

## SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CHANGE

**Figure 8-26** This is a classroom in Rapid City, Manitoba, in 1890. Why do you think there was a British flag on the blackboard?



### WEB CONNECTIONS

To learn more about the Manitoba Schools Question, visit the *Shaping Canada* web site and follow the links.

### VOICES

[Franco-Manitobans, the pioneers of the country, had no] more than the last arrivals; we whose rights are guaranteed by the constitution, are placed on the same footing as those who came from Ireland or the depths of Russia, we are not better apportioned than the Chinese and the Japanese.

— Louis Philip Adélaïde Langevin,  
Archbishop of St. Boniface from  
1895–1915

In the post-Confederation years, territorial expansion, immigration, and industrialization had resulted in many changes in Canada. As conditions in Canada changed, people's expectations about the kind of country they wanted also changed. Canadians demanded **reforms**, or improvements, that began to shape the identity of the nation.

### THE MANITOBA SCHOOLS QUESTION

In 1870, Manitoba was populated by an almost equal mix of French-speaking Catholics and English-speaking Protestants. Due to the *Manitoba Act*, the province had two publicly funded denominational (church-run) school systems: one Catholic system in which the language of instruction was French and one Protestant system in which instruction was in English. However, by 1890, immigration had changed Manitoba demographics, and only about 10 percent of the province was French-speaking.

In 1890, responding to Protestant pressure to decrease the influence of the Catholic Church in Canada and to ensure the dominance of English in Manitoba, Manitoba's provincial legislature led by Premier Thomas Greenway created one public, non-denominational school system in which the language of education was to be English. Other legislation ended Manitoba's bilingual system for the courts and in government, which had also been established through the *Manitoba Act*. Roman Catholic schools could continue to operate, but now parents would have to pay for their children to attend.

The legislation caused a crisis for the federal Conservative government, which was divided on the issue. Catholics throughout Canada called for the federal government to overturn the provincial laws. They argued that the province had no right to contravene the *Manitoba Act*, a federal law. Winnipeg Catholics went to court over the issue, but were unable to get the legislation changed.

Wilfrid Laurier's Liberals defeated the Conservatives in the 1896 election, in which the central issue was the Manitoba Schools Question. After the election, Prime Minister Laurier worked with Premier Greenway to find a compromise. The Laurier-Greenway Compromise of 1897 left a single public school system in place, but where numbers warranted, Roman Catholic teachers could be hired, some religious instruction was allowed, and students could be educated in a language other than English. The compromise made no special provision for French. In subsequent years, some schools provided instruction in Polish, German, and Ukrainian, as well as French. The compromise lasted until the start of the First World War, when suspicion of recent immigrants, especially those from eastern Europe, grew stronger. In 1916, the Manitoba government abolished the provision that allowed instruction in languages other than English.

**IC** Why do you think the Manitoba Schools Question was so important to French Canadians in Québec and elsewhere in the country?

## WESTERN DISCONTENT

At the turn of the century, Canadian farmers were advocating for change. Farmers paid shipping costs, or freight rates, to the railroad that took their products to market. The railroad would not supply cars onto which grain could be loaded directly, and so farmers had no choice—they had to pay for loading platforms and elevator storage. Because the federal government would not allow any other railroads in the West to build south of CPR lines, a policy known as disallowance, there was no competition for the CPR. This meant it was a monopoly; it could charge what it wanted for shipping. Shipping costs were high in the Atlantic and western provinces—at least twice as high as in central Canada.

