

WE HAVE ASKED FOR BREAD,
AND YOU GAVE US A STONE!
WESTERN FARMERS AND THE
SIEGE OF OTTAWA

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"WE HAVE ASKED FOR BREAD, AND YOU GAVE US A STONE"

Western Farmers and the Siege of Ottawa

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By

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ABSTRACT

"We Have Asked For Bread and You Gave Us a Stone" examines the "Siege of Ottawa," a monumental meeting that took place on December 16, 1910 between roughly 800 organized farmers representing the Canadian Council of Agriculture, and Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier, his cabinet, and the rest of government. The "Siege" has not been given its due attention. A handful of academic works have looked at the "Siege," but only superficially. Most of these works have provided only a general description of the delegation's demands once they arrived in Ottawa. As a result, many details of the "Siege" were not investigated. This thesis represents the first major academic study of the "Siege," a pivotal event in Canadian political, economic, agricultural and social history.

The thesis focuses specifically on the events surrounding the "Siege," including the motivations, experiences and impact of 500 farmers from Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba who made up what was referred to at the time as the greatest delegation that ever waited on government. Particular attention is devoted to examining western farmers' motivations for going to Ottawa, the on-board business meetings that took place on the train from Winnipeg to Ottawa, the delegates' arrival in the nation's capital and the proceedings that took place in the House of Commons. Laurier's response to the farmers' memorials and the farmers' reaction to the prime minister's reply are also analyzed. The contemporary significance of the "Siege," along with the democratic principles embedded within it are also examined. Rural protest and populism are still defining characteristics of western Canada today. Farmers are an important group in Canada; we owe it to them to more clearly understand one of the first significant events in their history.

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I am fortunate to have had the assistance of my supervisor, Professor Bill Waiser. I am deeply indebted to him for his support, patience, encouragement, and skilled guidance, all of which helped to make my research and writing a great experience. I would also like to thank my advisory committee for their insights. A special thanks to my friend and side-kick, Bonnie Wagner, for her helpful commentary. To my sister and friends, thanks for all the support and for the good times. I also extend my heartfelt gratitude to my parents whose interest and commitment to education and research has inspired me to follow in their path. I would also like to acknowledge the resilience of my great-grandparents, farmers who came to Saskatchewan from England, Hungary, Minnesota and Ontario around the turn of the century and were contemporaries of those who participated in the "Siege." A final word of recognition must go to my grandparents, who carried on the farming tradition and showed unwavering support for this project.

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INTRODUCTION

"Being the story of the 800 farmers from Ontario, Quebec, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, who met the government and members of parliament in the House of Commons Chamber on December 16, 1910, and demanded equitable legislation."¹

On the morning of December 16, 1910, a delegation of approximately 800 Canadian farmers mobilized at Ottawa's Grand Opera House and marched four-to-six abreast through the streets of the Canadian capital to the House of Commons. Together, the delegates represented the Canadian Council of Agriculture (CCA), a newly formed nation-wide organization serving as the voice of Canada's farmers. Although the deputation had country-wide participation, it was composed of a high percentage of western delegates, numbering roughly 500 in total. The trip to the capital was a response to the mid-summer western tour that Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier had made earlier that year. Over the course of his trip through the West, Laurier had been met by anxious representatives who wanted action on several pressing agricultural issues: the tariff, terminal elevators, banking, co-operative societies, the chilled meat industry, and the Hudson Bay Railway. Upon completion of the tour, frustrated western farmers, not wanting their demands to be disregarded or forgotten, decided to present their case directly to Canada's parliamentarians.

¹ George F. Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa (Winnipeg: Grain Growers' Guide, 1911), 6.

During the December meeting in the House of Commons chamber, organized farmers presented a series of speeches that were read from the "Farmers' Platform," a seminal document which detailed various agricultural concerns that affected Canadian farmers. The country's leading statesman, Prime Minister Laurier, was the target and the recipient of most of these addresses. The demonstration in the House that day became known as the "Siege of Ottawa," an important symbol for the organized farmers' movement in the early years of the twentieth century.² The "Siege" signified that organized farmers were no longer willing to endure both a political and an economic system that they believed worked against them and hindered their future progress. The mass protest also made clear that organized farmers were now ready to take their issues directly to the officials in Ottawa who had the authority to address them.

Social movements similar to the "Siege of Ottawa" have been the focus of a broad range of works in a wide variety of disciplines. The concept of "West as Protest" has for some time been embedded in the public consciousness and has been the focus of scholarly debate.³ Historian W. L. Morton in a well-known essay, "The Bias of Prairie Politics," points to this protest tradition as a fundamental feature of western Canada.⁴ Morton writes, "The subordinate

² The mass demonstration which took place in the chamber of the House of Commons on December 16, 1910 was not referred to at the time, or even in its immediate aftermath, as the "Siege of Ottawa." It was not until George F. Chipman, editor of the Grain Growers' Guide and member of the organized delegation that descended on the capital, edited and released the sixty-eight page booklet entitled, The Siege of Ottawa, that the protest came to be known as such. Before the release of The Siege, the December events were, most often, referred to as "the farmers' meeting" with government.

³ George Melnyk, Ed., Riel to Reform (Saskatoon: Fifth House Publishers, 1995), 1.

⁴ W.L. Morton, "The of Bias Prairie Politics," in Melnyk, Ed., Riel to Reform, 12.

status of the West in Confederation was the initial bias that set the train of development of prairie politics towards increasing differentiation from the Canadian standard.”⁵ The West’s struggle against political and economic subordination, he argues, was expressed by the desire for “a new political utopia.”⁶ The resistance process in the West, as it relates to agriculture, sprang from the rapid development of the region’s agricultural economy after 1900. Agricultural historian Ian MacPherson contends that social movements on the prairies resulted, in large part, from high freight rates, excessive bank charges, railway discrimination, indifference in Ottawa, unfavourable tariffs, and the manipulation of natural resources.⁷ Farmers complained that markets were rigged against them and they tended to blame officials for siding with eastern-dominated institutions. Many of these issues were areas of concern during the “Siege of Ottawa.”

Although the “Siege of Ottawa” and the events surrounding it have not been completely left out of the historical record by scholars, the topic has not received extensive coverage and analysis. To date, no full-scale academic study has been devoted to examining the “Siege” and those events that accompanied it. Despite there being a wealth of primary sources that pertain to the “Siege,” most of the academic works have provided only a general description of the farmers’ memorials that were presented to the country’s

⁵ Ibid., 12.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ian MacPherson, Each For All: A History of the Co-operative Movement in English Canada, 1900-45 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

parliamentarians in the House of Commons. Consequently, little is known about this important event.

The two most comprehensive works detailing the "Siege" and its related events were written in 1911, when the "Siege" continued to be a much-discussed topic of debate. George F. Chipman's edited volume, The Siege of Ottawa, published by the Grain Growers' Guide, provides the most detailed account of the events and issues associated with the "Siege." At the time of the "Siege," Chipman was the editor of the Guide. Under his direction, the Siege publication contained a number of documents that were central to the event. These materials included the major speeches presented at the Grand Opera House meeting, as well as the entire "Farmers' Platform," which was a complete set of memorials presented by the CCA executive to federal officials at the meeting in the Commons. The volume was distributed to all interested farmers throughout the country at a cost of twenty-five cents per copy.

The Canadian Annual Review (CAR) 1910-1911, a yearly publication that recounts the country's most important current events, was the second major source to include a description of the "Siege of Ottawa."⁸ It includes a detailed and accurate eight-page description of the "Siege" and the major events associated with it. The contributors noted the uniqueness and greatness of the deputation and recognized the immediate importance of the meeting. The information in the CAR provided the historical background for many later academic works.

⁸ The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1910 and 1911 (Toronto: The Canadian Review Company Ltd., 1911), 328-335.

Economist Louis Aubrey Wood's A History of Farmers' Movements in Canada (1924), a ground-breaking study of the origins and early developments of Canadian agrarian protest, serves as the first major academic work to include a section on the "Siege."⁹ The book, a record of the actions taken by organized farmers between 1870 and 1924 to improve their social, economic and political situation, includes a summary of the events which took place in Ottawa. Wood describes the December 15 meeting in the Grand Opera House, and then details the memorials presented by the delegation in the House of Commons the next day. He concludes by listing the important agrarian leaders who presented memorials that day including, among others, Roderick McKenzie, J. W. Scallion and E. C. Drury.

Harald S. Patton's Grain Growers' Cooperation in Western Canada (1928), was the second major academic study to analyze the events of the "Siege."¹⁰ This book is a study of the origins, growth, and experiences of prairie grain growers in the first two decades of the twentieth century and focuses on their co-operative attempts to market their wheat. Patton points to some of the concerns raised by organized prairie farmers during Laurier's 1910 summer tour; issues, he argues, that led directly to the farmers' decision to go to Ottawa in protest. He also claims that the Guide played an aggressive and influential role in promoting the necessity of sending a delegation to Ottawa.

⁹ Louis Aubrey Wood, A History of the Farmers' Movement in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1924).

¹⁰ Harald S. Patton, Grain Growers' Cooperation in Western Canada (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1928).

American historian Paul F. Sharp, in his book The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada: A Survey Showing American Parallels (1948) also provides a short analysis of the reasons for the organized farmers' demonstration in Ottawa.¹¹ Like the works of Wood and Patton before it, this study includes a description of the key issues on the minds of farmers that led to their decision to assemble in the capital. Sharp details the important resolutions presented by organized farmers in the House of Commons, and like other scholars, devotes particular attention to the tariff issue. He also points to two immediate results of the "Siege" and its historical significance. He argues that the press releases made available by the deputation informed the public at large of the reasons for the discontent in the West. Additionally, the "Siege" allowed eastern and western agrarian leaders to meet, and these meetings stimulated an "intersectional understanding," that later became invaluable to the farmers' movement.¹²

W. L. Morton's The Progressive Party in Canada (1950) was the next book to include the "Siege" as part of its analysis.¹³ This study, which tracks the rise of progressivism and the Progressive Party in Canada, offers a short explanation of the issues surrounding the "Siege" with particular focus on the tariff. Morton also draws attention to the disappointment experienced by the organized farmers following the meeting, which he argues was intensified after

¹¹ Paul F. Sharp, The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), 44.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ W. L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950).

reciprocity was defeated in the 1911 election. The defeat of reciprocity, he contends, did have its positive effects. It played a significant role in shaping the future "Farmers' Platforms" of 1916 and 1919.¹⁴ Although Morton does not devote a great deal of analysis to the "Siege" itself, he was the first and only historian to include the entire "Farmers' Platform" of 1910, a complete text of the memorials presented by farmers in the House, as a major appendix in his work.¹⁵ Academics since Morton who have studied the "Siege" have cited this appendix.

In his seminal book The National Policy and the Wheat Economy (1957), agricultural historian Vernon C. Fowke highlights a number of important issues the farmers addressed during their march to Ottawa.¹⁶ Fowke also stresses the importance of the support offered to the delegates by eastern organizations such as the Dominion Millers' Association and the Toronto Board of Trade.¹⁷ He concludes his brief analysis of the "Siege" by focusing on the terminal elevator matter which, he contends, was of central concern to farmers for some time. "The representations of 1910," Fowke concludes, "may be regarded as the climax of the pressure put on the federal government to operate the terminal elevators."¹⁸

¹⁴ Ibid., 72.

¹⁵ Ibid., 297-99.

¹⁶ Vernon C. Fowke, The National Policy and the Wheat Economy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957).

¹⁷ Ibid., 161.

¹⁸ Ibid., 162.

W. C. Good's Farmer Citizen: My Fifty Years in the Canadian Farmers' Movement (1965) also presents a brief description of the Ottawa "Siege."¹⁹ Good, a former member of the House of Commons and an active member of the farmers' movement, briefly outlines the connection between the issues raised by farmers during Laurier's 1910 midsummer tour and the grievances that came to the forefront during the gathering in Ottawa. He argues that tariff reform initiated the farmers' decision to go to Ottawa. Good also states that many members of the cabinet were impressed with how the delegates presented their case.

Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed (1974) by historians Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, a comprehensive look at the Wilfrid Laurier and Robert Borden years, was the next study to include details about the "Siege."²⁰ Brown and Cook highlight a number of the important memorials read by some of the country's agrarian leaders including E. C. Drury, D. W. McCuaig and E. A. Partridge. The authors also describe Laurier's response to the "Farmers' Platform," calling it "dignified, complimentary, and evasive."²¹ They conclude by noting that Laurier, after giving the farmers' programme some thought, saw no reason to believe that it would gain wide-spread acceptance outside the agricultural community.²²

¹⁹ W. C. Good, Farmer Citizen: My Fifty Years in the Canadian Farmers' Movement (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965), 88.

²⁰ Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974).

²¹ Ibid., 160.

²² Ibid.

Charles F. Wilson's A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951 (1978) gives a short description of the events that unfolded during the "Siege of Ottawa," as well as explaining the development of the "Farmers' Platform."²³ He notes that the 1910 protest was the first in a series of mass demonstrations in Ottawa which would be made by farmers over the years. He concludes that a direct and long-term result of the "Siege" was a revision and expansion of grain regulatory legislation.

Charles M. Johnston's E. C. Drury: Agrarian Idealist (1986) is a biography which includes the "Siege" as a topic of examination.²⁴ Johnston describes the important organizational role played in the proceedings in Ottawa by E. C. Drury, an executive member of the CCA and future Premier of Ontario. Unlike most other studies before it, Johnston's work documents the issues which were of particular importance to the eastern delegates, most notably the problem of rural depopulation in the East. With this biography, Johnston provides a needed contribution to the scholarly literature because E. C. Drury played such a key role in securing and coordinating many of the important arrangements for the delegates.

Political scientist David Laycock's book Populism and Democratic Thought in the Prairies, 1910 to 1945 (1990) is a relatively recent scholarly work

²³ Charles F. Wilson, A Century of Canadian Grain: Government Policy to 1951 (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978).

