

AN ANALYSIS OF THE WINNIPEG PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM
AND THE SOCIAL FORCES THAT SHAPED IT
1897 - 1920

by
John Pampallis

A thesis submitted in conformity with
the requirements for the Degree
of Master of Education
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INTRODUCTION

The period from 1897 to 1920 was one of great economic growth for Winnipeg. During this period Winnipeg was transformed from a small, mercantile city to an important industrial centre. The population grew enormously (from 31,649 in 1896 to 199,055 in 1921) and became ethnically diverse due to large-scale immigration from Britain, the United States, and central and eastern Europe. With the growth in industry and population, there emerged a fairly large working class, a significant number of whose members were non-Anglophones. The entire period was marked by increasingly sharp conflict between capitalists and workers, and by tensions between Anglo-Saxons and other ethnic groups. This dissertation is largely an analysis of the way the Winnipeg public school system responded to the changing reality of the times.

The first chapter presents a brief portrait of Winnipeg in the years immediately prior to 1897. It reviews the Manitoba School Question up to that year and describes the changes in educational legislation that accompanied it. The operation of Winnipeg's public schools in the 1890's is also briefly surveyed. This chapter provides the necessary historical background and serves as a point of dep-

arture for the material which follows.

Chapter 2 does not deal specifically with education. Rather, it analyses the class composition of Winnipeg and the power relationships that existed between the various classes. Such an analysis is included in order to show where political and economic power lay, and, therefore, where the power to exercise control over the educational system, its aims and its implementation lay. It is demonstrated that this power rested predominantly with the capitalist class. This chapter also serves to lay the basis for explaining why the various social groupings in Winnipeg took the positions that they did with regard to the school system.

The third chapter attempts to show how the public schools were used as instruments of political socialization and social control by the ruling class in order to serve ruling class interests. Incidentally, it should be noted that no claim is made that this was the sole function of the public schools. It is claimed, though, that it was one of their major functions.

The fourth chapter focuses on the education of non-Anglophone immigrants. The attitudes of various Anglophone classes to "foreigners" is discussed, and particular attention is paid to the way in which the attitudes of these classes were manifested in the sphere of education. It is pointed out that while all classes of Anglophones favoured

the cultural assimilation of "foreigners," their motivations for wanting this varied from class to class. In this discussion one point of focus is the fear that many Anglophones had as a result of the continued influx of non-Anglophones — the fear of political and social displacement. The attitudes of the "foreigners" themselves to assimilation and cultural retention are also discussed. The latter part of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of the role of the school in assimilating non-Anglophones.

Chapter 5 discusses the advent of manual training and technical and vocational education in the Winnipeg school system. The rationale for the introduction of these programs is discussed in some detail. While the introduction of manual training at the elementary school level was not a subject of great controversy, the same cannot be said for technical education at the secondary level. The differences of opinion between the labour movement and sections of the capitalist class regarding the form that this education should take — whether trade schools or technical schools — is examined.

The sixth chapter deals with the campaign for compulsory school attendance legislation. This campaign enjoyed a strong, broad-based support, and the arguments of various sectors of Winnipeg society for such legislation are elucidated. The provincial government's reasons for resisting the demands of such a popular movement are also examined. The remainder of the chapter consists of a documentation of

the legislative concessions that were gradually wrung from the provincial Tory government. The actual passing of the School Attendance Act of 1916, which finally made education compulsory, did not occur until Norris' Liberals came to power in late 1915.

The final chapter summarizes and draws conclusions from the material presented in the previous chapters.

CHAPTER 1

A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In the early 1890's, Manitoba suffered a mild depression which lasted until about 1896. This decline of economic prosperity was part of a general depression in most of the world capitalist economy which resulted in low wheat prices and a shortage of investment capital among other things. As a trading centre which supplied wheat farmers with raw materials and equipment, and which also acted as a grain marketing centre, Winnipeg obviously felt the effects of the fall in the price of wheat. This problem was compounded by a long period of low rainfall which had an adverse effect on agricultural output, and also by a decline in the rate of immigration and thus the opening up of new farm lands.

Despite these problems, however, neither Winnipeg nor the province as a whole ceased to experience economic growth. The improvement of agricultural techniques and the immigrants that did come to the prairies — mainly from the United States — kept agricultural output growing, if somewhat slowly. In addition to this, the wholesale trade of Winnipeg kept growing slowly and the Winnipeg Grain Exchange increased in importance as a grain marketing insti-

tution. Some new industries also grew up — notably flour milling and meat packing.

The labour movement in Winnipeg also grew slowly. A new plumbers' local and a machinists' lodge were organized¹ and in 1894 the Winnipeg Trades and Labour Council was re-organized on the principles of craft unionism.² The early nineties were not marked by the sharp industrial conflicts which were to become characteristic of the opening decades of the twentieth century, and strikes were very uncommon during this early period.