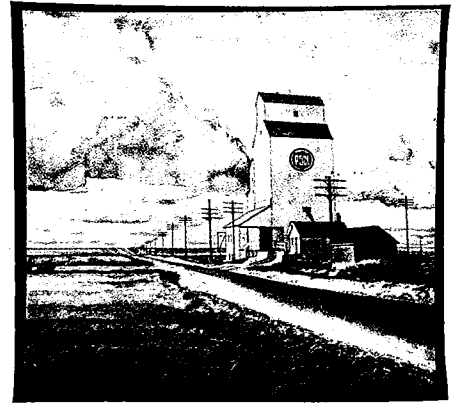
Farmers, especially those in the West, who were far from the major manufacturing centre in central Canada, were also suffering from the tariffs established by the National Policy. For example, when they needed farm machinery, they had to either pay high duties on imported American machinery or pay for high-priced equipment from central Canada. Moreover, Canadians exporting agricultural products or other natural resources did not have tariff protections. They had to add the high cost of shipping to their product prices and often had trouble competing in international markets.

### AGRARIAN REFORM

Many farmers joined together in farmer-owned **cooperatives** to pool their costs and purchase expensive equipment. Some farmers formed cooperative stores, marketing cooperatives, and even cooperative banks. In the 1920s, farmers established many successful wheat pools, which were cooperatives that operated grain elevators and bought and marketed wheat.

Many prairie farmers joined together to ask the government for more beneficial policies, such as reduced grain storage and rail costs and more branch lines from the main CPR track. In 1900, protests by farmers' groups led to the *Manitoba Grain Act*, which regulated railroads' and grain elevators' dealings with farmers. Farmers joined together to create formal associations, such as the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association in 1903. In 1909, farmers from Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and Ontario established the Canadian Council of Agriculture. This organization lobbied the government on their behalf, including pushing for reduced tariffs on imports. In 1910, members from various provinces marched on Ottawa to voice these demands. Prime Minister Laurier entered the 1911 federal election in support of free trade, or reciprocity, with the United States. However, many voters, especially in central Canada, feared that a free-trade agreement would flood Canadian markets with less expensive American goods and lead to job losses in Canadian manufacturing. Conservative Robert Borden was against reciprocity, claiming that support for reciprocity was support for continentalism, which was political union with the United States. Borden won the election, and the tariffs remained.

**Figure 8-27** Wheat pool elevators were an important part of towns across the rural West. Manitoba Pool Elevators, established in 1924 as a farmer cooperative, is now part of a company called Viterra, a global agribusiness.



### VOICES

We must decide whether the spirit of Canadianism or that of continentalism shall prevail on the northern half of this continent.