²⁴ Charles M. Johnston, E. C. Drury: Agrarian Idealist (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986).

that mentions the "Siege."²⁵ Laycock states that the "Siege" and the presentation of the "Farmers' Platform" which accompanied it, represented the first major demonstration of prairie farmers' opposition to national economic policy and colonialism. It is for this reason that Laycock uses 1910, the year of the "Siege," to begin his analysis of the rise of populism on the prairies in the early to mid-twentieth century. Laycock contends that the events of 1910 are roughly when "the momentum of indigenous populist practice began to have a major impact on national politics and prairie political competitions."²⁶ This work is significant because it underscores the fact that the "Siege" and events associated with it were influential in affecting the direction that political action would take in the prairies for the next thirty-five years.

Murray Knutilla's "That Man Partridge" (1994), an examination of the life of E. A. Partridge, is another example of a relatively recent scholarly biography that provides a number of good insights into the "Siege."²⁷ Knutilla's main intent was to describe the speaking role that Partridge played once the western delegation arrived in Ottawa. He also provides a general analysis of the "Siege." Unlike most academics before him, Knutilla describes how the idea for farmers to travel to Ottawa first gained prominence in the West and briefly looks at some of the important developments. These include the formulation of a position paper entitled the "Farmers' Bill of Rights" or "Farmers' Platform," and

²⁵ David Laycock, Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁷ Murray Knutilla, "That Man Partridge" E.A. Partridge, His Thoughts and Times (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1994).

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²⁵ David Laycock, Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910 to 1945 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

²⁶ Ibid., 6.

²⁷ Murray Knutilla, "That Man Partridge" E.A. Partridge, His Thoughts and Times (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1994).

the significant role that the CCA came to play in the protest. Knutilla also highlights the unusual fact that the large deputation had been allowed into the House of Commons at all, as this practice had never been allowed before or after the "Siege." He concludes his coverage of the "Siege" by noting that the "Farmers' Platform" was expanded upon by the CCA in 1916 and formed the political platform of a number of candidates in ensuing elections.

Finally, historian Bradford James Rennie's The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: the United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta 1909-1921 (2000) contains the most recent scholarly discussion of the "Siege" and its significance.²⁸ In most cases, his analysis of the "Siege" focuses on the influential role that a number of leading United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) executive members played in the meeting. Rennie also provides a general context for the farmers' protest. He correctly points to the direct connection between Laurier's western tour and the issues later endorsed in the "Farmers' Platform." The main strength of Rennie's work on the "Siege," however, is his discussion of its long-term significance. He stresses that the "Siege" came to be a "symbol of self-respect" for the organized farmers which, in turn, mobilized them even further in future protests.²⁹ He contends that the "Siege" became part of the "shared noble past" of inspired farmers.³⁰

²⁸ Bradford James Rennie, The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta 1909-1921 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Given the limited work that has been done on the "Siege," many aspects of this historically important meeting are open for further examination. In particular, there has been no in-depth examination of the role that western farmers, as a collective unit, played in the "Siege." This thesis will use a distinct western focus to examine the "Siege" and the events surrounding it. The emphasis on the West and on western delegates is warranted given the fact that they made up 500 of 800 CCA representatives who attended the meeting in the Commons. The "Siege" and the events associated with it represented a transnational movement, because delegates from all Canadian provinces except British Columbia and Prince Edward Island were involved in it. From the initial decision to go to Ottawa, however, this social movement was marked by strong western support and in the later stages it was regarded as being western-driven. Because organized support was so predominant throughout the West, special attention will be devoted to a number of leading western agrarian leaders and meeting organizers who played a prominent role in bringing about the proceedings of the "Siege."

Several important topics relating to the role that western delegates played in the "Siege" will be the main focus of examination and analysis. No academic study has included an in-depth look at the issues western farmers communicated to Prime Minister Laurier on his western tour the summer of 1910. No study, moreover, has made direct connections between these grievances and the farmers' decision to travel to Ottawa in protest. The thesis will also examine the important role that organized farmers from the three prairie

provinces played in promoting, organizing, and descending upon the capital in December of 1910. Emphasis will be placed on those organized farmers, who representing various farmers' associations, addressed Sir Wilfrid Laurier on his 1910 summer rail tour of Canada's western provinces.

Another area that has not received any in-depth historical analysis is the planning period when delegates devoted their energies to the organization of the mass demonstration in Ottawa. The fact that the meeting between organized farmers and Canadian government officials took place at all is significant, considering that never before had a farmers' movement of similar size and scope taken place in the country. Two of the main catalysts that strengthened the protest were the formation of the CCA, the first nation-wide body representing Canadian farmers as a whole, and the popular western-based magazine, the Grain Growers' Guide.

This study will also include an examination of the period when western delegates made their way from Winnipeg to Ottawa aboard their special train. The movement of the western portion of the organized farmers' deputation to Ottawa was the first time in Canadian history that a national train company, the Canadian Pacific Railway, had taken a western delegation of this size to the nation's capital. The forty-seven hours that the western delegates spent riding the special were a crucial period in terms of preparation. During this time, meetings were conducted, speeches and memorials for the upcoming meeting were prepared, acquaintances were made, group solidarity was formed, and on-

board rumours were rampant. The public welcome which accompanied the arrival of the western delegates in Ottawa will also be discussed.

The large organizational meeting in the city's Grand Opera House, one day before the main assembly with government on Parliament Hill, will also be described. The Opera House meeting offered an opportunity for the delegates from both the East and the West to come together for the first time to meet and discuss grievances from their respective provinces. A number of inspirational speeches were also given by prominent agrarian leaders to rally the delegates to their cause and outline their strategy for the next day. Finally, and most importantly, at this meeting the "Farmers' Platform," a long-term symbol for the "Siege," was discussed, critiqued, and endorsed.

This thesis will also provide an in-depth assessment of the December 16 meeting in the House of Commons. Many aspects of this important assembly have never been explored. These include a detailed description of the unique scene which played out as the delegates first arrived on Parliament Hill and assembled in the Commons, the presentation of the "Farmers' Platform," and Prime Minister Laurier's response to the memorials presented in this "Platform." Most of the delegates expressed bitter disappointment over Laurier's reply. The reasons for their disappointment will be examined. This discussion will lead directly into an analysis of the short-term, long-term, and contemporary significance of the "Siege." The "Siege," it is argued, influenced the Canada-United States reciprocity negotiations in January 1911, as well as contributed to Laurier's disastrous decision to call an election on the issue later that same

year. The "Siege" has also taken on recent significance for the democratic principles imbedded within it, as well for the spirit of the western farmers who made the trek to Ottawa, a spirit that western farmers attempt to emulate today.

In terms of my research strategy, I have devoted most of my attention to primary documents. The prime ministerial papers of Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Sir Robert Borden from the National Archives of Canada have been consulted extensively in researching and writing this thesis. Wilfrid Laurier's correspondence files were especially useful. These files contain dozens of letters from western farmers to the prime minister dealing with topics related to his western summer tour. Letters detailing the organization of the meetings in Ottawa and letters written by farmers describing their experiences in Ottawa are also part of this collection. Borden's correspondence files also proved useful as they provided a much-needed counter-balance to Laurier's file. The personal files of Robert Sellar, a delegate from Ontario who kept a number of documents relating to the "Siege," were also examined in Ottawa. Other files consulted from the Saskatchewan Archives include the personal papers of Saskatchewan Premier Walter Scott, Saskatchewan Minister of Agriculture W. R. Motherwell, and western agrarian leader E. A. Partridge. Saskatchewan Liberal Party papers were also used in assembling this thesis.

Newspapers were another key source for this study. Newspapers from across Canada devoted front-page coverage to the farmers' deputation, from the time the delegates prepared to leave for Ottawa to the days immediately following the Ottawa meeting. As well, the farmers' movement became front-

page news in the papers ranging from the New York Times to The Times of London. Weekly newspapers from a number of smaller prairie centres were also examined and provided a sense of the importance of the delegation's trip to Ottawa and illustrated the support the communities gave the delegation.

The western-based Grain Growers' Guide also served as an important source during the course of my research. The farmers' delegation was the main topic addressed in the Guide for the entire month of December 1910. The majority of the articles detail the event's preparation, the actual meeting between the delegates and the federal government, and the aftermath of the meeting in Ottawa. Additionally, articles dealing with the delegates' personal reflections and the general feeling in the prairies about the importance of the event are found throughout the Guide. The Guide proved to be an invaluable source because its columnists and editors were directly involved in organizing as well as in documenting the progress of this mass undertaking.

The "Siege" served as a denouement to an important organized social movement. The term 'social' movement has been chosen over others such as 'protest' or 'political' movement to describe the "Siege" and its accompanying events, mainly for its broad scope. Sociologists Samuel D. Clark and J. Paul Grayson and historian Linda M. Grayson in the seminal edited collection Prophecy and Protest: Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Canada, note that a driving force behind social movements is that people are discontented because they do not believe that sufficient institutional guides exist to direct their

behaviour.³¹ The authors state that this discontent stems from a "perceived institutional deficiency."³² They provide an excellent definition of what constitutes a social movement that proved useful for examining the "Siege." They refer to social movements as a "form of behaviour in which a large number of people try to bring about or resist social change."³³ Social movements represent a group's conscious effort to change systems in light of past experiences. This definition can be directly applied to actions of organized farmers throughout 1910. The "Siege" serves as a model early example of a social movement. Whether the definition is used to examine the farmers' voiced discontent about the country's economic structure, to analyze the western farmers' motivations for going to Ottawa in the first place, or to examine the delegates' actions once they arrived in Ottawa, it proves to be useful for examining what took place.³⁴

This thesis makes an important contribution to historical research because it examines one of the most significant events in the history of Canadian rural protest. Not content to merely complain about their economic

³¹ Samuel D. Clark, J. Paul Grayson and Linda M. Grayson, eds., Prophecy and Protest: Social Movements in Twentieth-Century Canada (Toronto: Gage Educational Publishing Limited, 1975), 3.

³² Ibid. For one reason or another, Clark, Grayson and Grayson assert, people are unhappy with the way in which society is operating, and blame their unhappiness on prevailing institutional guides. The authors suggest that the reason why people become discontented is because, often times, they are concerned with inconsistencies in the existing institutional structures.

³³ Ibid., 1.

³⁴ Ibid., 12-22. Clark, Grayson and Grayson use a set of criteria to evaluate social movements like the events associated with the "Siege." Their criteria include: collective participation or 'mobilization'; a common set of values or 'ideology'; people to articulate the group's values and norms, or willing and able 'leadership'; effective channels of communication; 'organizational structures', both communal and associational in nature; the presence of social cleavages or 'social segmentation'; and 'government response' in the form of indifference, accommodation, or obstruction. These criteria were all considered when looking at the farmers' trek to Ottawa.

and social concerns, organized farmers in the fall and winter of 1910 took a proactive stance towards improving their situation. The trek to the capital signalled that these farmers were prepared to fight for their rights, and that they were willing to go directly to the nation's capital to ensure that these rights were protected. Not only did they organize and travel to Ottawa in large numbers, but they also came prepared with a clearly-articulated and formulated program in the form of the "Farmers' Platform." Through democratic and sophisticated processes, these farmers were able to bring both public and government attention to their grievances. The "Siege" brought some much-needed respect to the farmers' movement and recognition that Canadian organized farmers were to be taken seriously. Perhaps the most interesting fact about the "Siege" is that the coming of the deputation to Ottawa constituted a number of firsts in Canadian history. No farmers' delegation had ever received the international publicity that this one did. It was the first time that a farmers' delegation, over 300 strong, was carried by special Canadian Pacific Railway train to the capital. It was also the first time that a large farmers' deputation had gone to Ottawa, as well as the only time that the House of Commons had been set aside for a public meeting, which included almost every federal Member of Parliament and most of the Senate. As the 100th anniversary of the "Siege of Ottawa" approaches, it seemed timely to explore this seminal event and reflect on its significance.

CHAPTER 1

A 'Wild, Woolly' Western Welcome

*"When Laurier comes West he will find that the first hand Information about this Country is not Exactly the Same as he has been Getting for the past while."*¹

How had Canadian farmers, particularly western farmers, reached the point that they were willing to travel as far as from the foothills of Alberta, at their own expense, to descend on the Dominion capital? The decision of western farmers to go to Ottawa originated from promises made by Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier during his 1910 summer tour of western Canada. In April 1910, the sixty-nine-year-old Laurier, who had by then spent thirty-nine years in public office, announced that he would be making an extensive, two-month midsummer rail tour of the Canadian West. Laurier's itinerary was released on June 6. His trip was to include stops at numerous villages, towns, and established cities between Lake Superior and the Pacific Ocean. At these stops between July 7 and September 10, Laurier would be met by crowds of well-wishers, in addition to organized delegations of western farmers who demanded immediate action over what they believed to be the country's ongoing agricultural crisis.

¹ "Cover," Grain Growers' Guide (GGG), 29 June 1910.

Laurier's western tour was unique in Canadian history since never before had a Canadian prime minister embarked on such an extended campaign. Because the tour was so out of the ordinary, Laurier's stops were the focus of front-page news in most Canadian newspapers throughout the summer. Excitement mounted across the prairies, and many of the cities, towns, and villages, where Laurier was scheduled to visit, organized expensive welcome parties for Canada's first minister to highlight the West's new found growth and prosperity. A statement on the cover of the July 6 edition of the Grain Growers' Guide, a weekly magazine devoted to the home and farming, described the opportunity that the tour offered the people of the West: "Sir Wilfrid Laurier is getting ready to come west. Let us join hands in an effort to convert him while he is here. He needs some western vigor in his system."²

A number of political and personal reasons motivated Laurier to embark on an extended tour of the West that summer. One key reason was to re-familiarize himself with the conditions of the West and its people, which had changed since his first publicized tour in 1894 as federal Liberal opposition leader.³ Like a student, Laurier planned to spend the summer studying the needs of western residents, particularly farmers, with the hope that his Liberals could create policy better suited to their needs. He stated, "I am eager, that we should become better acquainted with the new, far rapidly progressing western country. That we should visit and see with our own eyes the cities, towns,

² Ibid.