The permanent population of Winnipeg, according to the federal census of 1896, was 31,649. The vast majority of this population was of British origin and the largest minority ethnic groups were the Scandinavians (including Icelanders) and Germans. The more detailed census in 1901 (when the ethnic composition had moved towards a greater degree of heterogeneity) showed that those of British stock composed 73.9% of the total population of Winnipeg, while the Scandinavians and the Germans comprised 7.9% and 5.4% respectively. Ethnic tensions were not great in Winnipeg.

However, almost unnoticed, the seeds of the future transformation of the population were being sown. Eastern Europeans of various national groupings were beginning to trickle into the Canadian Northwest, and some of these settled in Winnipeg. The first Ukrainian settlers arrived on the prairies in 1891 although the large influx of these people did not start until late in the 1890's. Other East-

ern Europeans, mainly from the Austro-Hungarian and Russian empires, also began to move into the prairie region. In 1901, the federal census showed that Winnipeg had small populations of Austro-Hungarians (2.7% of the total population), Russians and Poles (1.5%), and Jews (2.7%). Many of these Eastern Europeans only arrived in Winnipeg in the years 1897 to 1901, however, and in 1897 their numbers were much smaller.

The decade prior to 1896 was a time of slow change sandwiched between the boom of the early and middle eighties and the frantic period of economic and population growth which followed in the late eighteen nineties and the early years of the new century. W. L. Morton describes it this way:

The excited hopes of the boom, the dreams of metropolitan greatness, were damped by these years of relative stagnation, and Winnipeg, from being a roaring frontier town, the town of the plains traders, the lumber men, and the railway workers, had become for the time being a quiet provincial capital, slow-going, sedate, and conservative.³

In the sphere of education, while the Winnipeg public school system continued to grow and evolve, Manitoba's legislators and voters became embroiled in what was called the Manitoba School Question. While this legislation and the political issues surrounding it did not immediately have a very great influence on most schools in the city of

Winnipeg, it did effect the atmosphere in which educators and other influential citizens viewed the school system, and it also had a direct effect on the heated debate regarding compulsory education which loomed so large in the first decade and a half of the twentieth century. It thus behoves us to review it here briefly.

Manitoba's first School Act was passed in 1871, soon after the province joined Confederation. This Act established a Board of Education, which was divided into Protestant and Catholic sections. The Board was administered independently of the provincial government, but received grants from it. Schools were administered by local trustees under the superintendence of one or the other section. Although it was not always the case, Catholic schools tended to use French as a language of instruction while Protestant schools tended to serve the English-speaking population and to use English. Every school was classified as either Protestant or Catholic.

Despite a few amendments, the dual system of education established by the School Act of 1871 remained substantially the same until 1890. During this period, the composition of the province's population changed radically. Whereas in 1871 there were about equal numbers of Catholics (mainly French-speaking) and Protestants (mainly English-speaking), by 1890 new settlers, who came mainly from Ontario, had caused such a sharp rise in the number of English-

speaking Protestants that the Catholics had become a small minority in the province. This shift in the population ratio was also accompanied by a shift in political power in favour of the Anglophone Protestants. The political power of the Francophones was also weakened by the redistribution of the province into thirty-eight electoral districts in March 1888. This redistribution ignored the former practice of communal representation and replaced it with representation by population. As a result the legislative assembly following the June 1888 election had only eight French members.

As the Protestant population of Manitoba increased, so did the anti-French and anti-Catholic feelings among them become more intense. This was partly because of the influx of Ontario Protestant settlers, many of them members of the Orange Lodge, who harboured a traditional animosity towards Quebec and an intolerance towards anything French or Catholic. The Riel Rebellion in Saskatchewan in 1885 also helped to inflame the chauvinism of many Anglophone Protestants in Manitoba, as it did throughout Canada. Although these attitudes on the part of English-speakers did not immediately translate themselves into demands for the abolition of the dual system of education, they provided a base from which future advocates of "national" schools could draw their support.

The event which served as a spark to inflame anti-

Catholic passions and resulted in the move to abolish the dual system, was the passing of the Jesuit Estates Act of 1888 by the government of Quebec. This Act proposed to pay compensation to the Jesuit Order for lands which were confiscated from it by the British Crown at the time of the Conquest, and which had passed to the province of Quebec at Confederation. Some of the claims of the Jesuits, however, were in dispute and the Act requested the Pope, as head of the Catholic Church, to arbitrate the disputed claims. The idea of the Papacy playing such a direct role in Canadian politics led to a great cry of protest from Protestants, and especially from Orangemen in Ontario. They claimed that Catholicism was trying to extend its power in Canada, and demanded that the Act be disallowed. The leader of this campaign was Dalton McCarthy, a member of the Conservative Party.

