 1937), 12–13; SAB, Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association Records (SUMA Records), Annual Convention Report, 1937, 39–40.

69. As it was, by 1936 the combined cost of relief and interest payments on the province's debenture debt had become greater than the Patterson government's annual revenue. Rather than see Saskatchewan default on its obligations, William Lyon Mackenzie King's federal government agreed in 1937 to provide an emergency loan. (It did the same for Manitoba, which was also in dire straits.) At the same time, King created a Royal Commission to examine federal-provincial financial relations and the distribution of powers between Ottawa and the provinces. On this see Beth Bilson, "William J. Patterson," in Gordon L. Barnhart, ed., *Saskatchewan Premiers of the Twentieth Century* (Regina 2004), 42–46; H. Blair Neatby, *William Lyon Mackenzie King, 1932–1939* (Toronto 1976), 197–200.

70. *Daily Star*, 4 August 1937; *Leader-Post*, 4 August 1937, 17 September 1937.

71. *Daily Star*, 12 March 1937, 2 April 1937; *Leader-Post*, 12 March 1937, 2 April 1937, 29 April 1937.

that it intended to reopen its assembly plant in the provincial capital. What motivated this decision remains unclear. Both Regina city council and the provincial government had been in contact with General Motors earlier that summer, but it is difficult to believe that these overtures would have had much to do with the automakers' decision to expand production beyond Oshawa again.

A more likely explanation is that General Motors was seeking to take advantage of what seemed to be more buoyant economic conditions at the time. The economic recovery Ontario was experiencing had certainly given a stimulus to automobile sales. There are no sales figures for Ontario alone, but nationwide General Motors sold 18,799 cars (and trucks) in 1932, 42,005 in 1934, 59,554 in 1935, and 63,314 in 1936. While prospects for future sales in western Canada were not as bright as in Ontario, automobile registrations were on the rise again in all three prairie provinces from 1934 on. Resuming production in Regina would give General Motors better access to what seemed to be a rebounding market.

When the official announcement came there were more details. General Motors would spend upwards of \$700,000 in modernizing its plant; it anticipated hiring 400 men when production resumed in November; and former employees still living in Regina (many of whom were on relief) would be given preference in hiring. Before year's end automobiles were again rolling off the assembly line at General Motors' plant on Winnipeg Street.⁷² Imperial Oil's announcement in November 1937 that it intended to expand the capacity of its Regina refinery (which had first opened in 1917) at a cost of \$350,000 was no less welcome.⁷³

The outcome of the 1937 election demonstrated that the mayor and his Labour colleagues remained popular with Regina voters. Ellison ran as the official candidate of the Civic Labour Association (CLA), successor to the CLL. The CLL was only two years old; why create a new party? Were social democrats anxious to distance themselves from the Communists in the CLL who had created so much turmoil in the previous civic election? This does not seem likely, for the CLA actually included a Communist named Victor Mills, a member of the Regina Union of Unemployed, on its slate of candidates for aldermen.⁷⁴ While the CLA ran a full slate of candidates, the RHOTA put up only eight, including Garnet Menzies (who had been a Labour alderman since

72. CORA, City Council Minutes, 17 August 1937; *Leader-Post*, 3 September 1937; Alfred P. Sloan, *My Years With General Motors* (Garden City 1964), Table: Unit Sales of Total Cars and Trucks-By Divisions, 1909–1962; F. C. Leacy, ed., *Historical Statistics of Canada* (Second Edition, Ottawa 1983), Tables T176, 180, 184.

73. *Leader-Post*, 16 November 1937.

74. *The Daily Clarion* (Toronto), 4 November 1937, 16 November 1937; *Daily Star*, 22 October 1937, 2 November 1937; *Leader-Post*, 2 November 1937. Clarence Fines doubtless would have had a hand in the creation of the CLA, but his memoirs are silent on this subject. Mills finished second last in a field of twelve aldermanic candidates.

1931). The RHOTA also had difficulty finding a mayoralty candidate willing to accept its endorsement, but eventually Henry Black, a former mayor (1918–1919) and chairman of the Saskatchewan Relief Commission (1931–1934), agreed to run.