³ Laurier did visit both Alberta and Saskatchewan in 1905 for the provincial inauguration ceremonies. He returned to Ottawa, however, after only a brief stay in the West.

villages and communities springing into being as if by magic."⁴ He went on to proclaim, "It is to extend a hand of welcome to those new fellow citizens who come to us from various parts of the world to make our country their country; it is to ascertain the wants and requirements of these new communities."⁵ The Prairie West signified youthfulness, confidence, ambition, enthusiasm, opportunity and optimism, but at the same time, uncertainty as to what its future held, particularly when it came to Canadian agriculture.

It had been fourteen years since his first trip West. In his 1894 tour, Laurier made a number of lofty campaign promises to western residents, promises that for the most part he had failed to act upon after becoming prime minister. In 1894 he declared, "The national policy is a fraud and a failure. . . . To levy tribute upon the people for a private and privileged class should be condemned without qualification."⁶ As well, he outlined the problems of protection and extolled the benefits of free trade. By the summer of 1910 Laurier's previous campaign promises of 1894 as well as of more recent elections, had not become political realities. The promises, however, had not been forgotten by westerners. Western farmers, for example, believed that no honest attempt had been made by Laurier and his administration to secure

⁴ "Prime Minister's Greeting to the People of the West," Toronto Globe, 11 July 1910, 1.

⁵ "Sir Wilfrid Given a Princely Welcome to Twin Cities," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 14 July 1910, 1.

⁶ "Who Controls," GGG, 14 September 1910, 13. For the best analysis of Canada's National Policy as it related to agriculture, see Vernon C. Fowke's, The National Policy and the Wheat Economy (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1957).

better trade relations with the United States. This time, western farmers would be ready and waiting with questions for Laurier.

Major demographic changes had occurred in western Canada over the roughly decade-and-a-half between the two Laurier tours. The population of the prairies, which made up roughly eight per cent of Canada's total population in 1901, had skyrocketed to eighteen per cent by 1911.⁷ Saskatchewan, for example, had a population of 91,279 in 1901. By 1911 its population had risen to a striking 492,432, a 439 percent increase.⁸ If these trends were indicative of future growth in the prairie provinces, then dramatic changes in the West's political power were imminent. In 1910, twenty-seven of 221 Members of Parliament (MPs) represented the three prairie provinces. An increase in western representation was undoubtedly on the horizon. The Liberal Party wanted to maintain and expand upon the support it received in the 1908 election, when they had won fifteen of the twenty-seven prairie seats. With a national census scheduled for June 1911, Laurier believed that the West would be entitled to an additional twenty members in the House.

From the Dominion government's perspective the tour offered the opportunity for the Laurier Liberals to take the pulse of the changing West which had sprung to life during the prime minister's tenure. With an election looming, the tour offered the chance for the party to gauge western popular opinion regarding the ongoing political issues at the centre of debate amongst westerners. In Laurier's own words the tour offered him the opportunity to "get

⁷ The Canada Year Book 1911, Second Series (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1912).

⁸ Ibid.

in contact with the people and see things through their eyes.”⁹ A column in the July 6 edition of the Toronto Globe reflected similar sentiments: “It will mean much for the West that Sir Wilfrid is going to it in person instead of having to depend on the accounts furnished by others and what they see.”¹⁰ The ageing Liberal administration was also worried about the possible emergence of a farmer-based party with a platform committed to free trade. By 1910 western grain farmers had become particularly agitated over Canada’s high tariff structure and had pleaded for increased access to markets in the United States to decrease their costs for goods and machinery on the farm. Laurier hoped that his extended trip through the West would rally its residents to support the Liberal Party instead of a western protest party.

Not only was the tour politically important for Laurier and his government, but it provided representatives from the Manitoba Grain Growers Association (MGGA), Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association (SGGA) and the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) with the chance to express their strong opinions regarding fiscal matters affecting day-to-day farming operations.¹¹ Before Laurier left on his trip through the West, letters and petitions from westerners rolled into his office requesting that he stop in their town or city. Once the tour stops had been decided, the question remained as to whether western organized farmers would present their case to Laurier as a single delegation at

⁹ “Grain Growers’ Program Presented to Premier,” Toronto Globe, 19 July 1910, no page.

¹⁰ National Archives of Canada (NAC), Manuscript Division, Robert L. Borden papers, MG 26H, Toronto Globe, 6 July 1910.

¹¹ Ibid., “The Tariff Hypocrisy,” Toronto Globe, 4 August 1910, 185413.

a central location such as Regina, or as several small delegations at various points where he was to speak.¹² In May, the Guide addressed a letter on behalf of western farmers to each of the twenty-seven MPs from the prairie provinces. The letter explained that grain growers' associations had decided to have delegations meet with Laurier at each of his stops to express their views on matters of concern to western grain growers. Brandon was chosen as the most convenient western location for the Grain Growers to address Laurier first.¹³

Accompanying Laurier on the tour was the Honorable George P. Graham, the federal Minister of Railways; E. M. Pardee, chief Liberal whip representing West Lambton; and E. M. McDonald, a Member of Parliament representing Pictou, Nova Scotia. Lady Laurier also accompanied Laurier for the first stretch of the tour. Because of the tour's grueling schedule, she spent most of the time holidaying at the Banff Springs Hotel in Alberta's Banff National Park. In an effort to remain non-partisan, the transportation of Laurier's delegation was divided between the Canadian Northern, the Grand Trunk Pacific, and the Canadian Pacific Railways. In total, five cars made up the Laurier "Special."¹⁴ Also traveling with the prime minister and his party of government representatives was a corps of newspaper reporters from many of the largest newspapers in the East including the Toronto Mail and Empire, Halifax Chronicle, Montreal Star, Toronto Globe, La Vigie, Toronto News,

¹² National Archives of Canada (NAC), Manuscript Division, Wilfrid Laurier papers, MG 26G, "Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association to Laurier," 5 July 1910, 172834.

¹³ "Sir Wilfrid Replies," GGG, 22 June 1910, 24.

¹⁴ "Free Trade and British Preference, Two Results," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 19 July 1910, 1.

LeCanada, New York Herald, Brockville Recorder, and the Montreal Herald. Of course, western newspaper coverage was extensive once the Laurier "Special" reached Manitoba. It was the reporters' task to describe their impressions of the western provinces and the people and places, as well as to provide reports of Laurier's speeches and numerous engagements at each of his stops.¹⁵

Conspicuously absent from the party traveling with Laurier was the Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver. His absence was noticed by westerners who believed that the minister should have accompanied the party to address their concerns, and to provide Laurier with insight into the changing conditions in the western provinces. An article in the Edmonton Evening Journal pointed to the oddity of Oliver's absence stating, "... one would judge the tour as a time where the Minister of the Interior should be at the premier's right hand to give him inside information of what the west demands."¹⁶ Oliver's portfolio was distinctly western, and he was the man in the Liberal cabinet who was supposed to represent the West and look after its concerns. Some westerners questioned why Oliver had, in fact, chosen to be out of the country for the beginning of the tour.¹⁷ The disappointment over Oliver's marked absence was not the sort of publicity that the prime minister and the Liberal Party wanted as they entered an already intense political situation in the prairie provinces.

¹⁵ "Laurier Tour Means Much in Publicity: Special Scribes Traveling With the Party Are Writing Up the Country," Edmonton Evening Journal, 15 July 1910, 6.

¹⁶ "Are We Represented in Ottawa?" GGG, 18 July 1910, 4.

¹⁷ "Frank Oliver's Program," Edmonton Evening Journal, 3 August 1910, 2

The situation in western Canada in the summer of 1910 can best be described as a political hailstorm, marked by farmer discontent throughout the region. Farmers on the prairies had for many years complained that the federal government had little understanding of the important subjects affecting their day-to-day lives. Five main issues were the focus of western grain growers' demands: the tariff, terminal elevators, the Hudson Bay Railway, chilled meat, and co-operative legislation. The protective tariff, a lasting reminder to farmers of John A. Macdonald's "National Policy," was by far the most controversial and widely discussed topic of the tour. The tariff, which had been put in place decades earlier to protect Canada's eastern manufacturing sector from external competition, dramatically increased duties on all imported goods. Because imported goods were made more expensive by the imposed duty, Canadian farmers were left almost no other option than to purchase high-priced domestic manufactured goods for their farms. The tariff situation had changed little during Laurier's tenure as prime minister. During Laurier's tour, western farmers made clear their discontent over this structure which compelled them to pay a high price for necessities used on the farm, and forced them to contribute a disproportionate amount to the privileged eastern manufacturing sector. Because of these concerns, farmers demanded tariff reduction for items such as wools and cotton and the complete removal of duty on all farm machinery and equipment at a number of Laurier's tour stops.

Another important subject was that the Hudson Bay Railway. For years, prairie farmers had believed that the proper outlet for their farm products was

through Hudson Bay, because it offered a more direct link to European markets. Many westerners were concerned with the lack of progress being made towards the construction of the railway, which had been promised for some time.¹⁸ Farmers were also disturbed by the ongoing practice of mixing wheat in elevators. They argued that mixing drove the value of their grain downward and damaged the reputation of Canadian wheat abroad. Because of these problems, there was practical unanimity in the West in favour of government control and operation of grain elevators. Alberta farmers made calls for government construction, ownership, and operation of an internal terminal elevator at Calgary, as well as a transfer elevator at Vancouver. They argued that because there was no terminal elevator at the Pacific Coast, no adequate means existed for western grains to be transferred onto ocean freighters, and as a result, farmers could not obtain the fullest return on their grain.

One characteristic that marked each of the early stops on the tour was the enthusiasm of the crowds that met the prime minister. Laurier made the first official tour stop in Port Arthur and Fort William, Ontario on July 9. An evening meeting in Fort William prompted Laurier's first notable speech of the tour. He used the speech to deflect criticism that the trip through the West was simply a campaign ploy to attract votes from its residents or a harbinger of an autumn

¹⁸ "Poles Are Grateful For Sir Wilfrid's Message," Toronto Globe, 24 July 1910. In terms of approximate distances, Winnipeg to Liverpool via Hudson Bay was 3,626 miles, compared to 4,228 miles via Montreal. Duluth to Liverpool via Hudson Bay was 3,728 miles, against 4,201 miles via New York.

election. His Liberals, he claimed, would go to the country only if a situation arose demanding the verdict of the people.¹⁹

Winnipeg, one of Canada's budding metropolitan cities, was the next stop for the Laurier party. On July 12 he arrived at the Canadian Northern Station to the cheers of 2,000 people who chanted, "Three cheers for Sir Wilfrid! . . . Six cheers for Sir Wilfrid! . . . Some tigers for Sir Wilfrid!"²⁰ He later spoke to a crowd of roughly 10,000 cheering admirers in the city's spacious horse show amphitheatre. Transportation and immigration were the focus of the prime minister's speech.²¹ Laurier promised the immediate construction of the Hudson Bay Railway, which, he argued, would not only be of particular benefit to the West, but the whole of the country because it would serve as the shortest route to European markets.²² On July 13 Laurier visited the small Manitoba village of St. Anne, where the focus of talks was once again on transportation and greater railway competition.²³ Other Manitoba stops on the tour included Selkirk on July 14 and Somerset on July 16.

His visit to Brandon on July 18, however, stands out because it marked the first round of active and vocal grain growers' protest that the prime minister

¹⁹"Prime Minister's Greeting to the People of the West," Toronto Globe, 11 July 1910.

²⁰"Development in the West Due to Government: Sir Wilfrid Laurier Asserts His Administration is Responsible for Prosperity," Edmonton Evening Journal, 13 July 1910, 3. "Tigers" may have been in reference to the tiger lilies Laurier was given as a welcome gift.

²¹ Ibid.

²²"Laurier Compares East With West – Will Continue Present Policy of Western Development, Discusses H.B. Railway," Edmonton Evening Journal, 15 July 1910, 7.

²³ The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1910 and 1911 (Toronto: The Canadian Review Company Ltd., 1911), 266.

encountered on his tour. In fact, Brandon was the only Manitoba stop where organized farmers sought an interview with Laurier. Upon Laurier's arrival in the city, 250 members from most of the 200 branches of the MGGGA were ready and armed with memorials to present to him.²⁴ The first grain growers' address was given by Roderick McKenzie, secretary-treasurer of the MGGGA and a well known champion of farmers. He presented a hard-hitting memorial which proclaimed that nothing had retarded western progress as much as the protective tariff. He also urged free trade with Great Britain and the United States.²⁵ J. W. Scallion, president of the MGGGA, called for the securing of a reciprocal arrangement with the United States. He pointed out that "there are no trade relations our Government could enter into with any country with better advantages to the farmers of the West than a wide measure of Reciprocity towards the United States including manufactured articles and the natural products of both countries."²⁶ Such an arrangement, Scallion argued, would give Canadian farmers a larger and better market in which to sell and a cheaper market in which to buy.²⁷ Demands were also made for government acquisition and operation of terminal elevators as well as for regulations to remedy the manipulation and mixing of wheat. In his response Laurier spoke about the preferential trade policy with Britain: "As to Reciprocity we are prepared to meet the United States, with one important condition, which is that the British

²⁴ "Wilfrid's Great Stunt Fooling Farmers," Edmonton Evening Journal, 19 July 1910, 1.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Canadian Annual Review, 267.

²⁷ Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Walter Scott Papers, File G8 1911.9, "The Grain Growers and Reciprocity," 11.

