



The Regina Manifesto and the Birth of Social Democracy in Canada



75TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATIVE 2009 CALENDAR

Remembering the Regina Manifesto

Just over seventy-five years ago the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) held its first national convention in Regina, Saskatchewan. Times were desperate. The industrialized world was consumed with an economic crisis of unimaginable horror and Canada was no exception. Unemployment in our country was at an all-time high. Millions of people were relying on public relief. Work camps for single, unemployed males were deplorable and dust storms and droughts made matters even worst in the prairies where crops failed year after year.

Neither the National Liberal Opposition nor the provincial governments offered solutions to the desperate times facing Canadians — a political vacuum was waiting to be filled. The depression served as a catalyst to bring together a wide spectrum of reform-minded people from across the country to form a new political party. Over 250 people, went to extraordinary lengths to travel to the dustbowl of the prairies in July

of 1933 to debate the finer points of the Regina Manifesto and discuss strategy on electing a new party to help alleviate the ills befalling our country.

Even though the CCF never managed to “eradicate capitalism”, even its worst critics would be hard pressed to deny that the party and its successor the New Democratic party have had significant impact on Canadian politics and society. The claim could rightfully be made that because of the CCF, capitalism in Canada became more humane and that some of the sharper edges of the economic system it hoped to replace were at the very least, smoothed. Case in point — Canada has a social welfare state, which includes minimum wage laws, unemployment insurance, government pensions and progressive taxation, and, of course, a medical care system the envy of many countries around the world. This is in large thanks to the CCF’s success as an influential Opposition party at the national level and as government in the Provinces

of Saskatchewan, British Columbia, Manitoba and Ontario.

The Regina Manifesto eventually left a huge footprint on the Canadian landscape. It provided the guiding principles to the CCF government of Tommy Douglas and much of what the Manifesto advocated, although under constant attack, is now well-established in Canadian life. The Fourteen Points were very progressive for their time, calling for public health insurance, unemployment insurance and pension plans, expansion of Crown corporations in transportation, resources and banks, and the adoption of a Canadian constitution with an entrenched Charter of Rights.

The Regina Manifesto is also an important Canadian historical document because it allows us to see and hear the desperation of the times in the words written 75 years ago. But, more importantly, the Regina Manifesto provided a vision to strive for, something that many social democrats still believe is sorely needed in the present day.

JANUARY

SUNDAY

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WEDNESDAY

THURSDAY

FRIDAY

SATURDAY

				1 New Year's Day	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31



The Regina Manifesto

Preamble

... The present order is marked by glaring inequalities of wealth and opportunity, by chaotic waste and instability; and in an age of plenty it condemns the great mass of the people to poverty and insecurity. Power has become more and more concentrated into the hands of a small irresponsible minority of financiers and industrialists and to their predatory interests the majority are habitually sacrificed. When private profit is the main

stimulus to economic effort, our society oscillates between periods of feverish prosperity in which the main benefits go to speculators and profiteers, and of catastrophic depression, in which the common man's normal state of insecurity and hardship is accentuated.

... The new social order at which we aim is not one in which individuality will be crushed out by a system of regimentation. Nor shall we interfere with cultural rights of racial or religious minorities. What we

seek is a proper collective organization of our economic resources such as will make possible a much greater degree of leisure and a much richer individual life for every citizen.

... It appeals for support to all who believe that the time has come for a far-reaching reconstruction of our economic and political institutions and who are willing to work together for the carrying out of the following 14 policies.

FEBRUARY

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
15	16	17	18	19	20	21
	Family Day					
22	23	24	25	26	27	28



1. Planning

The establishment of a planned, socialized economic order, in order to make possible the most efficient development of the national resources and the most equitable distribution of the national income.

James Shaver Woodsworth

“The machine has brought about an industrial revolution. We have passed from an age of individual production to an age of social production. But the machine has gotten into the hands of a few who control the operations of industry for their own advantage. The next step is for the people to gain control of the machine and operate it for the benefit of all.”

Allen Mills, *Fool for Christ: The Political Thought of JS Woodsworth* (Toronto: Toronto UP, 1991), 69