The 1937 election proved to be a tame affair. Ellison again asked for a mandate to press the senior governments for sufficient funds to implement a “work and wages” program in place of direct relief. Some of the RHOTA aldermanic candidates (notably T.G. McNall) also declared themselves in favour of such a scheme, but Black remained silent on the issue. Instead he spent most of the campaign reminding voters of his record of economical administration when he had served as mayor nearly twenty years earlier. Ellison defeated Black by more than 8,000 votes (the largest majority any mayor had obtained in the city’s history) and carried all twenty polling subdivisions. Five CLA candidates (four of them incumbents) headed the field in the aldermanic contest and were elected to two-year terms. The fifth was a newcomer to municipal politics: C. C. Williams, a CNR dispatcher and member of the CBRE. Four of the RHOTA candidates were victorious as well, including James Grassick, another former mayor (1920–1922) and Conservative member of the Saskatchewan Legislature (1929–1934).⁷⁵

Early in 1938 it appeared that there would be another confrontation between Saskatchewan’s cities and the Patterson government over the sharing of relief costs. Regina again took the lead. In his inaugural address to the new city council, Ellison appealed to the other cities in Saskatchewan to adopt a common front in negotiating a new relief agreement. Only in this way could “pressure be brought to bear on the [provincial] government to take over the administration and financing of relief.” If these efforts were not successful, he added, then all cities “should definitely refuse to continue to administer relief, and hand this problem over to the authorities primarily responsible for it.” Ellison then set out to garner support from his fellow mayors, emphasizing that it was essential that they act together and take a hard line. “The plain facts,” he told Moose Jaw Mayor J. W. Corman, “are that the superior Governments have no intention whatever of taking over either the administration of relief or the costs of same, and until the time arrives when the cities are compelled by circumstances to close their relief offices...there is no hope of our being relieved of this burden.”⁷⁶

In due course the Patterson government did submit a new relief agreement to the cities. It contained the same formula for sharing the cost of relief that had prevailed in the past, and again left the cities responsible for all administrative and other costs. Like the agreement it was supposed to replace, it would

75. *Daily Star*, 13 November 1937, 17 November 1937; *Leader-Post*, 9 November 1937, 13 November 1937, 17 November 1937.

76. CORA, City Council Minutes, 3 January 1938; City Clerk’s Correspondence Files, file 4322(a), A.C. Ellison to J.W. Corman, 13 January 1938.

expire on 31 March.⁷⁷ It did not take long for Regina city council to respond by unanimously adopting the following resolution:

That we are prepared to continue with the arrangement previously made by the Provincial Government that we administer Relief until the 31st March next in accordance with their regulations, but after that date we should expect the Provincial Government to either take over the administration of Relief, or provide the City with the necessary funds to administer relief on behalf of the Government.⁷⁸

When this elicited no response from the provincial government, city council repeated its ultimatum on 15 March, again by a unanimous vote.⁷⁹ But the Patterson government's only concession was to extend the new relief agreement to the end of 1938. One by one Saskatchewan's cities agreed to sign it. Regina was the last holdout, but it eventually did as well.⁸⁰

Of course relief did not create jobs for Regina's unemployed. A "work and wages" scheme would, but the city could not proceed without financial assistance from the senior governments, and none was forthcoming. House construction would also create employment, and in 1938 there was an encouraging sign with the enactment of the *National Housing Act* (*NHA*). Historians rightly regard this legislation as an important watershed in the evolution of Canadian housing policy. Not only did it provide easier terms for federally-backed mortgages to prospective homeowners, James Struthers has noted, "the [federal] government for the first time entered the field of subsidized housing for low-income earners." It was now prepared to loan municipalities 90 per cent of the cost of constructing low-rental housing, "provided the houses were rented to families whose income was less than five times the 'economic rental' of the unit." Limited dividend housing corporations would also be eligible for these loans. As it turned out, the provisions in the *NHA* making it easier to qualify for a mortgage did not have any appreciable impact in Saskatchewan. By the end of 1938 only five mortgages had been approved in the entire province (all in Regina).⁸¹

As for the low-income housing scheme, Regina's city council initially seemed keen to participate. It is not difficult to understand why: a recent survey had found Regina to be "one of the most overcrowded cities in the Dominion of Canada for its size." According to the survey 7.4 per cent of all families in

77. *Leader-Post*, 15 February 1938, 23 February 1938.

78. CORA, City Council Minutes, 24 February 1938.

79. CORA, City Council Minutes, 15 March 1938; *Daily Star*, 25 February 1938, 16 March 1938; *Leader-Post*, 25 February 1938, 16 March 1938.

80. CORA, City Clerk's Correspondence Files, file 4322(a), A. C. Ellison to Members of City Council, 11 May 1938; *Daily Star*, 31 May 1938; *Leader-Post*, 26 March 1938; *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 2 March 1938, 11 March 1938; Robert Baker Allan, "A Populist in Municipal and Provincial Politics: John Wesley Corman," MA thesis, University of Regina, 2004, 20, 34–35.

81. James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941* (Toronto 1983), 191; Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, 117.