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preference stands first and last and all the time.²⁸ Terminal elevators were another topic that he addressed. He noted that he had already given some thought to this issue and agreed that the farmers had a legitimate grievance. He pointed to the problems around the mixing and manipulation of wheat and promised that legislation would be prepared upon his return to Ottawa.²⁹

With his tour of Manitoba complete, Laurier moved on to Saskatchewan, self-proclaimed as the "the banner Province of the Dominion."³⁰ Saskatchewan had made monumental progress during Laurier's years as leader. One Saskatchewan farmer described the regime this way, "Since the Laurier Government took office stagnation has given place to progress, depression to buoyancy and despair to hope."³¹ In 1910, Saskatchewan was increasing in population more rapidly than any other part of Canada, and would soon become the third most populous province in the country. In terms of economic output, Saskatchewan was also producing more grain than Alberta and Manitoba combined.³²

Yorkton was Laurier's first stop in the province. Triumphant arches made of wheat and oats were erected and other decorations such as emblems and

²⁸ *Canadian Annual Review*, 267. Scallion's statement can be verified by comparing Canadian and American prices for grain and livestock in that era. In general, the prices in the United States for both grain and livestock were much higher than in Canada. As well, articles of prime necessity for Western American farms were able to be produced much cheaper than in Canada.

²⁹ "Wilfrid's Great Stunt Fooling the Farmers," *Edmonton Evening Journal*, 19 July 1910, 1.

³⁰ "In the Capital of Saskatchewan – Sir Wilfrid Laurier is Received With Open Arms," *Toronto Globe*, 2 August 1910.

³¹ "Poles Are Grateful for Sir Wilfrid's Message," *Toronto Globe*, 24 July 1910.

³² "Protective Tariffs Are Regarded with Disfavor," *Toronto Globe*, 6 August 1910.

flags greeted the Premier upon his arrival on July 20.³³ In Yorkton's curling rink Laurier spoke to the most cosmopolitan crowd he had yet encountered.³⁴ He relayed words of hope and encouragement to his audience:

I do not hesitate to say that this is the best portion of the whole continent. The more I see western Canada the more proud I am of the fact that I am a Canadian and the more I see of it the more I love it. In this west you do not know what disappointment is. You might have a poor crop this year, but you look forward to next year with great hopefulness. The buoyancy and hopefulness of the west are unequalled.³⁵

Following a civic address, delegates representing the SGGA presented memorials focusing on issues similar to those addressed by the MGGA in Brandon. In response to a question about terminal elevators, Laurier reiterated that this grievance would be remedied through legislation enacted after Parliament convened in November.³⁶ The delegates also asked for free trade arrangements with Britain, reciprocal free trade with the United States and immediate construction of the Hudson Bay Railway.³⁷

Laurier's next Saskatchewan stop was on July 22 in the town of Melville. There, he addressed a large meeting of close to 2,000 people in the skating

³³ Canadian Annual Review, 268.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ "Buoyancy of the West Unequaled: Sir Wilfrid Says West Is Hopeful and he is Proud of it," Calgary Herald, 20 July 1910, 1.

³⁶ "Sir Wilfrid Explains How Saskatchewan is a Greater Province Than Manitoba," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 21 July 1910, 1.

³⁷ NAC, Borden papers, 185343. Robert Borden, after looking at a copy of the words spoken in Yorkton, stated in his memoirs that the speech given there was "... remarkably like his speech of 1894." He noted that Laurier's platform of 1894 had denounced all protection and had referred to it as the "curse" as had his campaign speeches.

rink.³⁸ Only three years earlier, the land where the town now stood had been open prairie.³⁹ The Grain Growers of the district asked for free trade and government ownership of terminal elevators.⁴⁰ As for the tariff issue, Laurier commented, "I hope the tendency of any new revision will be downward . . . and not upward."⁴¹ He further stated that, "Following the Motherland, we should place Free trade as the goal before us, but we cannot reach it in one step. So as long as the United States maintains its tariff policy we must be cautious on how to proceed."⁴²

Laurier stopped in Lanigan on July 23 and once again various district delegates from the SGGa made appeals to him. Laurier's opening address in the town was light-hearted: "If I were to give up my present occupation I think I should come to live in Lanigan."⁴³ A highlight of the stop was when one of the speakers described himself as a free-trader, to which Laurier surprisingly replied, "So am I."⁴⁴ On July 25, Laurier made his way to Humboldt where he

³⁸ "Elevator Question Will Be Solved By Farmers: And the Grain Growers Asked to Ottawa to State Their Case and Give Out What Information They Possess," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 23 July 1910, 1.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ "Hudson Bay Road Soon to be an Accomplished Fact: Premier a Student of English Politics," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 25 July 1910, 1. Grain Growers in Lanigan also dealt with the usual matters of pressing concern, particularly the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway.

⁴⁴ Canadian Annual Review, 269.

was met by another "cosmopolitan" crowd.⁴⁵ As in his past tour stops, a capacity crowd of nearly 4,000 people met Laurier at the local arena.⁴⁶ The Grain Growers' Association, which represented five Saskatchewan districts in the region, demanded reciprocal free trade in farm implements with the United States, reduction in the tariff, and co-operative action for farmers.⁴⁷

Prince Albert was the next stop on the tour. In fact, Prince Albert had elected him as its member in 1896.⁴⁸ Prince Albert was quickly becoming one of the leading commercial centres in the West and was identified as a natural starting point for the Hudson Bay Railway, which would transport products from Alberta and Saskatchewan, as well as the western states.⁴⁹ Once again, amongst the "immense crowd" waited another Grain Growers' deputation making the usual requests.⁵⁰ From Prince Albert, the tour went on to make a stop in the francophone community of Vonda, whose citizens chanted "Vive Laurier." Laurier commented that he was pleased to be greeted in his native tongue.⁵¹ Other stops included Melfort, Duck Lake, Rosthern, Birch Hills, and

⁴⁵ "Sir Wilfrid Talks Voluble Patriotism: To a Cosmopolitan Audience He Says That Canada Gives Everything and Asks Only Citizenship," Edmonton Evening Journal, 26 July 1910, 1. "The Premier At Humboldt, Sask.: New Arrivals From United States Join Welcome," Toronto Globe, 26 July 1910.

⁴⁶ "Humboldt Meeting A Wonder: People From Many Countries Assembled There," Toronto Globe, 27 July 1910.

⁴⁷ Canadian Annual Review, 269.

⁴⁸ "Another Magnificent Reception and Crowded Meeting," Toronto Globe 27 July 1910.

⁴⁹ "Sir Wilfrid Laurier and Prince Albert: The Hudson Bay Railway Much Wanted," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 25 July 1910, 1.

⁵⁰ "Bright Stars in Britain's Crown," Calgary Herald, 28 July 1910, 1.

⁵¹ "Vive Laurier the Glad Cry," Calgary Herald, 27 July 1910, 1.

Kinistino. A number of these stops were brief and Laurier occasionally addressed the crowds from the rear of the train. As he continued his grueling tour through the province, he was said to be standing the strain and labour of the trip well.

The next key stop for Laurier was Saskatoon. On July 29, Laurier was welcomed by the cheers of a large crowd at the CNR station. His arrival fell on a public holiday, a day of speeches and civic addresses.⁵² Speaking at the city's skating rink, Laurier declared that his greeting by Saskatoon residents was "the greatest scene of enthusiasm ever seen in western Canada."⁵³ Mayor William Hopkins stated, "We have read with pleasure your assurances that the government will proceed with the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway with all reasonable expedition."⁵⁴ He went on to note that, "A glance at the map will show . . . that Saskatoon would be the natural centre for the railway and the most direct line for the Hudson Bay."⁵⁵ At a late-day SGGa conference being held in the city, John Evans, an association representative who would later become a prominent leader of the Ottawa farmer's deputation, made an address. "In 1896 the Liberal Government came into power on the distinct

⁵² "Saskatoon Makes Welcome to Canada's First Citizen: Sir Wilfrid Laurier Receives Address," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 29 July 1910, 1.

⁵³ "Laurier Delivers Stirring Speech at Saskatoon: Has Much Faith in the Hudson Bay Railroad as in the G. T. P.," Edmonton Evening Journal, 1 August 1910, 2. During Laurier's stop in Saskatoon, a young John Diefenbaker, then a newspaper boy, famously met and talked to Laurier.

⁵⁴ NAC, Laurier papers, MG 26 G, Vol. 1035, "Laurier in Saskatoon," 28 July 1910.

⁵⁵ "Winnipeg Welcomes Laurier With Great Enthusiasm," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 14 July 1910, 8.

pledge of free-trade," he remarked, "To-day you are farther from it than in 1896. In 1896 you promised to skin the Tory bear of protection. Have you done it? If so, I would like to ask you what you have done with the hide?"⁵⁶

A welcome in Regina on August 1 highlighted the railway issue: "We note with deep satisfaction the announced intention of your Government to proceed with all possible expedition with the Hudson Bay Railway, thus bringing to an early realization one of the most cherished dreams of western Canada."⁵⁷ Hon. Mr. Graham, in an address to the crowd, stated that the next session of Parliament would most likely proceed with the entire project. Later that day Laurier also discussed the topic: "Our policy in the past has been private ownership of all railways and government control. I see no reason at this moment to change my views upon this point and I think the method we adopted had demonstrated that the policy we applied to all roads has been a measure of great relief to the people and has given ample satisfaction."⁵⁸

In Weyburn on August 3 Laurier experienced what a Saskatoon Daily Phoenix reporter described as a welcome "of the wild, woolly west variety."⁵⁹ Protection was the main topic of the day, and the deputation of the SGGA made it clear to the prime minister that they were against it if it only continued to favour privileged eastern interests. President Frank Sheppard, an executive

⁵⁶ "Are Here to Throw Off Class Privilege: Says Mr. Evans of Saskatoon At Meeting of Grain Growers," Ottawa Evening Journal, 15 December 1910, 1.

⁵⁷ NAC, Laurier papers, MG 26G, Vol. 1035, "Regina," 2 July 1910.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ "Premier Sees Much Country," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 3 August 1910, 1.

member of the SGGGA, called for access to American markets.⁶⁰ Similarly, at a stop in North Battleford on August 6, the city's Address of Welcome pointed to the injustices associated with protection:

From a broad view it is apparent that Governments, the world over, have in the past legislated more favorably for the property interests of the privileged few than for the human rights of many, and it is now an important part of the task of the modern democratic and liberal governments to make adjustments toward a fairer adjustment of the balance, if they would keep pace with the present wave of democratic sentiment now sweeping over the civilized world as a result of improving understanding and ideals of civilized people.⁶¹

Ironically, the Address of Welcome further asserted that because the prairies were still in an early stage of economic development, some form of government protection was necessary for western farmers.

At Moose Jaw, members of the Grain Growers delegation also turned out in full-force to greet Laurier and make their demands known. Close to 4000 people greeted the prime minister the evening of August 6 in Moose Jaw's rink.⁶² H. Dorell, spokesperson for the SGGGA branch in Moose Jaw, expressed disappointment that the government did not accept the principle of government ownership of grain terminals and railroads. Free trade for agricultural implements and other materials used by farmers was also a key topic for this

⁶⁰ "Wanted Free Trade: Weyburn Farmers and Sir Wilfrid Are Unanimous," Calgary Herald, 4 August 1910, 9.

⁶¹ NAC, Laurier papers MG 26G, Vol. 1035, "North Battleford and Battleford," 6 August 1910, 2-3.

⁶² "Want Free Trade With a "But" In It," Calgary Herald, 6 August 1910, 4.

delegation.⁶³ Nothing could have prepared the Laurier for the events which would unfold next. After leaving Moose Jaw at 8:00 p.m. the CPR special was involved in a head-on collision with a freight train between Belle Plaine and Pense, during a rain storm. Those on board were violently thrown about the train. As it turned out, the train's conductor, Ed Cook, was the only person seriously injured, having sustained broken ribs and other bruises.⁶⁴ The cars were subsequently drawn back to Moose Jaw to make needed repairs for the "special" to continue on its way.⁶⁵ In many ways, the collision course of the Laurier "special" can be viewed as a metaphor for the turbulence and dissent Laurier continued to experience on the tour,⁶⁶ and that he would later encounter in December during the "Siege of Ottawa."

Laurier entered Alberta, as he had Manitoba and Saskatchewan, with a good understanding of the kinds of demands that farmers and cattlemen of the province would be making. Before the prime minister had even embarked on his tour, his office was inundated with letters from local branches of the UFA that equated the protective tariff with bondage. One letter outlined Association demands this way:

⁶³ "More Grain Growers Meet Laurier," GGG, 17 August 1910, 14. The issue of free trade was especially important to new settlers from Britain and the United States, countries where low tariff and free trade opinions flourished.

⁶⁴ NAC, Laurier papers, 16 August 1910, 173765.

⁶⁵ NAC, Manuscript Division, Canadian Transport Commission papers, RG46, Vol. 1419 C251-52, File 15381.

⁶⁶ Bill Waiser, The Saskatchewan Story: The Province and Its History (draft manuscript), chapter 7.

We . . . ask that a general move towards freer trade and that a general reduction of the tariff be made more particularly on wool and cotton goods, also that the duty be immediately removed from all implements and tools; further, that steps be taken to arrange with the United States Government for reciprocity in farm implements in accordance with the offer made by them.⁶⁷

Not surprisingly, similar demands were repeated at most of the Alberta tour stops. Farmers in Lethbridge, for example, pointed to the fact that their demands for tariff reductions were repeated all over the prairies. The UFA publicly declared the tariff to be the biggest burden on western farmers and asked that the tariff be revised downward. The UFA was also particularly concerned about the lack of a chilled meat industry in the West. The period around 1910 was a time when the cattle industry was in decline. UFA representatives called for funds for the construction of an up-to-date publicly operated chilling plant. At a stop in Red Deer on August 10, provincial UFA directors raised similar concerns to those at previous Alberta stops: a chilled meat industry run on a co-operative basis, a lower tariff, government ownership of terminal elevators, and the construction of the Hudson Bay Railway.⁶⁸ The same requests would be voiced throughout the remainder of the Prime Minister's Alberta stops.