—Robert Borden, Leader of the opposition, 1911

**IP** Why might western Canadian farmers have begun to feel alienated from the established political parties?

## OTHER REFORM MOVEMENTS

### NEW POLITICAL PARTIES

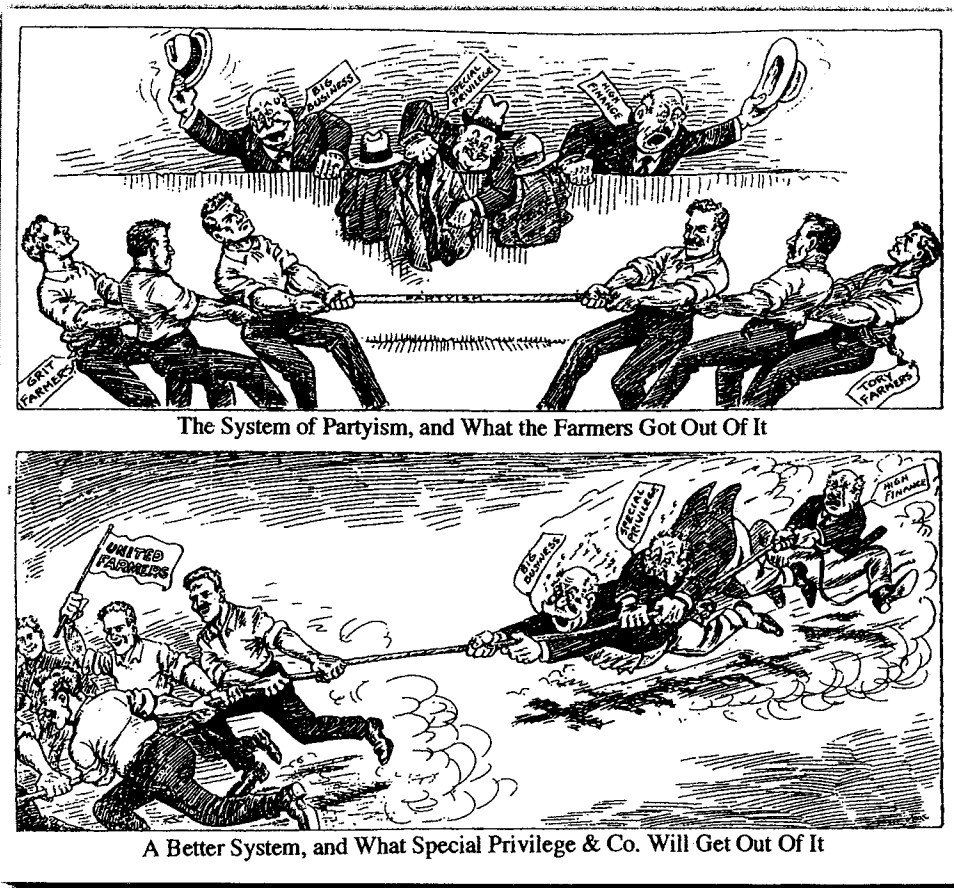
Many farmers and labourers felt alienated from the major national political parties during and after the First World War and so they formed their own provincial parties to advocate for their concerns. For example, the Dominion Labour Party was formed in Manitoba in 1918. In 1920, the United Farmers of Manitoba joined with other agrarian groups to support the national Progressive Party, which, in 1921, became part of the Official Opposition in the House of Commons. Some people, especially in the West, turned to socialism, which supports significant government intervention in the economy in order to bring about greater equality in society. The Socialist Party of Manitoba, founded in 1902, advocated compulsory, free education; an eight-hour work day; pensions for aged and infirm workers; free public hospitals and medical service; and equal political rights for men and women.

### RISE OF UNIONS IN CANADA

Increased industrialization at the turn of the nineteenth century saw many Canadians move from the fields to factory work. Most employees had to work ten or more hours a day, six days a week, for little pay. Women and children were also hired and were paid even less. Working conditions were often unhealthy and unsafe. For example, most factories had poor lighting and heating and dangerous equipment with few or no safety features. Workers were not paid if they were sick or got hurt on the job.

Many workers across the country joined **trade unions**, which are organizations formed by workers to advance their mutual interests. Between 1915 and 1919, union membership more than doubled from 143 000 to 378 000 workers. Legalized in Canada in 1872, unions experienced some successes. For example, during the First World War, when labour was in demand, wages went up by about 18 percent. But there was growing labour unrest when the end of the war brought high unemployment, high prices, and increased living expenses.

**Figure 8-30** Published in *The Grain Growers' Guide*, Winnipeg, 1919. Believing special interests controlled the Liberal and Conservative Parties, many farmers began to form their own political parties. During the 1920s and 1930s, a variety of United Farmers parties operated at the federal and provincial levels.



## SOCIAL REFORM IN THE CITIES

Along with reforms to their working conditions, Canadians also lobbied for social changes, especially in the rapidly growing cities. In the early twentieth century, cities could not handle the rapid population increases they were experiencing. There was overcrowding, disease, poor living conditions, and few services in place. Up to half of all urban dwellers lived in poverty. No government policies assisted Canadians with health care or unemployment.

Many middle-class urban citizens, especially women, formed humanitarian organizations to improve living and working conditions for the poor, children, the elderly, and widowed or sick women. These groups lobbied for laws to establish minimum wages and ban the hiring of child labourers. Religious missions provided food and shelter to the homeless. For example, the All People's Missions in Winnipeg, established by the Methodist Church in 1892, offered programs for children and medical and relief support for those in need. From the 1890s to the 1930s, a trend in Christian churches known as the Social Gospel worked to initiate improvements in areas such as health care, child labour, education, housing, urban reform, women's rights, social justice, and **prohibition**, which is the banning of the sale and consumption of alcohol.