The anti-Catholic campaign in Ontario soon spread to Manitoba and manifested itself in a demand for the abolition of the dual system of education. This demand was fuelled by claims that the dual system was wasteful and inefficient because it required the duplication of administrative tasks. The campaign for the abolition of the dual system proved to be irresistible. There is no need here to go into the detail of the campaign except to say that it included an anti-Catholic speech in Portage La Prairie by Dalton McCarthy and speeches by two Manitoba

cabinet ministers. The upshot of this campaign was legislation by the Liberal government of Thomas Greenway which: a) in January 1890 abolished the official use of French in the Legislative Assembly, the civil service, government publications and the provincial courts; and b) in March 1890 abolished the dual system of education. The Protestant Anglophone majority, it seemed, were determined to "nationalize" the schools, to make Manitoba into an English-speaking province and to assimilate non-Anglophones into a "British" culture.

The legislation which abolished the dual system instituted a single non-denominational (but not secular) school system.⁴ The Board of Education was replaced by a Department of Education under a minister responsible to the legislature. The legislation also provided for the establishment of an Advisory Board.

The Department of Education was responsible for educational administration, including control over school inspection. The Advisory Board had control over the curriculum, textbooks, and teacher certification, and was responsible for regulations concerning school buildings and the administration of final examinations. For the administration of most of its rules and regulations, however, the Advisory Board was dependent on the Department of Education, and as time went by and the educational system grew, the Board delegated more and more of its powers to

the Department.

The education legislation of 1890 was incorporated in two Acts: "An Act Respecting Public Schools," and "An Act Respecting the Department of Education." The former act was a copy of the Ontario School Act with the section dealing with the provision of separate schools and the clause providing for compulsory schooling omitted.⁵ The reason for these omissions, according to Morton, was that

...the legal position of the government...was that the Catholics of Manitoba had no constitutional right to schools supported by public taxation, but did have a right to schools such as they had before the entry of Manitoba into Confederation, private schools supported by fees and gifts. Because of this right, children of Catholic parents could not be compelled under the constitution to attend state-supported schools.⁶

The Catholics in Manitoba were angry at what they saw as a violation of their rights. They had opposed the new legislation before it was passed, and they fought against it after it became law. Dr. J. K. Barrett, an Anglophone Catholic from Winnipeg, challenged the right of the Winnipeg school district to compel him to pay taxes for the support of non-Catholic schools. The Court of Queen's Bench ruled against Barrett. On appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada this decision was reversed, but on a further appeal the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council reversed the ruling of the Supreme Court. Thus the legislation of 1890

was considered to be constitutional. A similar appeal by an Anglican taxpayer, Alexander Logan, who also objected to paying taxes for non-denominational schools, also met with the same fate.

The Catholics, defeated in the courts, now petitioned the federal government to have remedial legislation passed to remedy the wrong that they had suffered. Thus the federal government became directly involved in the Manitoba School Question. The Conservative federal government was placed in an embarrassing position and tried desperately to avoid having to take a definite position on the matter, since to do so would probably entail losing either its French Catholic support in Quebec or its support from Protestants in Ontario. As it turned out the Manitoba School Question became a key issue in the federal election of 1896. The federal Liberals, led by Wilfred Laurier, claimed that they could reach a compromise with the Liberal government in Manitoba which would satisfy Manitoba's Catholics. The Liberals won the election and a compromise was soon reached between the federal government and the government of Manitoba. The Laurier-Greenway Compromise became law in 1897 by means of an amendment to the Public Schools Act. The amendment provided for religious instruction in the schools between three-thirty and four o'clock in the afternoon when this was requested by parents or guardians of at least ten children attending the school. The religious instruction

was to be given by a Christian clergyman of the same faith as the parents or guardians who made the request. No pupil could attend religious classes unless their parents or guardians desired it. In addition to this, the trustees were to employ at least one Catholic teacher where there were forty children in an urban school or twenty-five in a rural school. With respect to the language of instruction, the amendment stated that:

Where ten of the pupils in any school speak the French language (or any language other than English) as their native language, the teaching of such pupils shall be conducted in French (or such other language), and English upon the bilingual system.⁷

Thus was the Manitoba School Question temporarily resolved.

While the controversy over educational legislation and minority rights raged on, the Winnipeg public school system — which had always been overwhelmingly Protestant — continued to operate without major conflict. The few Catholic schools in Winnipeg did not continue as public schools after 1890, but instead chose to operate as parochial schools. The old Winnipeg Protestant School District No. 1 became the Winnipeg Public School District No. 1.

Daniel McIntyre, who had been appointed superintendent of Winnipeg's Protestant schools in 1885, continued as superintendent of the new public school system after 1890.