Regina lived in one room, compared to a national average of 2.5 per cent. Another 9.6 per cent lived in two rooms, compared to 4.4 per cent for Canada as a whole. To alleviate this overcrowding, Regina needed 2,000 additional dwelling units.⁸² However, by year's end city council's enthusiasm had begun to wane. Perhaps it became discouraged by the realization that the province would have to be persuaded to amend the *City Act* to give Regina the power to borrow money to construct these houses, and to guarantee the city's loan from the federal government; that the approval of the federal Minister of Finance would also be necessary; and that the debenture issue to cover the city's 10 per cent share of the cost would need to be approved by Regina's property-owning taxpayers in a money bylaw vote.⁸³

In 1938 the uneasy relationship between social democrats and Communists in Regina became very public again, first in the provincial election in June and then in the municipal contest in November. At the provincial level, the CCF had decided at its 1936 provincial convention to invite "all progressive organizations...to seek to discover common ground on which we may unite for action and a common goal to which we may eventually move." Over the next eighteen months provincial CCF leader George H. Williams had actively courted the Conservatives and Social Credit with a view to arranging "saw-offs" in individual constituencies when the next election took place. (The Conservatives had been receptive, Social Credit had not.) Williams had approached the Communists too, but warily, fearing that developing closer ties with them would be politically fatal for the CCF.⁸⁴

Some CCFers in Regina did not share Williams' misgivings. They joined with local Communists, Social Crediters, and members of the CLA to create a new political group, the Regina Labour-Progressive Association (RLPA). The RLPA then proceeded to nominate a CCFer, Alderman Samuel East, and a Communist, T.G. McManus, now the party's provincial secretary, to contest the forthcoming provincial election in Regina's two-member constituency.⁸⁵

Even before the two Labour-Progressive candidates were chosen, some CCFers were already having second thoughts about working closely with the Communists and resigned. Rumours also began to circulate that there would soon be a rival slate, and that Regina's mayor would be one of the candidates on it. The RLPA was quick to respond:

82. *Leader-Post*, 28 February 1938.

83. CORA, City Council Minutes, 6 September 1938; *Daily Star*, 9 September 1938, 14 September 1938; *Leader-Post*, 12 September 1938, 5 December 1938.

84. SAB, Co-operative Commonwealth Federation Records (CCF Records), I, CCF Convention Minutes, 15–17 July 1936, 218; Ken Andrews, "Progressive Counterparts of the CCF: Social Credit and the Conservative Party in Saskatchewan, 1935–1938," *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d'études canadiennes*, 17, (Fall, 1982), 65–72; Steininger, "George H. Williams," 244–79.

85. SAB, CCF Records, IV, file 104, H.W. Cowan to CCF Provincial Board, 18 March 1938; *Daily Clarion*, 1 March 1938; *Daily Star*, 20 April 1938; *Leader-Post*, 28 February 1938, 20 April 1938.

Let it be clear in everybody's mind that Alderman East and Mr. McManus are the candidates of this association, and no matter what happens we will loyally support them until the end, and we intend to elect them both.

Anyone who attempts to split the Labor movement now will be branded...as a splitter and will be driven out of public life forever.⁸⁶

To this the mayor replied:

With reference to a statement from the Labor-Progressive group as to my possible entry into the provincial field, which I can only regard as a threat, my answer is that I am not to be intimidated by the Communist party, nor anyone else and if I want to enter as a candidate, I have a perfect right to do so.

I may say further that so far as unity is concerned, I prefer freedom under the Union Jack to unity under the hammer and sickle and that I prefer our British democratic system, with all its failings, to the pretended democracy of the Communist party.⁸⁷

Ellison did decide to run as an "Independent Labour" candidate. He was soon joined by A.D. Connon, a CNR conductor and member of the CBRE. With two rival Labour slates now vying for support, it should not have been surprising that the CCF decided not to put candidates of its own in the field.⁸⁸

The Communist Party's newspaper, *The Daily Clarion*, and the two RLPA candidates continued to attack Ellison, but it is debatable whether this affected the outcome. Ellison finished fifth behind the candidates nominated by the Liberal and Conservative parties, but he polled a larger vote (5,372) than either East (4,422) or McManus (4,080). A more plausible explanation for the outcome is that while Regina voters had been prepared on three occasions to elect a social democrat as mayor, their loyalties in provincial politics remained with the Liberal party, whose candidates in Regina polled 12,717 and 12,636 votes respectively.⁸⁹

It seemed for a time that the split within Labour's ranks would carry over into the municipal election. In October 1938 a branch of the long-moribund ILP suddenly appeared in Regina, issued a platform, and gave every indication that it intended to nominate a full slate of candidates. In some respects this platform was not as ambitious (or no more ambitious) than what Ellison and his colleagues were already committed to. With regard to relief, it pledged to "press superior governments for increased rental allowances; shelter allowance for homeowners on relief" and "standardization of relief." As for housing, it promised to "seek low interest bearing loans from Ottawa to enable the

86. *Leader-Post*, 16 April 1938, 21 April 1938.

87. *Leader-Post*, 23 April 1938.

88. *Daily Star*, 9 May 1938, 12 May 1938; *Leader-Post*, 9 May 1938.