Worrying about the connection they saw between poverty and alcohol, groups such as the American-based Women's Christian Temperance Union, which formed a Canadian branch in 1873, educated others about the ills of alcohol, advocating **temperance** or moderation. Temperance groups lobbied the government to legislate the prohibition. Prince Edward Island brought in prohibition in 1900, and Alberta and Ontario did so in 1916.

**C-C** What various methods did Canadians use to try to cause change in the early twentieth century? Are there other methods you can think of that they might have tried?

### THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

In the early twentieth century, many Canadian women organized and lobbied tirelessly for women's rights, including equality in the workplace and **suffrage**, which is the right to vote. They talked, they argued, they presented petitions, and finally they were successful.

In 1900, only one of every six paid workers in Canada was a woman. But the First World War changed all that. While men fought overseas, women took over their jobs in the workplace, while continuing to lobby for the right to vote. Women's service and sacrifices during the war became a key argument in favour of their receiving the right to vote. Between 1916 and 1925, all provinces except Québec (which did so in 1940) granted women the right to vote in provincial elections.

**Figure 8-32** Most Canadian city dwellers in the early twentieth century were tenants sharing poorly heated rooms, such as this crowded room in Toronto in 1911, without running water or a sewage system.



**Figure 8-33** In 1915, the Political Equity League of Manitoba presented the provincial legislature with two petitions containing almost 40 000 signatures of people supporting women's suffrage. Shown here in the back row: Mrs. A. V. Thomas and Mrs. F. J. Dixon; front row: Dr. Mary Crawford and Mrs. Amelia Burritt. In January 1916, Manitoba became the first province to give women the right to vote.

## CHECKFORWARD

You will read more about conscription in Chapter 10.

## VOICES

Women are persons in matters of pains and penalties, but are not persons in matters of rights and privilege.

— 1876 British court ruling relied on by Canadian courts



**Figure 8-34** Raised in Manitoba, Nellie McClung, shown above, was a powerful advocate for the rights of women. McClung, along with Irene Parlby, Louise McKinney, and Henrietta Edwards, assisted Emily Murphy in the Persons Case. The women became known as the Famous Five.

## THE FEDERAL VOTE AND THE PERSONS CASE

In 1917, Prime Minister Borden was facing an election as a result of his policy of **conscription**, which is the compulsory enlistment of civilians into the armed forces. Many Canadians were against conscription, but Borden believed that those who already had family fighting in the war would support it. With many men still far from home, Borden's government passed the *Military Voters Act*, giving the federal vote to all Canadian force members, including nurses, and the *Wartime Elections Act*, which permitted Borden to give female relatives of soldiers the right to vote. Borden was successful in saving his government from defeat.

In 1918, the year the First World War ended, all women, except First Nations, Métis, Inuit, and Asian women, were granted the right to vote in federal elections. At this time, no First Nations, Métis, Inuit, or Asian people, neither men nor women, had the vote in Canada. In 1919, women were granted the right to run for a seat in the House of Commons. Agnes MacPhail was the first woman to be elected to Parliament in 1921.

**CC** How, and why, did the First World War affect women's suffrage?

Although women had received the right to vote and hold a seat in the House of Commons, they were still not permitted to sit in the Senate. In 1916, Emily Murphy became the first woman judge in Alberta, and in all of the British Empire; however, Prime Minister Borden refused to consider her as a candidate for the Senate because she was not a "qualified person," as required by the *British North America Act*. Women, according to an old British definition, were not necessarily "persons" under the law.

In 1928, Murphy took the matter to court, and the Supreme Court of Canada ruled that only men were persons. But one year later, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council in London, then the final court of appeal for Canada, overturned the decision, ruling that women should be seen as persons under the law. Soon after the final ruling on the "Persons Case," Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King nominated Cairine Wilson to the Senate.

## EXPANDING ROLE OF GOVERNMENT

As the country grew and changed, rapid urbanization, immigration, and increased industrialization created new challenges in Canadian society. You have read about how many Canadians were demanding reforms.