Under McIntyre's leadership, there was an increase in the quantity of school accomodation and an improvement in its quality. Especially after 1890, more enduring school structures were built, with more attention being paid to features such as adequate heating and ventilation.

The school population grew steadily. Between 1889 and 1896, the number of pupils enrolled increased from 4,703 to 6,374, while the number of teachers grew from 61 to 96.⁸ Despite the growth in enrollment, however, many children in Winnipeg did not attend school at all and many of those enrolled did not attend regularly. The vast majority of the pupils enrolled in Winnipeg schools were in elementary schools which consisted of grades 1 to 8. In 1896, for example, enrollment in the Winnipeg Collegiate Institute (Winnipeg's only secondary school) numbered 554 pupils.⁹

In the elementary schools, the subjects taught were reading, composition, spelling, grammar, geography, history, physiology and hygiene, arithmetic, geometry, algebra and music.¹⁰ Patriotic exercises were included as part of the class-work of the pupils as well as being performed as extra-curricular activities. In 1897, for instance, 4000 school children marched in the celebrations marking the Diamond Jubilee of the reign of Queen Victoria.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that the schools began to place a greater emphasis on the inculcation of values, as opposed to punishment, as a means of controlling

the behaviour of pupils. The Visiting Committee of the Winnipeg Public School Board mentioned this in their report of 1897:

We have been well pleased with what we have found. We have observed marked improvements in conditions as contrasted with former years. The literary work is well done, the discipline is good, and there is less corporal punishment. There is a growing tendency for teachers to substitute an appeal to the higher motives. The minimum in corporal punishment has not been reached but the time is not distant when more than the rarest resort to it will be considered as evidence of unfitness for the work of teaching.¹¹

With this brief background information, we can now take a more detailed look at the city of Winnipeg and its public education system over the following twenty-odd years, and analyze the educational development which occurred during that period.

NOTES

1. C. Lipton, The Trade Union Movement of Canada, 1827-1959. (Toronto: N. C. Press, 1973), p. 80.
2. W. L. Morton, Manitoba: A History (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p. 264.
3. Ibid., p. 263.
4. The schools were not secular in that religious instruction was allowed in the schools under certain circumstances.
5. Ontario had a system of separate schools, whereby Catholic parents, in defined circumstances, could require that their taxes be used for the support of Catholic schools.
6. Morton, op. cit., p. 248.
7. Canada: Sessional Papers, Vol. XXVI, No. 13, 1897, pp. 1 - 2.
8. Winnipeg Public School Board, Annual Reports, 1890 and 1897.
9. Report of the Department of Education, 1899, p. 559.
10. K. Wilson, "The Development of Education in Manitoba," (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis: Michigan State University, 1967), p. 178.
11. Quoted from J. W. Chafe, An Apple for the Teacher (Winnipeg: Winnipeg School Division No. 1, 1967).

CHAPTER 2

CLASS COMPOSITION AND RELATIONS BETWEEN CLASSES

Before we undertake to actually look at Winnipeg's public school system, we will first examine the class composition of the city and the relations between the various classes. This will enable us to have a clearer picture of the social milieu in which the educational developments of the period took place.

The population of early twentieth century Winnipeg may be divided roughly into three social classes, based on common interests, lifestyles, and relationships to the means of production. These classes may be labelled: the capitalist class, the working class, and the middle class. Let us begin by briefly describing each of these in turn.

The capitalists were numerically a small class consisting mainly of wealthy merchants, financiers, and industrialists. Through their ownership of the city's businesses, they controlled the economic life of Winnipeg. They were also the dominant force in its political life and formed the social elite. They were predominantly Protestant and of British origin.

They tended to live in the exclusive neighbourhoods

of South and West Winnipeg, especially in Armstrong's Point and Crescentwood (the area surrounding Wellington Crescent). These areas were composed of large, stately homes surrounded by beautiful gardens. A working class newspaper delivery boy later described his first day's work in Armstrong's Point thus:

Indeed there were no houses in Eastgate, Westgate or Middlegate. There were only castles, huge castles three full storeys in height, some with leaded windows, and all, certainly, with dozens of rooms. They were built in an assortment of architectural styles and peopled by names from Winnipeg's commercial and industrial Who's Who. I was so awe-stricken by the sheer size of the houses that I almost tiptoed up the walks with my papers.¹

The chief political and economic preoccupation of the capitalist class until nearly the end of the First World War, seemed to be that of ensuring the growth of Winnipeg into an important commercial and industrial centre. This would, of course, serve the purpose of the businessmen and increase their power within Canada as a whole. In order to achieve this goal, they utilized their political muscle to promote, inter alia, immigration, the provision of cheap, municipally supplied, hydro-electric power, foreign and eastern Canadian investment in local industries, and educational facilities (especially for technical education).

With the growth of the city's economy, other concerns