89. *Daily Clarion*, 17 May 1938, 24 May 1938, 25 May 1938; *Daily Star*, 20 May 1938, 27 May 1938, 2 June 1938; *Leader-Post*, 20 May 1938; *Saskatchewan Executive and Legislative Directory*, 134. The two Conservative candidates polled 7,979 and 6,579 votes respectively.

city to loan money to individuals for sewer and water installations” and to implement a low-cost housing program. But the ILP’s platform also included a commitment to obtain a separate city charter which would give Regina wider powers than it currently enjoyed.⁹⁰

As it turned out, the ILP and the CLA agreed to join forces, adopt a common platform, and endorse a single slate of candidates: incumbents Alban Ellison and John Toothill and four newcomers to civic politics. Their platform was a wide-ranging one. In 1939 a Labour city council would urge that the federal government assume full responsibility for the cost of relief and provide funds so that the city could launch a “work and wages” program and a low-cost housing scheme. It would also urge the provincial government to grant Regina a separate city charter and would establish a municipal savings bank.⁹¹

Labour’s opponent, on the other hand, was in disarray. The RHOTA ceased to exist, and the aldermen it had endorsed in the previous election all ran as independents in 1938. No one could be found to challenge Ellison, and he won a fourth term as mayor by acclamation. In the aldermanic contest two independents were elected: incumbent aldermen James Grassick and T.G. McNall. John Toothill was also re-elected along with first-time CLA candidates E. L. Child and E.R. Franklin. With nine seats on city council, Labour’s control over City Hall was stronger than it had ever been.

Early in 1939 Ellison and his Labour colleagues did prepare a draft city charter that would provide Regina with additional powers and responsibilities, including the “right to build, rent or sell, on such terms as it sees fit, houses and apartment blocks” and “to borrow money from the Dominion government on resolution of council, only for the purpose of carrying out any housing scheme, slum clearing plan, or any scheme for repairing, remodelling, or modernizing existing dwellings or for the purpose of local improvements and for municipal works and buildings.” Under the charter, Regina would also be able to extend the municipal franchise to include all adult residents over the age of 21 (not just homeowners and renters as was then the case), determine who could hold civic office (in order to avoid a repetition of the unseating of the two aldermen in 1936), and have the same powers of taxation within the city as the province then enjoyed. The charter would also enable the city to “own and operate and acquire by purchase, or otherwise, any business or industry as a municipal enterprise...to aid, bonus and assist in the promotion, establishment and operation of industries of a co-operative nature” and to set up a municipal savings bank.⁹² All of this was too much for Aldermen T. G.

90. *Leader-Post*, 18 October 1938.

91. *Leader-Post*, 7 November 1938, 9 November 1938. None of the aldermanic candidates chosen at this joint convention appear to have been involved in reviving the ILP. The most prominent of those who were (judging from the sparse coverage in the city’s daily newspapers) was Alderman C.C. Williams.

92. *Daily Star*, 13 January 1939. It is not entirely clear what Ellison and his Labour colleagues

McNall and James Grassick. McNall declared that businessmen and property owners would be safer under the existing *City Act*. Both refused to support the document when it was put to a vote in council. Not surprisingly, the Patterson government refused to accede to Regina's request.⁹³

In other respects caution remained the watchword at City Hall. This was certainly true when it came to the management of civic finances. The city's share of the mill rate was held more or less at the 1936 level (27.48 in 1937, 26.24 in 1938 and 26.28 in 1939), and the overall mill rate (for a public school supporter) remained at 50. There were modest reductions in Regina's debenture debt too. That debt had reached a Depression-era peak of \$16,870,225 in 1936; by 1939 it stood at \$15,875,283.⁹⁴

Although it was city council as a whole that set the mill rate each year, and made decisions with regard to the city's overall financial policy, one alderman was an especially vocal advocate of prudence. Clarence Fines consistently argued that Regina should try to eliminate its long-term debenture debt with its onerous interest payments that were then consuming half or more of the city's annual tax revenue, and instead attempt to put the city on a pay-as-you-go cash basis. He won a small victory in 1939: his city council colleagues agreed to reduce the term on an issue of debentures to cover the cost of laying sewer and water lines from 30 years to 20.⁹⁵ A modest improvement in the city's financial position also permitted city council to restore some (but not all) of the wage cuts which had been imposed on civic employees in 1931 and 1933.⁹⁶

Although the number of Reginans on relief fell by roughly half between 1936 and 1939 (from 11,220 to 6,664), and the provincial government absorbed a larger share of the cost of relief from 1936 on, its burden on civic finances remained a substantial one. Over the period 1929–1939, Regina's share of the cost of relief amounted to \$3,528,090; \$1,600,455 of this amount had been incurred since 1936.⁹⁷ These commitments had been met only by the city

had in mind in seeking to obtain the same powers of taxation as the province then possessed. Through resolutions adopted at the annual SUMA conventions, Regina and other cities had long been demanding a share of the province's gasoline tax (first introduced in 1928). Regina's Labour city council might also have had its eye on the provincial sales tax which the Patterson government had introduced in 1937.