As Laurier continued on his tour, he was absorbed by the spirit of the boundless West. A reporter from the Evening Journal described Laurier's actions on the tour this way:

⁶⁷ NAC, Laurier papers, United Farmers of Alberta to Laurier, no date, 173749.

⁶⁸ "The Premier Drove Spike: Construction Work on Alberta Central Commenced By Sir Wilfrid at Red Deer," Calgary Herald, 11 August 1910, 1.

With boyish enthusiasm and pride he has during his trip across the prairies eagerly drunk in evidence on every hand of the tremendous advance of progress and prosperity since he last traversed the west. . . . He lays claim to the fact that his policies have done something for the west, but evinces pride to the fact that he is a Canadian who has lived to see the day the west is coming into its own. . . .⁶⁹

After a mid-August swing through British Columbia, Laurier, having spent over two intense months, traveling, meeting westerners, answering questions, as well as reciting and receiving speeches, was ready to return to Ottawa.⁷⁰ Clearly, the trip through the West had been a true learning experience for the prime minister and those who accompanied him. Some of the experiences were certain to have been expected, others, undoubtedly were not. On September 8 a Toronto Globe correspondent summarized the significance of the trip:

No newspaper, no matter how accurate in detail, no matter how comprehensive in character, can do justice to the ten thousand miles of kaleidoscopic enthusiasm. No word painting, no matter how subtle, can adequately portray the meeting of the Premier and the people in the great western out-of-doors. In immensity of territory covered, character of reception accorded, and spirit of intercourse exchanged, the tour is without parallel in Canada.⁷¹

As Laurier began his return trip to Ottawa, he summarized his trip on September 2 stop in Medicine Hat, Alberta:

I left home a Canadian to the core. I return ten times more Canadian. I have imbibed the air, spirit and enthusiasm of the

⁶⁹ "No Vegreville When Premier Was West Last: Sir Wilfrid Receives Welcome From Town Not on Map When he Was Here Before," Edmonton Evening Journal, 8 August 1910, 1.

⁷⁰ Laurier's stops in British Columbia included: Vancouver, Victoria, New Westminster, Prince Rupert, Golden and Nelson.

⁷¹ Toronto Globe, 8 September 1910, 1.

west. I am a true westerner henceforth, nay, I should say a Canadian, for we must in the future aim to know the west and east only in emulation of the best in each other as to which can do more for Canada our common country. So I am going home now. I have learned a great deal in the past two months. I have learned to know my country.⁷²

Something that western farmers did obtain from Laurier's tour was a better understanding of his views on the future policies of the country. When reviewing Laurier's speeches and responses to delegates' questions, a number of his positions became abundantly clear. He promised that the problem of grain mixing in terminal elevators would be fixed, while at the same time indicating that he did not believe in the principle of government ownership of terminal elevators. Laurier did promise to investigate the chilled meat proposition made by ranchers, but held out little hope for a quick remedy. At many of his stops, he reiterated the government's commitment to its preferential tariff policy and gave assurances that his government would seek reciprocity with the United States.

Organized farmers, for their part, were determined to argue that the issues they had raised during the 1910 tour were not forgotten after the prime minister returned to Ottawa. In fact, they expected their concerns to be addressed or at least reflected upon by the prime minister. Prairie farmers, moreover, did not believe that the tour represented their final opportunity to make their voices heard. Instead, the protests that had accompanied the welcoming ceremonies for Laurier's tour were a starting point for them. In the

⁷² "Tour Ends At Medicine Hat," Toronto Globe, 2 September 1910.

next few months, Laurier's office would be inundated with letters outlining the same issues that had been raised on the tour, grievances that would come to take centre stage three-and-a-half months later during the "Siege of Ottawa."

CHAPTER TWO

A "Fight for Their Rights"

*"The western farmers have done admirable work thus far and should not take their hand from the plow till the work they set out to perform has been accomplished."*¹

On September 7, 1910, Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier had started home to Ottawa from his western tour. Popular opinion amongst organized western farmers was that the prime minister did not adequately answer the questions asked of him on his tour stops.² Because of sentiments such as these, organized farmers throughout the West decided to travel to Ottawa and meet with Laurier again.³ The upcoming meeting in Ottawa was to be an important mobilizer for farmers nation-wide. The coming together of the delegation represented organized farmers' first major attempt at taking a firm stand with government for their own economic well-being. Laurier had made his trip in the summer that year and this was now to be the farmers' trip. This trek, it was believed, would offer a greater opportunity for farmers to have their grievances addressed.

¹ "Time to Strike is Now," Grain Growers' Guide (GGG), 7 September 1910, 6.

² The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1910 and 1911 (Toronto: The Canadian Review Company Ltd., 1911), 285. For example, the Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA) publicly declared that Laurier's failure to address properly the demands made of him represented "a snub to the organizations which so valiantly and persistently voiced opinion and desires in a non-partisan spirit, which, however unpalatable they may have proved to Sir Wilfrid, truly represented Western aspiration."

³ See for example, National Archives of Canada (NAC), Manuscript Division, Wilfrid Laurier papers, MG 26G, George F. Chipman to W. Laurier, 10 September 1910, 174602-174604.

The decision to go to Ottawa owed its origins to Laurier's promise during the 1910 tour to discuss, first and foremost, the elevator question with farmers during a subsequent meeting. In fact, in Laurier's letter to the secretaries of the provincial Grain Growers' Associations dated October 28, 1910, terminal elevators were the only issue he believed would be discussed in their meeting: "With reference to the elevator question which I had the occasion, whilst in the west, to discuss with the Grain Growers' Association, the government is ready to receive a delegation of grain growers on the matter at any time that may be convenient to them. I address a similar letter to the Grain Growers' Associations of Saskatchewan and Alberta."⁴ The executives of the Grain Growers' Associations had decided, however, to send a delegation not only to discuss the elevator question, but to discuss other issues that the Canadian Council of Agriculture [CCA] deemed important. On October 27 E. C. Drury, Master of the Dominion Grange and key organizer of the deputation's trip to the capital, sent a letter to Laurier forewarning the prime minister of the farmers' plans, which clearly went beyond the single issue of terminal elevators. It stated that the delegation would probably demand the best possible reciprocal terms that could be arranged with the United States on agricultural products and implements, as well as for materials commonly used on farms. Drury also noted that it was likely that a large increase in the British preference would be a demand.⁵ The significance of Drury's letter is that it provided Laurier with a

⁴ Laurier papers, W. Laurier to R. McKenzie, 28 October 1910, 176190.

⁵ Laurier papers, E. C. Drury to W. Laurier, 27 October 1910, 176197-98.

good idea of what to expect at the upcoming meeting and allowed him to begin to formulate ideas for a possible response.

The idea for sending an organized farmers' delegation to Ottawa in 1910 was first brought up in Ontario, when shortly after Laurier's tour of the West, the Toronto Weekly Sun issued a call to Canadian farmers to send a representative delegation to the capital.⁶ The idea soon gained acceptance and momentum in the West, and it became the subject of discussion in various Grain Growers' Association meetings throughout the region. This trip was not the first time that a farmers' delegation had gone to Ottawa. Before 1910, several small western delegations representing farmers' organizations had ventured to Ottawa to lay their concerns before government. These delegations, however, accomplished little. On January 26, 1910, for example, a deputation of western farmers went to Ottawa demanding government ownership of terminal elevators, but returned empty-handed. Why then, was this trip to Ottawa destined to be different from the relatively unsuccessful demonstrations of the past? One key reason was the progress of the recent nation-wide farmers' movement. Organized farmers, more than ever before, were driven by a renewed sense of purpose. They were determined to ensure that their important role in the national economy be recognized appropriately by federal policy-makers.

⁶ CIHM no. 72461, "Reaching Across Canada: Story of the Canadian Council of Agriculture: The National Policy: As Adopted by the Organized Farmers of Canada," (Winnipeg, 1920). The Weekly Sun was also referred to as "The Farmers' Business Paper." The Sun article pointed to the strategic value of a trip to Ottawa. It stated that the trip would help reinforce the demands made by farmers during Laurier's tour, and would also offer the chance for farmers from eastern and central Canada to have their voices heard and addressed by government.

Before 1910, there was no body that represented eastern and western agricultural interests as a whole. At the eastern farmers' annual Dominion Grange meeting held in Toronto in November 1909, Edward Alexander (E.A) Partridge of Saskatchewan and D. W. McCuaig and Roderick McKenzie of Manitoba called for farmers from all provinces to unite and organize in order to become more effective politically. At the meeting, a preliminary constitution for the nation-wide farmers' body, to be known as the Canadian Council of Agriculture, was composed and adopted.⁷ In December, the preliminary constitution was approved at the annual convention of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association (MGGA) in Brandon. It was also endorsed by the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA) at its general meeting in Edmonton in February, 1910, and by the SGGA at its general assembly that same year. Once ratified, the CCA represented an official national affiliation among the Grain Growers' Associations of the prairie provinces and the Grange of Ontario. Its objective was to co-ordinate the efforts of these bodies and work towards obtaining reforms for the well-being of farmers throughout the country. The Council was mandated to reflect the views of Canadian rural society in general, and also to promote fraternity between farmers in the East and West, particularly on the issue of free trade.⁸ The sending of a farmers' delegation to Ottawa was one of its first priorities.

⁷ George F. Chipman, Siege of Ottawa (Winnipeg: Grain Growers' Guide, 1911), 67.

⁸ Ibid. The first executive officers of the CCA were D. W. McCuaig, President of the MGGA (President), James Bower, President of the UFA (Vice-President) and E. C. Drury, Master of the Dominion Grange (Secretary-Treasurer). The CCA expanded to include executive officers of farmer organizations from each of the Canadian provinces.

The role of the Grain Growers' Guide in organizing the delegation's movement to the nation's capital was also of central importance. The magazine, intended for the farm and home, was owned and operated by western Canadian farmers. Published by the UFA and the Grain Growers' Associations of Saskatchewan and Manitoba since 1908, the weekly magazine was the brainchild of E. A. Partridge, an outspoken agrarian leader from Sintaluta, Saskatchewan. As a part of his "Partridge Plan," the colourful leader hoped that the weekly would help extol the benefits of government ownership of terminal elevators. Almost from its inception, the Guide gained a strong readership base through its struggle with elevator companies. In fact, Prime Minister Laurier was himself an admitted reader of the Guide. Referred to widely as simply the Guide, the weekly soon delved into other topics of importance for western farmers to help propel the western movement.

In the fall of 1910 the Guide began to promote aggressively the notion that western farmers should protest their treatment. In August, following the recommendations made by the Toronto Weekly Sun, it also recommended that a delegation of western farmers be sent to Ottawa to voice their concerns to Parliament.⁹ The September 7 edition made the first official mass call for western farmers to go to the nation's capital to demand action. Following this appeal, articles, editorials, personal letters, branch updates, and lengthy essays about the need to go to Ottawa filled the pages of the Guide for months.

⁹ W.C. Good, Farmer Citizen: My Fifty Years in the Canadian Farmers' Movement (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1963), 8.

Referring to the deputations that met Laurier on his summer tour, the Guide pointed out that:

The western farmers have done admirable work thus far and should not take their hand from the plow till the work they set out to perform has been accomplished. The spirit of the trip to Ottawa represents a continuation of their worthwhile struggles as tiller of the soil, Western farmers is [sic] of the kind that will not hesitate in the face of obstacles. Nothing is worth having that is not worth a struggle.¹⁰

It was only after the Guide lent its support that the protest movement gained appeal and won support throughout the country, and other journals began to promote the same ideas. Through the use of the Guide, calls were made to all local Grain Growers' branches to find one or two delegates to represent them in Ottawa so they could, as the publication stated, "talk the politics of a square deal and insist on getting it."¹¹

One striking characteristic of the decision by organized farmers to go to Ottawa was the speed with which plans for the initiative came together. By the first week of October, the movement towards sending a large farmer delegation to Ottawa under the auspices of the CCA was progressing well. The good progress came in spite of the fact that organizing a protest movement of this magnitude required tremendous amounts of time, energy and money.¹² Cost was one of the most important considerations in organizing the protest. Grain Growers' branches realized that the out-of-pocket expense of sending their

¹⁰ "Time to Strike is Now," GGG, 7 September 1910, 6.

¹¹ Ibid., 5.

¹² "Ottawa Delegation," GGG, 5 October 1910, 15.

representatives would be great, but no larger than the importance of the farmers' present situation. Throughout September, it had become increasingly apparent to Grain Growers' branches that a delegation backed by numerical strength, fuelled by a united righteous cause, and directed by a business-like approach would make the greatest impression. The importance of the farmers working for fair legislation through moderation and simple justice was also stressed.¹³ At the time, it was estimated that a delegation of at least five hundred farmers should represent the West and "put the pistol to the heads of Laurier, Borden, and every member of parliament and demand a square deal."¹⁴

From the outset, it proved difficult to fix a date for the farmers to meet with government. Originally, the meeting between farmers and Laurier was planned for late November.¹⁵ Complications, however, arose in September and continued through October. For various reasons, some practical, some economic, a date in December was favoured by most associations. By early October, the expectation was that western farmers would leave about December 1, giving delegates the opportunity if they wished, to spend the Christmas holidays with their relatives in the East.¹⁶ From September through December, E. C. Drury played a significant leadership role, particularly in organizing the arrival of the deputation. He argued that if a meeting were to be held earlier than December, attendance would be seriously affected because of

¹³ "On to Ottawa," GGG, 19 October 1910, 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 6.

¹⁵ "Time to Strike is Now," GGG, 7 September 1910, 5.