The Liberals governed Canada between 1896 and 1911, winning four elections in a row. The final three were won on a platform that included an expanded role for government. Governments assumed new responsibilities for the social and economic well-being of the people. The federal and provincial governments began to create policies and laws in areas of education, health, policing, public services, labour legislation, and social security.

## FEDERAL-PROVINCIAL POWERS

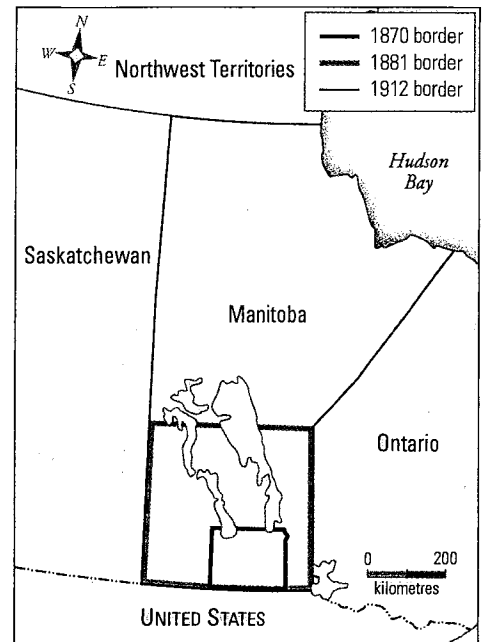
Through Confederation, the federal government was given most of the control over the finances of the country. It imposed taxes and spent money on nation-building projects, such as the construction of the CPR. As time went by, the provinces began to assert their own independence in matters they deemed important. For example, during the early 1880s, Manitoba made several demands, including control over its natural resources and Crown, or public lands; a lower tariff on agricultural tools; boundaries extended to Hudson Bay; and the right to grant railroad charters in the province (the elimination of disallowance). In response, the boundaries of the province were extended in 1881 and 1912. In 1888, the CPR agreed to end its monopoly in exchange for compensation from the federal government, and Manitoba was given the right to grant railroad charters. In 1930, the province was given control of its natural resources and Crown lands.

The federal government's power in provincial matters had been weakened in part due to a court case in Ontario. Oliver Mowat, who became premier of Ontario in 1872, advocated strongly for provincial rights. He took some issues, including those related to provincial boundaries and jurisdiction over timber and mineral rights, to court in the 1880s, where they were settled in Ontario's favour. These rulings changed the relationship between the federal and all the provincial governments. Instead of a strong, centralized federal government and weak provincial governments, the rulings gave the provinces more power in some areas. In 1896, the Liberals won the federal election on a platform that focused on provincial rights.

During the First World War, however, there was "emergency federalism." The federal government took charge of most areas, including the economy, taxes, and labour relations. It controlled wages and prices, and it banned strikes. After the First World War, the balance of power shifted back, with the provinces once again having increased jurisdiction. They took over personal and corporate taxation, and had more responsibility for health, education, and welfare.

Figure 8-35 Manitoba's Borders, 1870, 1881, and 1912



In 1881, Manitoba grew in size to include the land occupied by new immigrants. The federal government tried to extend Manitoba's boundaries eastward, as well, but Ontario resisted. The boundaries were extended northward in 1912.



### .. SHAPING CANADA TODAY ..

From the early 1870s to the mid-1920s, provinces developed laws that required children to attend school. By 1929, most provinces had laws prohibiting children under fourteen from working in factories and mines. These laws formed the basis for provincial laws today.

### RECALL... REFLECT... RESPOND

1. What were some ways in which governments responded to changes in the lives of Canadians and demands for reforms?  

2. Why do you think power shifted from the provincial governments back to the federal government during the First World War, and why do you think this shift was tolerated by the provinces?  

3. How might laws and policy documents be a source of evidence for facts and insights about the past? What laws or policy documents might you consult for insight into the issues discussed on pages 244 to 251?  