93. CORA, City Council Minutes, 12 January 1939; City Clerk's Correspondence Files, file 4357, R.J.M. Parker to G. F. Stewart, 30 January 1939; *Leader-Post*, 13 January 1939.

94. CORA, City of Regina Financial Statements, 1936–1939.

95. *Daily Star*, 6 April 1938; *Leader-Post*, 15 September 1939, 7 October 1939; Fines, "Impossible Dream," 273–74.

96. CORA, City Council Minutes, 11 March 1937, 6 April 1939, 11 May 1939, 8 August 1939; *Leader-Post*, 12 March 1937, 9 August 1939.

97. CORA, City of Regina Financial Statements, 1929–1939; *Leader-Post*, 10 November 1939, 11 November 1939, 14 November 1939.

continuing to forego almost all routine maintenance of streets and sidewalks and replacement of worn out equipment.

Regina did derive some benefit from two job creation schemes that the federal government introduced in 1938 under the *Municipal Improvements Assistance Act* and 1939 with the Civic Improvement Plan. It was able to make some much-needed improvements to the city-owned power plant and to initiate a modest “work and wages” program, putting some unemployed Reginaans to work graveling streets, planting trees, and laying sewer and water lines. The federal government for its part constructed a new passenger terminal at the municipal airport, and this provided jobs for men in the building trades.⁹⁸

Mayor Ellison was also able to resolve a long-standing dispute with the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC). In 1925 the HBC had begun to purchase land in downtown Regina with the intention of building a department store. Four years later it bought a parcel of adjoining city-owned land. The purchase agreement with the city had stipulated that the new store would open by 1932, when Regina was planning to host a major event, the World Grain Exhibition and Conference. Construction did not begin, thanks to the Great Depression, and in 1931 the HBC approached the mayor of Regina about the possibility of obtaining an extension to the now-looming deadline. It is not clear if the mayor responded to this query, but the following year the HBC approached the city again, this time to have the agreement cancelled altogether.⁹⁹

There does not appear to have been any formal response from the city of Regina until 1936. One of the CLL aldermen (Victor Olson, a contractor) raised the issue in the fall civic election, charging that “the city authorities have been asleep in not calling on the Hudson Bay Company to build.”¹⁰⁰ At year’s end city council unanimously decided that the time had come to appeal to the HBC to honour its commitment. Mayor Ellison approached the HBC in April 1937 to arrange for a meeting to discuss this matter, but then suggested that it be delayed on account of the near-total crop failure Saskatchewan experienced that summer. In August 1938 Ellison wrote again, but the HBC showed no real interest in meeting with him. The company had obtained a legal opinion that if it sat tight until the statute of limitations expired on 31 December 1938 it could not be compelled to build the store even if the city decided to sue.¹⁰¹

98. Brennan, “Public Works Relief,” 205–220, 223–25.

99. Hudson’s Bay Company Archives (HBCA), Records of the Canadian Committee Office, Series 1, Minutes, 13 August 1931, 1 October 1931, 5 November 1931; Series 8, file 1539, G. W. Allan to J. Balfour, 4 August 1931; CORA, City Commissioners’ Correspondence Files, file 331(a), P. A. Chester to J. McAra, 6 January 1932; *Morning Leader*, 12 September 1925, 21 September 1929.

100. *Daily Star*, 18 November 1936.

101. HBCA, Records of the Canadian Committee Office, Series 1, Minutes, 22 February 1934; Series 8, file 1540, D. H. Laird to F.W. Gasston, 23 April 1935; file 1541, A.C. Ellison to Hudson’s Bay Company, 17 April 1937, D.H. Laird to P.A. Chester, 25 June 1937, A.C. Ellison to P. A.

In 1938 city council finally decided to proceed with legal action in a straight party vote. Mayor Ellison and his Labour colleagues voted in favour; Aldermen Grassick, McNall, and Menzies were opposed, preferring to continue to negotiate with the Hudson's Bay Company. While the city prepared its case, the two sides also began to meet in the hope of finding an amicable solution. A compromise was finally reached in June 1939: the city agreed to rescind the agreement in exchange for a commitment by the HBC to build a luxury apartment block on a portion of the property.¹⁰² The outcome of these negotiations might seem incongruous: the city's Labour mayor and aldermen had obtained a commitment from the Hudson's Bay Company to erect an apartment building whose rents would be well beyond the means of working-class Regina. However, like the construction of the new terminal at the airport, this project would give much-needed work to the building trades. Construction of the 72-suite apartment block began at once, and was completed in November 1939.¹⁰³

By this time Regina's civic election was in full swing. Alban Ellison had initially been reluctant to seek a fourth term as mayor: with Canada now at war, he believed he might be called upon to serve. He was still a member of the RCNVR.