¹⁶ Ibid.

the difficulty for both eastern and western delegates in securing satisfactory transportation arrangements.¹⁷ By leaving in December, Drury further noted, the western delegates would be able to take advantage of the winter excursion rates, an important consideration for the many farmers who aimed to make the trip to the capital as inexpensive as possible.¹⁸ Later in October, the date of the delegations' expected arrival in Ottawa was changed to December 9. In a particularly accommodative approach on the part of the Liberals, Laurier had left the decision completely up to Drury as to when the delegation would arrive. Laurier did warn Drury, however, that they should not arrive too late in December as Parliament would be breaking for the Christmas holidays.¹⁹

Planning for the exact date of the deputation's arrival in Ottawa continued into late October. December 5 and 9 were immediately eliminated as possible dates because of a fat stock show in Guelph, Ontario, an event several eastern delegates planned to attend. Other than these dates, delegates from the East left it up to their western counterparts to set the date at their own convenience.²⁰ By October 26, the date for the delegation's arrival in Ottawa was finally confirmed.²¹ The deputation intended to leave Winnipeg by special train on the December 12 and reach Ottawa on the evening of December 14. There, a mass conference would be held on December 15 to formulate demands, and

¹⁷ "Drury to Laurier Letter," GGG, 3 Oct 1910, 7.

¹⁸ NAC, Robert Sellar papers, MG 29C 86 File 1, Report of the Proceedings in the Hearing By Members of the Government of the Farmers' Delegation December 16, 1910 With Correspondence Preliminary to the Hearing, 6.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "All Ready For Ottawa," GGG, 26 October 1910, 16.

²¹ NAC, Laurier papers, Drury to Laurier, 27 October 1910, 16197-98.

then the delegates would meet with government the next day in the House of Commons chamber.²²

By October 28, arrangements for the arrival of the deputation in the nation's capital were nearing completion. The Guide called the forthcoming meeting "the most tremendous project which the farmers of Canada have yet undertaken."²³ Although western farmers had specific concerns that were particular to their region, they realized that if anything was to be accomplished on their trip to Ottawa, farmers representing East and West would have to stand together in support of the same policy. The organized farmers from the West realized that in no way did their home provinces hold the balance of power in the House of Commons. Historian Charles M. Johnston notes that "No one doubted that the west, with its vaunted enthusiasm for the cause, would deliver a sizeable and committed delegation."²⁴ Some concern, however, had been expressed as to whether Ontario would demonstrate this same enthusiasm. Planning in the eastern provinces, however, was progressing well. The Dominion Grange had sent out a call to all its branch organizations in Ontario asking them to confirm which delegates they would be sending to the meeting. The Ontario Dairymens' Association, the Ontario Fruit Growers' Association, and the Farmers' Organizations of Quebec also had delegates who signed on to attend.²⁵ The popular support from these associations only served to strengthen

²² ibid.

²³ "The March on Ottawa," GGG, 26 October 1910.

²⁴ Charles M. Johnston, E. C. Drury: Agrarian Idealist (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 31

²⁵ "Time to Strike is Now," GGG, 5.

the farmers' cause because it showed that grievances extended beyond grain growing.

Although the decision to descend on the capital had gained some popular support in the East, it was in the western provinces where the support for the Ottawa trip had become most pronounced. Original estimates indicated that there would be 250 delegates from Saskatchewan, along with 150 from Manitoba, and seventy-five to 200 representatives from Alberta. That number, combined with representatives from the eastern provinces, would make what F. W. Green of Saskatchewan referred to as a "formidable delegation."²⁶ It is also quite probable that if the crops throughout the West had been better that fall, there would have been an even larger number of western delegates interested in personally making their demands clear in Ottawa. By most standards, however, this delegation was a large one. The intention of organizers from the start was that the deputation would be as large and as representative as possible. The Guide argued, "There is special reason why this delegation should be a large one, because those who are beneficiaries of the present fiscal system are endeavoring to make it appear that the presentation made to Sir Wilfrid Laurier while in the West was instigated only by very few."²⁷

Given the expected turnout, organizers worried over finding a meeting place large enough to accommodate the entire delegation. They feared that the entire delegation would not have the opportunity to attend the conference if a meeting room outside the Parliament Buildings was used. Drury wrote Laurier

²⁶ NAC, Laurier papers, R. McKenzie to Mr. Neely, 5 December 1910, 177777.

²⁷ "Time to Strike is Now," GGG, 5.

about the problem: "We are having difficulty in securing a suitable hall in Ottawa for farmers' delegation December 15th/16th. Could you allow us to meet in some room in parliament buildings, we would wish to hold convention on December 15th before presenting views to government on 16th. About 700 delegates expected."²⁸ Initial government response to the question can best be described as not particularly helpful. A reply from Laurier dated November 17 stated: "I doubt if there is in the Parliament Buildings a room which could accommodate such a large delegation, but your application should go to the speaker who is the proper authority."²⁹ Special arrangements were later made by the Ottawa organizing committee for the House of Commons chamber to be used for the meeting, and the difficulty was removed.³⁰ This arrangement was unique because never before had the chamber been set aside for a delegation, let alone a farmer delegation, to meet with government. What was even more remarkable was the fact that the meeting was scheduled on a day when Parliament was still in session, and it would therefore interrupt its usual proceedings.

Going into the Ottawa meeting, the delegates had one major goal. "The farmers of Canada are in deadly earnest and have awakened to the fact that when standing side by side they possess enormous power," the Guide argued, "They are not asking for legislation which will allow them to rob other classes but

²⁸ NAC, Laurier papers, Drury to Laurier, 15 November 1910, 176828.

²⁹ Ibid., Laurier to Drury, 17 November 1910, 176829.

³⁰ Ibid., McKenzie to Neely, 5 December 1910, 177777.

merely for legislation that will prevent other classes from robbing them."³¹ The presentations were to also include problems peculiar to western Canada, particularly those grievances which had been raised with Laurier during his summer tour.³²

As plans for the meeting were being finalized, a decision was made in Ottawa in late November that a commission would be established to examine Canada's existing tariff structure. This action displeased most farmers. Agrarian leaders argued that the decision was simply a way to delay immediate government action on the tariff and would not bring about satisfactory results.³³ Consequently, farmers argued that a deputation to Ottawa was needed more than ever before. An article in the Calgary Herald pointed to the major difference between the Laurier tour and the farmers' trek to Ottawa. The article stated that upon going to the city, the farmers would have their questions ready and "in the absence of brass bands and cheering multitudes, it will be more difficult for the premier to evade them."³⁴ In other words, the glitz and glamour, and the celebratory speeches that marked many of the welcoming ceremonies upon Laurier's arrival through the West, would be no more. The delegates who went to Ottawa wanted direct answers from the first minister, which they felt they did not receive on his summer tour. Many farmers in the West wholeheartedly believed that a crisis had arrived in the national affairs of the country,

³¹ "The March on Ottawa," GGG, 26 October 1910.

³² Ibid.

³³ "Farmers' Bill of Rights," GGG, 16 November 1910, 5.

³⁴ "The Farmer's Delegation," Calgary Herald, 15 December 1910, 6.

a crisis where the "shackles" were "so tightly riveted upon the necks of the people that nothing short of revolution" would bring relief.³⁵ The farmers' trip to Ottawa was not intended to be truly revolutionary in nature, but rather to be democratic and involve serious discussion. Farmers hoped, however, that this discussion would lead to a number of dramatic and much-needed changes in Canadian agricultural policy.

Realizing the historical importance of the upcoming meeting in Ottawa, the mood of the delegates was both upbeat and serious. An article in the Guide spoke to what many farmers considered to be a pressing agricultural situation in the country. It stated that farmers were now involved in a big "fight for their rights" and were demanding that a "square deal" be reached with Parliament.³⁶ Many believed that a march on Ottawa, with farmers standing together, was needed before the country's problems became too deep-rooted. The delegation was going to Ottawa to "demand that their rights be protected and that they no longer be compelled to carry on their shoulders the tariff-enriched magnates and the barons of special privilege."³⁷ A statement on the cover of the December 14 edition of the Guide emphasized the need for western farmers to work to ensure that a fair deal be struck. The statement read: "If the Western members continue blindly to follow their leaders, regardless of the interests of the people, then the demands of the farmers will meet little return. If western members stand together they can compel both political parties to change their tactics and

³⁵ "Farmers' Bill of Rights," GGG, 5.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ "A Warning to the Powers," GGG, 30 November 1910, cover page.

for once give the farmers a square deal.”³⁸ The organization of the farmers’ deputation represented an important social movement, and was more than a simple party demonstration. Despite the fact that western farmers had specific concerns with Laurier, they were not only protesting against Laurier and his Dominion Government, but also against a system which they believed catered to the country’s privileged eastern manufacturing sector. The trek to Ottawa represented a move by farmers towards ensuring what they thought would be greater democracy, a way to attain a larger say in the management of their own affairs.

As the organized farmers completed their final preparations for a descent on Ottawa, they were not without their vocal opponents. At the same time, a counter-attack was being planned by representatives of the Canadian Manufacturers Association (CMA). At its annual convention in Vancouver, the CMA asserted that its members were determined to concentrate their forces in Ottawa in the winter in an effort to force Parliament to retain its protectionist tariff and prevent the move towards a reciprocal trade arrangement with the United States.³⁹ A column in the Guide stated that these plans represented the CMA’s attempts to “throw down the gauntlet” and create an adversarial situation of manufacturers versus farmers.⁴⁰ The Guide also noted the manufacturers’ viewpoint at their annual convention: “Let us not listen to a sectional, parochial,

³⁸ “If Western Farmers Continue,” GGG, 14 December 1910, cover page.

³⁹ “Manufacturers Throw Down Gauntlet,” GGG, 28 September 1910, 5.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

little meeting of Grain Growers."⁴¹ The Guide used these comments as political ammunition to encourage the delegates in their fight, noting that it was "time for farmers to accept the challenge of manufacturers" and time for farmers to go to Ottawa in December and present their demands to Parliament.⁴² "If farmers send their delegates to Ottawa they will succeed in their case, if they do not, the manufacturers will win. . . . It is a question of feudalism or democracy, and it remains with the farmers to say which it shall be. Ontario has already decided upon the Ottawa delegation and Western vigor is equal to that of Eastern Canada."⁴³

A statement on the cover of the November 23 edition of the Guide, still referring to the actions taken by the CMA, stressed the need for farmers to unite: "the manufacturers are marshalling all their forces at Ottawa and have prepared to spend a lot of money in a desperate fight to prevent any tariff reduction. The big farmers' delegation on December 16 should be able to convince our Ottawa members that they have been representing special privilege long enough and should now represent the people."⁴⁴ In the CMA, the farmers realized that they were facing a huge organization with seemingly endless financial support and political power. The Manufacturers' Association could afford to spend large sums of money to counteract farmers' demands. E. C. Drury, concerned about government treatment of farmers as compared to the

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ "The Tariff Question," GGG, 23 November 1910, cover page.

manufacturers, stated that "organized manufacturers are holding up the country instead of trying to develop it . . . we ask that the system established for the benefit of infant industries and which has now become a system of legalized robbery be put a stop to."⁴⁵ Drury's statement illustrated that farmers throughout the country believed that their important role in the national economy was not properly appreciated.

In December, the Dominion Grange issued its final call for a mass lobby in Ottawa. On December 14 the Farmers Association and the Dominion Grange held their 36th annual meeting in Toronto.⁴⁶ Most of the meeting was devoted to finalizing their plans before leaving for Ottawa. Delegates officially endorsed the position that protection was an unjust system of taxation and a reciprocity arrangement with the United States was needed.⁴⁷ With this final call, farmers country-wide were now prepared to tackle Ottawa. After three-and-a-half-months of careful planning by organizers, which was by no means easy or straightforward, the stage was set for what delegates hoped would be an informative, successful, and historic meeting with the federal government.

⁴⁵ Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 15.

⁴⁶ Canadian Annual Review, 329.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 330.

CHAPTER THREE

"On To Ottawa"

*"For the first time in their history Canadian farmers were in the limelight of the world and the subject of discussion throughout the whole of Canada. As an advertisement nothing could be more successful than their trip to Ottawa."*¹

The fact that the main body of western delegates made the trip to Ottawa by special train was unique in Canadian history. It marked the first time that a chartered train, owned by a Canadian railway company (Canadian Pacific Railway), had carried a western delegation of this size such a distance.² The western delegates were part of the largest deputation ever to descend upon the nation's capital. They went there to mobilize and to press home the demands that they had made of Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier on his western tour. They wanted to receive some definite word on Laurier's intended course of action on agricultural matters affecting their region.³ It was clear from the outset that the delegates saw their trip to Ottawa and their upcoming meeting with Laurier as a critical business venture, and not as a time for simple personal enjoyment or to receive congratulations for their successes. The business planned for the trip to Ottawa was simply an extension of the hard work and determination that most delegates exerted as entrepreneurs on their prairie farms. For weeks, the Grain Growers' Guide had been emphasizing the

¹ George F. Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa (Winnipeg, Grain Growers' Guide, 1911), 7.

² Ibid., 6.

³ "The Farmers' Delegation," Calgary Herald, 15 December 1910, 6.

business approach required for a successful trip. A Saskatchewan farmer described it best: "We are going to plough through our business here like we plough through our land – do it straight and get results."⁴

The 328 passengers aboard the thirteen-car train provided by the Canadian Pacific Railway (CPR) left the depot in Winnipeg at 10:30 on the night of December 12 on a forty-seven hour run for Ottawa. The train had been scheduled to leave somewhat earlier, but the late departure was due to the fact that not all the trains carrying delegates to Winnipeg had arrived from the various branch lines on time.⁵ The "free trade special," as it was named in various newspapers, carried delegates from many nationalities – English, Scottish, Irish, Gallic, Scandinavian, German, and American, a reflection of the multi-national population of the West. Most of the delegates, however, were English-speaking. As well, a number of western delegates on board were originally from eastern Canada, who had left their homes years earlier to seek a living in the new West. For these delegates the trip to Ottawa represented a return visit home. The departure followed a formal banquet in honour of the delegates, given on behalf of the people of Winnipeg. With the exception of about fifteen women who accompanied their husbands, most on board were

⁴ "Little Grains of Wheat," Ottawa Evening Journal, 15 December 1910, 1.