Chester, 28 June 1937, A.C. Ellison to P.A. Chester, 2 August 1938; CORA, City Council Minutes, 29 December 1936; City Solicitor's Correspondence Files, file 453, J.C. Malone to A.C. Ellison, 14 October 1938; *Leader-Post*, 30 December 1936, 11 March 1937.

102. CORA, City Council Minutes, 29 December 1938, 20 June 1939; City Solicitor's Correspondence Files, file 331(a), G. F. Stewart to City Commissioners, 4 November 1938, R.J. Westgate to all Departments, 7 November 1938, agreement between Hudson's Bay Company and City of Regina, 22 June 1939; HBCA, Records of the Canadian Committee Office, Series 1, Minutes, 20 April 1939; Series 8, file 1542, A.C. Ellison to P.A. Chester, 26 April 1939, P.A. Chester to A.C. Ellison, 11 May 1939; file 1700, memorandum of meeting between Canadian Committee of Hudson's Bay Company and R.J. Westgate, 17 May 1939; *Daily Star*, 21 June 1939; *Leader-Post*, 30 December 1938, 21 June 1939.

What convinced the two sides to negotiate an end to this long-standing dispute was a realization by 1939 that neither had a particularly strong case. A canvas of civic departments produced little evidence that the HBC's refusal to build its department store had resulted in a serious financial loss for the city of Regina; the HBC's expectation that the statute of limitations would run out at the end of 1938 turned out not to be so. Its lawyers had to admit early in 1939 that their original opinion had been incorrect. They had neglected to take into account the impact of provincial legislation enacted in 1934 whose provisions meant that the HBC could still be sued. See CORA, City Solicitor's Correspondence Files, file 453, G.F. Stewart to R.J. Westgate, 28 November 1938, R.J. Westgate to G.F. Stewart, 30 December 1938, G.F. Stewart to R.J. Westgate, 31 December 1938; HBCA, Records of the Canadian Committee Office, Series 8, file 1542, D.H. Laird to P.A. Chester, 11 January 1939.

103. CORA, City Solicitor's Correspondence Files, file 453, C.E. Joslyn to G.F. Stewart, 17 November 1939. These two projects helped to boost the total value of building permits issued in Regina in 1939 to \$587,615. This was the best year for the construction sector since 1935, if the value of building permits issued by the city of Regina is any guide. See Brennan, *Regina*, Table x1.

However, he did eventually agree to run again under the CLA banner.¹⁰⁴ As the campaign got underway, Labour's political fortunes began to shift dramatically. Its opponents were better organized in 1939, having founded yet another nonpartisan "citizens" group, the Civic Voters' Association (CVA). It chose James Grassick as its mayoralty candidate, and a merchant, a lawyer, a medical doctor, a trade unionist (Garnet Menzies), a farmer, and a woman (Helena Walker, who had served on city council for three years earlier in the 1930s) to fill the other seats on city council. The CVA also began to develop an extensive organization to get out the vote on election day.¹⁰⁵

And again, as in 1936, there were accusations of Communist influence in the selection of a Labour candidate. T.G. McManus was said to have used his influence to ensure that another local Communist, Victor Mills, was added to the Labour slate in place of incumbent alderman Victor Olson.¹⁰⁶ This prompted the CVA to declare that "the only safe and reasonable attitude for a Regina citizen to take to avoid the menace of Communist control is to vote the solid Civic Voters' Association slate."¹⁰⁷ Regina's daily newspapers, and particularly the *Leader-Post*, were also quick to weigh in.

Does any rational right-thinking Reginan want Communist influence asserting itself in Regina municipal affairs, particularly at a time like this, with a war on and Canada and the empire...fighting for their very life?...Do we want a party 'nosing' into the affairs of Regina that would nullify Canada's war effort, would take Canada out of the war altogether? Do we want a party seeking to dictate the affairs of Regina that a few months ago was shouting to high heaven, 'Stop Hitler!' and that now may be willing enough to give encouragement to that arch-criminal in his...attacks on small semi-helpless nations? Do we want any such control, or even influence, in the affairs of this British, Canadian city, Regina?¹⁰⁸

The local branch of the Canadian Legion agreed. It urged Reginans "to exercise their franchise in the coming civic election and...see to it, in so doing, that they do not find themselves represented...by Communists or Nazis, no matter how skilfully camouflaged."¹⁰⁹

It did not help that Ellison remained silent on the matter of whether or not the allegations were true (in marked contrast to what he had said and done when this issue had arisen in 1936). Only near the end of the campaign did the mayor have anything to say, and then it was to condemn the CVA for raising

104. *Daily Star*, 30 September 1939, 11 November 1939; *Leader-Post*, 11 November 1939.