⁵ "How to Get There," Grain Growers' Guide (GGG), 16 November 1910, 28.

At least 100 delegates purchased tickets from the Canadian Northern Railway, whose trains made their way to Ottawa via Toronto and Chicago. Although the events aboard this train are not widely known, it can be surmised they were similar to those which took place on the CPR special. As well, for various reasons at least 75 delegates left ahead of the special train.

male members of western-based farm organizations.⁶ One reporter noted that some of the distinguishing characteristics of the men were that they appeared "healthy, wealthy and wise."⁷ Similarly, another reporter described the delegates as "the cream of the west's agricultural population."⁸

Several journalists, representing various newspapers, boarded in Winnipeg and remained on the special until it reached Ottawa. Senator T. O. Davis of Prince Albert and a number of MPs would later travel from Ottawa to meet the train at a stop in Renfrew, Ontario. Similarly, other representatives from newspapers such as the Ottawa Citizen, the Montreal Gazette and the New York Times, would board at several stops east of North Bay, Ontario. Numerous special dispatches and cable messages would be sent to hundreds of newspapers by these reporters.

Newspapers from across North America covered the episode extensively for approximately one week and continued to make references to it for over a month. Because of the front-page publicity afforded to the delegation's monumental descent on the capital, newspaper readers across the country were captivated and intrigued by the event. The coast-to-coast newspaper coverage of the delegates' movement eastward illustrated that this was no ordinary demonstration. "For the first time in their history," George Chipman of the Guide observed, "Canadian farmers were in the limelight of the world and the subject

⁶ Material relating to the farmers' trip to and arrival in Ottawa does not seem to indicate that the women who accompanied their husbands played an active role in the events between December 12 and December 16. By 1910, however, a number of farm women had come to be farm activists in their own right. In all likelihood, farm women did play an important part in helping organize the trip to the capital.

⁷ "Western Farmers Speeding to Ottawa," GGG, 12.

⁸ Ibid.

of discussion throughout the whole of Canada. As an advertisement nothing could be more successful than their trip to Ottawa."⁹ He added that, "The whole world was watching the progress of the special train from the West, and was anxious to know the feelings in the breasts of three hundred farmers."¹⁰ The delegates on board the special understood the fact that their delegation was making national headlines and evoking public interest, largely because a news service had been provided to them.¹¹

The time spent en route to the nation's capital was of central significance to the trip. Each delegate aboard represented a branch of between twenty-five and 100 members. Close to 300 Saskatchewan Grain Growers' Association (SGGA) branches were represented, while 150 from Manitoba and fifty from Alberta were also represented.¹² The delegates from each association also wore a badge with the insignia of their provincial association. Not only was the SGGA particularly well represented, its delegates stood out because of the attractive insignia of their association.¹³ In December 1910, the Saskatchewan Association had an enrollment of around 15,000 members. F. W. Green, secretary of the central body, stated that the SGGA, "is purely democratic and we are going to Ottawa to present to the Government our ideas on things which we consider ought to be changed in order to secure to the grain growers more

⁹ Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 7.

¹¹ The C.P.R. Telegraph Company and the Winnipeg Free Press provided news to the delegates about events throughout the country and abroad.

¹² "Farmers on the Way to Ottawa: Two Special Trains Bringing Big Delegations From the West," Montreal Gazette, 13 December 1910, 1.

¹³ Ibid.

rights and advantages. . . ."¹⁴ Indeed, the trip to Ottawa was viewed as a pilgrimage by many of the delegates.

An article in the Saskatoon Daily Phoenix pointed out that "On to Ottawa" was the watchword of those composing the train load.¹⁵ Furthermore, headlines in a number of major newspapers made use of this slogan to describe the deputation's move on the capital. The term "On to Ottawa" was important in a number of respects. The simple slogan clearly and succinctly displayed to all onlookers the deputation's final destination and its place of business – Ottawa, the nation's capital, where the country's most important decisions were made. This slogan also served to bind the delegates together in a united cause, as it would in a number of future social and protest movements in Canadian history. Delegates could loudly and proudly chant these words aloud as the train made its way to the capital. In fact, each delegate sported a ribbon displaying these words. The passengers also hung special banners bearing the same message from the windows of the train.¹⁶

Following breakfast the first morning after leaving Winnipeg, business began. A series of business meetings were devoted to discussing important issues that were to be taken up with government. These meetings also provided the delegates with the opportunity to become acquainted with each other. The intermingling between delegates, many of whom had never met

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ "On to Ottawa," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 15 December 1910.

¹⁶ "Deputation One Thousand Strong To Make Agricultural Demands," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 15 December 1910, 1.

before, allowed them to form personal contacts. Furthermore, private discussions made some of them realize how similar the individual grievances were across the prairie provinces. Each delegate was given the opportunity to become involved and contribute to the on-board meetings. Their contributions enabled the executive to improve their prepared speeches. Delegate participation also allowed the executive to determine agricultural expertise within the rank-and-file of the deputation. Some newspapers, however, described the meetings on board, not in business terms, but rather in militaristic terms. One newspaperman from the Ottawa Evening Journal noted the train ride offered the delegates the chance to lay out their "ammunition" and prepare to battle Laurier. This was a time, the same reporter wrote, when "Swords were sharpened, controversial swords."¹⁷

En route to Ottawa meetings were held in each of the thirteen rail cars throughout the day. After each meal, the dining cars were cleared and the speakers mounted chairs to address the meetings.¹⁸ In addition to the meetings, speeches were also written and questions were prepared. The executive officers of the three provincial associations, who played an important role in the final assembly of the farmers' case, occupied a special meeting car at the rear of the train.¹⁹ A number of prominent western agrarian leaders made up the executive rank. Each helped to bring credibility to the farmers' cause.

¹⁷ "Breezy Deputation Arrives From West: Healthy Sample of Healthy Canadians Enliven the City," Ottawa Evening Journal, 15 December 1910, 5.

¹⁸ "Western Farmers Speeding to Ottawa," GGG, 12.

¹⁹ "Western Grain Growers Speeding to Capital With Free Trade Demands," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 14 December 1910, 1.

The first notable officer was William. J. Tregillus of Calgary, who was vice president of the United Farmers of Alberta (UFA). Tregillus was born in England and moved to Canada in 1885, where he took up farming. He became extremely wealthy when the city of Calgary grew to take over his farm. He was accompanied by James Bower and E. J. Fream, also executive members from Alberta. Fream was from Innisfail and was one of the most energetic workers on the executive of the Canadian Council of Agriculture (CCA). He was an experienced farmer and secretary-treasurer of the UFA. J. W. Scallion and Roderick McKenzie were the most notable Manitoba officers. Scallion, of Virden, possessed one of the largest farms in the Canadian West. McKenzie, one of the main organizers of the deputation, began his career as a drug clerk in Ontario and then moved West, where he became a successful farmer. An Ottawa Evening Journal reporter described similar journeys made by many of the other western delegates. The reporter noted, "... 10 per cent. of the delegates reached the West on 'shanks' mare'. Now they are coming to their country's capital on a special train."²⁰ The executive officers from Saskatchewan included F. M. Gates of Fillmore, who was president of the SGGA, Fred W. Green, secretary of the SGGA, and E. A. Partridge, who was the association's director as well as an executive member of the CCA. Partridge had recently become known throughout the West as one of the most active leading spirits of the farmers' movement and as a prominent

²⁰ "Western Farmers Speeding to Ottawa," 12. Shanks' mare was a colloquial term for walking on foot.

spokesperson for their cause.²¹ He was also known for his work in the inauguration of a Farmers' Co-operative Company.

In considering the various farming issues before them, the main intent of the executive committee was to be fully prepared once the delegation reached Ottawa. During the meetings free trade dominated the discussion. By Wednesday afternoon, two days into the trip, most of the resolutions had been agreed upon by the executive committee and copies of the resolutions were distributed throughout the train for the delegates' approval. Formal and informal meetings did continue, however, until the train was just a few minutes outside the capital.²² As was made clear before its departure for Ottawa, the delegation strongly favored reciprocal free trade between Canada and the United States. Free trade for implements, machinery, vehicles and parts was requested. All horticultural, agricultural and animal products, as well as spraying materials, fertilizers, fuel, cement, fish, and lumber were to be included.²³ There was also a strong desire to lower the tariff structure, particularly for commodities in general use by the agricultural population. The delegates favored the principle of a British preferential tariff, which called for an immediate lowering of duties on all British imports, to half of what they were under the general tariff.²⁴ The western farmers also called for the continuous reduction of the duties on British goods, with the idea of ultimately bringing about free trade within the Empire

²¹ "Grain Growers Are Unanimous in Regards to their Demands: Clear Cut Demands on Tariff Question," Edmonton Evening Journal, 16 December 1910, 1.

²² Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 6.

²³ "Eight Hundred Farmers Prepare Their Program," Toronto Globe, 16 December 1910, 1.

²⁴ Ibid.

within ten years.²⁵ It was believed that Canadian producers would receive an immense advantage in the British market if these demands were implemented. A demand that terminal elevators be built at the Pacific Coast and Hudson Bay was also made in the meetings. In addition, the delegation called for amendments to the Railway Act and the Banking Act, both of which greatly affected prairie farmers and deeply interested them. The final demand was for a government-funded railway to Hudson Bay. In fact, western farmers went so far as to assert that if the government was not going to undertake both the construction and operation of the Hudson Bay Railway, then they would take on this initiative themselves. Some 200 delegates on board signed the following agreement:

We, the undersigned, in the event of the government failing to undertake the construction of the Hudson Bay railway and its operation through the medium of an independent commission, and from the viewpoints of the interest of our western population in the matter of efficient and cheap service provided throughout the year, desire to express our faith in the feasibility and desirability of western people, with suitable government assistance, building and operating the road themselves as a popular joint stock company enterprise. . . .²⁶

The delegation was extremely sensitive about the railway question. An uproar broke out aboard the train when a telegram message was received from Ottawa stating that the Manitoba-based Mackenzie and Mann Railway

²⁵ Ibid. The intent was that free trade would be brought about in ten years through ten annual reductions of ten percent. This proposal, it was argued, would give protected interests time to adjust.

²⁶ "Arrival of Grain Growers: Free Trade Special From West Got in Last Night," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 15 December 1910, 12.

Company had been given a contract for the operation of the Hudson Bay Railway. Clearly disillusioned and not knowing whether or not to accept the swirling rumours as fact or fiction, members of the executive even went so far as to state that if the telegram was true, the western portion of the delegation would not meet with government. Word was received a short while later that the telegram's message was untrue, and business returned to normal – but only for a short while.²⁷ As the special continued on its way to Ottawa, controversy swirled when reports surfaced stating that J. J. Hill, a railway magnate from the United States, and other capitalists from St. Paul and Minneapolis, were financing the delegation's visit to the capital.²⁸ These reports in the Montreal Standard stated that E. A. Partridge was the ring-leader of the western deputation and behind him stood J. J. Hill and his millions of dollars. Upon hearing these claims, a number of delegates made it abundantly clear that there was no truth to them.²⁹

More heartening news came from E. C. Drury, Master of the Dominion Grange, who reported on the tariff resolution passed at the annual meeting of the Dominion Grange in Toronto that week. Drury's dispatch was significant because it led the western delegates to believe that the similarity of the resolutions passed in both East and West would strengthen their joint cause. They reasoned that government officials in Ottawa would have no choice but to

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Says Hill Was Mover, Farmers Deny Story," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 19 December 1910. A reciprocity agreement, the reports stated, would divert more traffic to J. J. Hill's railways which ran North to South. It was for this reason that some believed Hill was backing the farmers' trek.

²⁹ Ibid.

address their concerns. Although the trek to Ottawa was in large part western-driven, no longer could it be argued that agricultural discontent was simply limited to the West. Rather, the trek was increasingly considered a nation-wide movement. It can also be looked upon as being a truly unique movement because of the high degree of exchange taking place between regions, which was made possible by the work of the CCA.³⁰

The train arrived in Ottawa shortly after ten o'clock on the evening of December 14. A large crowd of well-wishers was gathered to meet the deputation at the Ottawa Union Depot. The crowd was somewhat disappointed, however, that only a few delegates left the train. The majority stayed on board the train as "guests of the Canadian Pacific" to prepare and rest for the following day.³¹ Although appreciative of the reception, the delegates were not concerned with fanfare but completely consumed by their preparations for the meeting with the government.³² Among the large crowd were a few notable politicians on hand to greet the deputation. W. D. Staples, a federal Member of Parliament (MP) for MacDonald, Manitoba and chairman of the delegate reception committee, was in attendance. Others included Conservative MP Arthur Meighen and Ottawa Mayor Charles Hopewell.³³ An Ottawa Citizen

³⁰ "Abattoirs and Cold-Storage," Toronto Globe, 14 December 1910, 3. Even before its arrival the trek had already inspired a series of resolutions in the House of Commons on December 13. Dr. Sproule, a western Liberal MP, initiated a resolution in the House calling for the establishment of a system of abattoirs and cold-storage facilities to be placed under government control. The resolution, however, was voted down.

³¹ "Arrival of the Grain Growers: Free Trade Special From West Got in Last Night," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 15 December 1910, 12.

³² "Ottawa Est Envahi Par Les Fermiers Du Canada," La Presse, 15 December 1910, 1.