105. *Daily Star*, 1 September 1939, 12 September 1939, 20 September 1939, 1 November 1939; *Leader-Post*, 1 November 1939.

106. *Daily Star*, 4 November 1939; *Leader-Post*, 13 November 1939.

107. *Leader-Post*, 15 November 1939.

108. *Leader-Post*, 17 November 1939. The *Daily Star* made a similar appeal to voters, but the tone of its editorials was not as shrill. See *Daily Star*, 21 November 1939, 25 November 1939.

109. *Daily Star*, 20 November 1939; *Leader-Post*, 20 November 1939.

the "red bogey" and declare that Regina voters would "not be misled by such foolish propaganda."¹¹⁰

Voter turnout (61.5 per cent) was the highest since 1935, and the result was a resounding defeat for Labour. Ellison lost to James Grassick in the mayoralty contest by 8,270 votes to 7,294. The city divided along now familiar lines. Grassick carried eight of the thirteen polling subdivisions south of the CPR main line (Polling Subdivisions 5 and 7-13), but only one (Polling Subdivision 18) north of it. Ellison's strength lay in the working-class neighbourhoods on Regina's eastern, northern, and western outskirts (Polling Subdivisions 1-4, 6, 14-17 and 19-20). (Figure 2) The entire Labour aldermanic slate, including incumbents Clarence Fines, C. C. Williams and S. B. East, was also defeated.

The Labour city councils' accomplishments had been substantial, or so a 1939 election flyer claimed: cash relief, prudent financial management, resolution of some of the long-standing dispute with the HBC, and the restoration of the cuts in civic salaries. Looking to the future, the CLA pledged to embark on a "Municipal Housing scheme to provide low cost housing to Regina Citizens" and "a real Work and Wages scheme" once it secured the co-operation of the provincial and federal governments.¹¹¹

However, with Canada now at war, the CLA's ties to the Communists (tenuous though they were) could easily be linked to patriotism, and this trumped what Labour had done or hoped to do. Clarence Fines admitted as much in a post-election interview and again in his memoirs four decades later.¹¹² Labour's opponents were also better-organized in 1939, and their candidates represented a broader cross-section of the electorate. These were also important factors in determining the outcome of the election.

How does Regina's experience compare with that of other prairie cities during the 1930s? The most obvious comparison would surely be with Winnipeg, where John Queen won the city's highest elected office for the ILP in the 1934 civic election. The result of the aldermanic contests was a tie: six ILP candidates, two Communists and an independent favourable to Labour were elected; the other nine championed the interests of Winnipeg's business community. John Queen's vote as mayor gave Labour a majority. The ILP and the Communists were victorious again in the 1935 election, but control of the mayoralty and city council shifted back to the business community in 1936. Queen served as Winnipeg's mayor again from 1938 to 1942, but the ILP's foes held the majority of the aldermanic seats during these years.¹¹³

110. *Daily Star*, 25 November 1939; *Leader-Post*, 27 November 1939.

111. CORA, City Clerk's Correspondence Files, file 4408, Civic Labour Association election flyer, 1939.

112. *Leader-Post*, 28 November 1939; Fines, "Impossible Dream," 274-77.

113. Alan Artibise, *Winnipeg: An Illustrated History* (Toronto 1977), 142-46; Gutkin and Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent*, 343-81; McKillop, "Socialist as Citizen," 61-80; Rea, "Politics of Conscience," 276-88.

Communists had a significant following in Winnipeg, particularly in the city's North End. Voters there elected the city's first Communist alderman – William Kolisnyk – in 1926 and again in 1928. Two other Communists were elected to city council in 1933 (Jacob Penner) and 1934 (Martin Forkin). In Regina, on the other hand, Communists were a marginal factor in local politics. To the extent that the CPC had a following in Regina, it was almost entirely concentrated in Polling Subdivisions 3, 4, and 6 and then in Ward 3. (Figures 2, 3) Only one Communist candidate (T.G. McManus) managed to win a seat on city council there, and his tenure in office lasted only three weeks. Without a presence at City Hall, Communists in Regina lacked a platform for trumpeting the party line and a means of demonstrating how they could meet the immediate needs of the working-class and the unemployed, as their counterparts in Winnipeg were able to do.¹¹⁴

To the extent that social democrats and Communists in Regina did join together in founding the UAC and engaging in political activity through the CLL and its successors at the municipal level, and with the RLPA in the 1938 provincial election, this collaboration originated at the constituency, ward, or neighbourhood level, not among the leadership of the CCF or of those municipal political parties. Such arrangements were conceived on an ad hoc basis, and in the case of the UAC and the RLPA certainly, proved to be ephemeral. The UAC does not appear to have survived beyond 1935, the RLPA not beyond the 1938 provincial election.

“The common people have spoken with a mighty voice,” a jubilant John Toothill had proclaimed on election night in 1935. But what had he and his colleagues managed to accomplish for working-class families in Regina and for the city as a whole? It had been easy enough for the CLL to immediately reform the distribution of relief by replacing food and clothing vouchers with cash payments, but convincing W.J. Patterson's provincial Liberal government to take over full responsibility for the cost of relief had proved to be impossible. While Mayor Ellison had been prepared to take a very confrontational approach, he had not been able to convince other mayors across the province to follow his lead.

When the CLL took office in 1936 there had also been a pressing need to create jobs for men who had none. There was not much the Labour city councils could do without assistance from the provincial and federal governments, but little was forthcoming and so little was accomplished.

The Labour city councils had been no more successful in improving Regina's existing housing stock or building new houses. The primary goal of both the 1935 *Dominion Housing Act* and its 1938 successor, the *National Housing Act*,

114. Epp, “A Communist in the Council Chambers,” 79–103; Epp, “Jacob Penner, Martin Forkin and the Communist Party,” 14–26. William Kolisnyk remained on Winnipeg city council until 1930. Martin Forkin was defeated in 1940, but won a seat on city council again in 1942 and held it until his death in 1962. Jacob Penner served on city council almost continuously until 1961. J. M. Bumsted, *Dictionary of Manitoba Biography* (Winnipeg 1999), 84, 197–98.

was to make it easier for the well-to-do to purchase homes or build new ones. A 1936 initiative to encourage the repair of existing homes excluded those on relief from applying. When the city of Regina had decided in 1937 to construct new houses on its own, the federal government had refused to provide a loan or to guarantee an issue of municipal debentures. A year later the federal government had had a change of heart: one of the provisions of the *National Housing Act* gave Ottawa the power to lend cities up to 90 per cent of the cost of constructing low-income housing. However the conditions attached to such a loan were so onerous that Regina had decided not to apply.¹¹⁵

Mayor Ellison and his Labour colleagues had then turned to the province in the hope that wider powers in the housing field could be obtained through a separate city charter. This was without a doubt the most far-reaching initiative Regina's social democrats undertook during the four years they had control of City Hall, but its scope had been what sealed its fate. It would have given Regina wider powers than any city in the province then enjoyed (and new sources of revenue too), but all of this had proven too much for aldermen with close ties to the business community. Both James Grassick and T.G. McNall had refused to support this initiative when it came to a vote. The Patterson government had turned down Regina's request for the same reasons.

The battle lines in Regina civic politics would continue to be sharply drawn during World War II. C.C. Williams and Clarence Fines managed to regain their seats on city council in 1941 and 1942 respectively (Williams as mayor and Fines as an alderman), but the CVA remained firmly in control, winning seven seats on city council in each of the 1941, 1942, and 1943 municipal elections and five in the 1944 contest. Williams served two more terms as mayor in 1942 and 1943, but lost to the CVA candidate (T.G. McNall) in 1944.¹¹⁶

While Labour's election prospects at the municipal level were discouraging after 1939, it was a different story in provincial politics: the fortunes of the CCF brightened with the coming of the war. For those social democrats who were actively involved in the CCF, like Clarence Fines and C.C. Williams, this would open new political opportunities.¹¹⁷ Both ran as CCF candidates in Regina's two-member riding in 1944, and both were elected to the Saskatchewan Legislature. They would join the cabinet of Saskatchewan's CCF government

115. As for other prairie cities, only Winnipeg's efforts to spur the construction of low-income housing have been examined in any detail, in Stefan Epp, "Class, Capitalism, and Construction: Winnipeg's Housing Crisis and the Debate over Public Housing, 1934–1939," *Histoire sociale / Social History*, 43 (November 2010), 393–42. Winnipeg's experience was essentially similar to Regina's.

116. Brennan, *Regina*, 185.

117. Fines had become one of the Saskatchewan CCF's most successful fundraisers, and in 1942 he was elected party president. Williams had run unsuccessfully as a CCF candidate in a provincial by-election in Regina in 1938. See Fines, "Impossible Dream," 322; *Saskatchewan Executive and Legislative Directory*, 134.

(Fines as Provincial Treasurer and Williams as Minister of Labour) and play key roles in shaping its policies until the early 1960s.¹¹⁸

I would like to express my appreciation to the anonymous reviewers of Labour/Le Travail whose comments and suggestions have made this a stronger article.

118. Fines, "Impossible Dream," 311–72; McLeod and McLeod, *Tommy Douglas*, 107–193; A.W. Johnson, *Dream No Little Dreams: A Biography of the Douglas Government of Saskatchewan, 1944–1961* (Toronto 2004).