³³ "Have Resolutions All Ready For Meeting," Calgary Herald, 15 December 1910, 1.

reporter remarked that those who greeted the deputation shook hands with those on board in "breezy western style."³⁴ An interesting, if not comical, moment was the arrival of another train carrying a load of cows, pigs, and sheep. A number of farmers "roared with delight at hearing the familiar sounds of the livestock at the end of their trip."³⁵ That evening it was also raining and some delegates commented in mock disapproval on the eastern climate that allowed it to rain in mid-winter.³⁶

For the vast majority of western delegates the province of Ontario was not as foreign as many would have believed. In fact, it was rare when one of the delegates did not spend at least some part of his childhood in an eastern locale.³⁷ Descriptions of the deputation's arrival were numerous. When one newspaperman asked a group of the western farmers if they were coming to stay and live in the East, one exuberant delegate responded, "No chance. Young man, I like the West. You'll be out there yourself soon. You know you will."³⁸ Many of the Ottawa citizens who were witness to the deputation's arrival were impressed by what they believed to be the evident prosperity of the western farmers. The vast majority of delegates who came to Ottawa were successful farmers, displayed by the fact that they could afford to travel to Ottawa at their own expense in the first place. Their apparel also reflected

³⁴ "Breezy Deputation: Healthy Samples of Live Canadians Enliven the City," Ottawa Evening Journal, 15 December 1910, 5.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

success. For the most part, each delegate wore a boiled shirt with starched collar, and some even sported fur coats. A reporter from the Ottawa Evening Journal described the delegation this way: "The most significant fact about the success of the West, is the healthy and prosperous appearance of the delegates from there. The same applies to the visiting farmers of the east."³⁹ Besides the wealthy and prosperous appearance of the delegation, probably its most noticeable characteristic was the expressions of confidence on the faces of the delegates. Perhaps, descriptions such as these were not what western farmers themselves wanted to hear, as they had come to Ottawa to argue that they were discontented and that their work, due to a variety of factors, was not properly appreciated and rewarded. The western delegation, however, still commanded instant attention; they would remain the centre of focus in Ottawa, and in the entire country for that matter, for the remainder of their stay.⁴⁰

There was a great deal of speculation and curiosity among Easterners as what to expect from the western delegation. Much of the speculation stemmed from western stereotypes that had been perpetuated in eastern newspapers. It is clear, however, that many easterners who witnessed the arrival expected a scene quite different from the one they in fact saw: "The majority of the East still expected to see a 'wild and woolly' gathering armed with all sorts of shooting irons and ready to fight at a moment's notice."⁴¹ An article in the Regina Leader

³⁹ "Little Grains of Wheat," Ottawa Evening Journal, 15 December 1910, 1.

⁴⁰ "Farmer John Evans of Saskatoon Makes Presence Known at Ottawa," Evening Capital, 15 December 1910, 10.

⁴¹ Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 7.

sarcastically described similar expectations, stating that Ottawa citizens expected to see “cowpunchers armed with guns and all the paraphernalia of a movie picture film, but instead witnessed the sight of eight hundred earnest, whole-hearted farmers, thoroughly awake to the justice of their demands.”⁴² For some, it was quite a surprise to see that western farmers talked, acted, and thought in a way any easterner would. It was certainly the case that the deputation was one of the most unique to have ever invaded Canada’s capital city, and the western representatives understood that for the next few days Ottawa belonged to them.

Upon arrival in Ottawa, R. McKenzie made clear the deputation’s intentions: “We put in our requests to Sir Wilfrid when he was out West . . . and now we are here to show we mean business.”⁴³ His requests were echoed by other delegates. A Saskatchewan farmer stated, “We have a lot to talk to Sir Wilfrid about.”⁴⁴ One western delegate asserted, “We want what we want when we want it We want as much consideration as the manufacturers get from government.”⁴⁵ Another delegate, who went by the nick-name “Uncle John,” proclaimed, “Farmers are stepping out of the hog pen into automobiles these days.”⁴⁶ When asked by a stranger who the arriving western farmers were, one exuberant delegate shouted, “We are the controllers of the granary of the British

⁴² “Famous ‘Siege of Ottawa’ Will Live Long as a Notable Occasion for Grain Growers,” Regina Leader, 13 February 1918, 2.

⁴³ “Breezy Deputation Arrives From West: Healthy Samples of Live Canadians Enliven the City,” Ottawa Evening Journal, 15 December 1910, 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ “Little Grain of Wheat,” Ottawa Evening Journal, 15 December 1910, 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Empire."⁴⁷ Given these statements, it is clear that these delegates believed that Canadian agriculture deserved much attention. These farmers represented more than simply a special interest group. They came to Ottawa on behalf of farmers nation-wide. They understood that the demands they had come to Ottawa to make were well-founded and needed to be immediately addressed.

Newspaper reports describing the deputation's arrival used more exaggerated images. The New York Times⁴⁸ and La Presse⁴⁹ referred to the trip as an "invasion of the Canadian capital." Terms such as "invasion," and "uprising," a term also used, are interesting descriptions. These terms, often associated with active revolt and rebellion, are misleading and questionable descriptions for the movement considering that the "trek" was planned to be democratic and business-like, and that the farmers had been invited by Prime Minister Laurier himself to come to Ottawa. The business-like and democratic principles associated with the farmers' meeting with Laurier, however, are not what would come to be remembered. One probable explanation for the increasingly radical terminology used by some newspapers to describe the deputation is that the more momentum and support that it received from the general public, the more the descent on the capital appeared to be a major protest movement driven by hostility. The revolutionary terms used by some of these eastern newspapers are also intriguing considering that western newspapers from Vancouver to Winnipeg, for the most part, publicly supported the farmers. Perhaps because they had a better understanding of the concerns

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "Canadian Farmers Draw Up Demands," New York Times, 16 December 1910, 2.

⁴⁹ "Ottawa Est Envahi Par Les Fermiers Du Canada," La Presse, 15 December 1910, 1.

of western farmers, these newspapers sympathized with the farmers' delegates, in some cases referring to them as "our boys" and "our heroes."⁵⁰ The eastern-based newspapers, however, were not generally as accepting of the motives of the deputation.

On the morning of Thursday, December 15, the remainder of the delegates who had come to Ottawa aboard other trains arrived. These included the 100 western representatives who came on the CNoR, via Chicago. Another seventy-five came on the regular CPR line.⁵¹ Combining the train loads from the West, western delegates numbered approximately 500. Another 300 Grangers from Ontario were waiting, as well as a sprinkling of delegates from Quebec and the Maritime provinces.⁵² Once the delegates had had the chance to settle in the city, the officers of the now combined delegation held their first committee meeting at the Russell House. Memorials drafted by the executive of the three western provinces were submitted to the delegates of the eastern organizations, and, with a few minor changes, these memorials were given full support.⁵³ For roughly an hour the committee members discussed joint tariff resolutions for Canada. Among the five resolutions that were framed was one demanding free trade between Canada and Britain within ten years, as well as

⁵⁰ "Breezy Deputation Arrives From West: Healthy Samples of Live Canadians Enliven the City," Ottawa Evening Journal, 5.

⁵¹ "Arrival of Grain Growers," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 12.

⁵² There were two delegates representing the Nova Scotia Fruit Growers' Association, two from the New Brunswick Farmers' Association, in addition to seven farmers from Quebec.

⁵³ "National Council of Agriculture is Preparing Memorial for Government: Series of Resolutions Passed in the Secret Session Today," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 15 December 1910, 1.

absolute free trade with the United States on agricultural implements. Given the time constraints of the morning, little else was discussed.

The chief meeting for the day was held in Ottawa's Grand Opera House, chosen because its main hall was large enough to accommodate the delegation in its entirety. Here, the rank-and-file delegates from every province except British Columbia and Prince Edward Island came together for a general meeting. The reason for the meeting was, as La Presse described it, to determine "la ligne de conduit" or line of action that the delegates would take with the government the following morning.⁵⁴ Delegates also took time to become acquainted in informal discussions. A proposal made at the beginning of the meeting was that the representatives from individual provinces should sit together. This proposal met harsh criticism because the majority of the delegates wanted to mix with their counterparts from the other provinces. Western farmers were pleasantly surprised to learn that the eastern delegates, for the most part, were as equally concerned as they were with the country's present tariff conditions. Another important function of the general assembly in the Opera House was that it allowed agrarian leaders from across the country to meet. The Opera House meeting was the first time in Canadian history that an assembly of this size had come together to represent the agricultural interests of virtually the entire country. American historian Paul Sharp noted that, "The experience of working and fraternizing with rural leaders from every part of the dominion impressed the farmers with the strength of their class, and stimulated

⁵⁴ "Ottawa Est Envahi Par Les Fermiers Du Canada," 1.

intersectional understandings that were later invaluable to the farmers' movement."⁵⁵ Similarly, Edward Porritt remarked, "the educational effect of East and West meeting together in this way to decide upon the policy to be followed by the farmers was undoubtedly of more value than any result that was obtained by interviewing the ministers and politicians."⁵⁶

The scene at the Opera House that morning was animated. The floor of the Opera House was filled with close to 800 delegates. Some were forced to sit in the galleries with visitors and numerous MPs. Approximately twenty officers from the CCA sat on the stage at the front of the large room. A marked feature of the meeting was the large number of newspaper reporters in attendance. It had been previously decided that the delegation would make all of the information discussed in this mass meeting open to the public and the media. Nothing was held back because it was believed that the general public could only help the farmers in their fight. Most of the delegates were of the opinion that they had nothing to hide and demanded that journalists be admitted since making their grievances public, no matter the outcome of their meeting with government, was a major goal of their trip.⁵⁷ The events and details of the meeting made national headlines the following morning, just as the movement of the delegates by train had in the preceding few days. The Siege of Ottawa, a document highlighting some of the important speeches and events of the

⁵⁵ Paul F. Sharp, The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1948), 44.

⁵⁶ Edward Porritt, Sixty Years of Protection in Canada 1846-1912: Where Industry Leans on the Politician (The Grain Growers' Guide: Winnipeg, 1913), 451.

⁵⁷ "Ottawa Est Envahi Par Les Fermiers Du Canada," 1.

farmers' delegation to Ottawa, described the overarching feeling that seemed to unite the delegates at the Opera House that day: "Every farmer seemed at last thoroughly awake to the fact that he was carrying on his shoulders burdens imposed by federal legislation."⁵⁸

The Opera House meeting, just like the meetings on board the train, was business-like. The deputation received a lengthy and formal welcome from Ottawa's mayor, Charles Hopewell, who spoke on behalf of the city's residents.⁵⁹ Replying to the welcome, D. W. McCuaig, who was President of the CCA, pointed to the possibilities of the West. He proclaimed that despite all of Ottawa's advantages, the city was not destined to remain the country's capital city. Winnipeg would someday become the capital of the country because it was situated at the centre of the nation's population and commerce. An article published that morning in the Toronto Globe also stressed the West's changing political landscape. The article stated:

The movement of Western farmers and their alliance with their friends of Ontario and the East, to secure Tariff reductions, cannot be brushed aside lightly. The growth of the West is so rapid that it will certainly hold the balance of power in the next Parliament. At all events, in a dozen years, which is a very short span in the history of a nation, the West will be in a position to dictate the fiscal policy of the Dominion. To ignore it even now would be folly.⁶⁰

Presentations at the meeting were divided into two distinct categories. The first group contained papers dealing specifically with western concerns.

⁵⁸ Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 7.

⁵⁹ "Ottawa Est Envahi Par les Fermier Du Canada," 1.

⁶⁰ Toronto Globe, 16 December 1910.

The second group was made up of papers dealing with matters concerning East and West alike, particularly the tariff.⁶¹ One central topic addressed at the meeting was the more than prominent role that the Canadian Manufacturers' Association (CMA) occupied in the national economy. John Evans, a delegate from Saskatoon, Saskatchewan and outspoken critic of the CMA, stated that the delegation "was the greatest to have ever occurred on the continent,"⁶² and noted that it marked the line between party worship and independent action.⁶³ The delegates, he stated, did not converge on Ottawa to protest against Laurier as leader of the Dominion or Robert Borden as leader of the opposition; rather, they "sought to throw off class privilege."⁶⁴ Evans commented that the country's manufacturing sector had been able to "whip into line" the Laurier government and the opposition, as well as the Canadian newspapers. He argued that Canadian newspapers were ninety percent controlled by the manufacturers.⁶⁵ Referring to the CMA, an agitated Evans bluntly stated: "We are going to see that they do not keep their heels upon our necks any longer or hold our lives in their bloody hands."⁶⁶ This statement was rehashed and attacked in a number of Canadian newspapers the following day. One cynical Globe reporter

⁶¹ Toronto Globe, 4 January 1910, 1.

⁶² National Archives of Canada (NAC), Manuscript Division, Laurier papers, MG 26G, J. Evans to W. Laurier, 177421.

⁶³ "We Are Here to Throw Off Class Privilege: Says Mr. Evans of Saskatoon at a Meeting of Grain Growers," Ottawa Evening Journal, 15 December 1910, 1.

⁶⁴ "National Council of Agriculture is Preparing Memorial for Government," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 15 December 1910, 1.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ "Farmer John Evans Makes Presence Known at Ottawa," Ottawa Evening Capital, 15 December 1910, 10.

described the group as a "prosperous and self confident body of men who, despite their protests at being ground down under the heel of the manufacturers, evidently possess bank accounts that would put most city dwellers to shame."⁶⁷

One topic addressed by E. C. Drury concerned how the development of Canadian farmers was being retarded. He stated that the organized manufacturers were holding up the country for their own benefit.⁶⁸ Drury pointed to Laurier's tour through the West and noted that after the tour, opponents attempted to represent farmers as selfish and not being willing to contribute their proportional share to the building of the nation.⁶⁹ He noted that farmers were asking that a system that had initially been established to cater to infant manufacturing industries be adapted to fit with changing agricultural concerns. Numerous proposals, most of which had been discussed by the western delegates on the train *en route* to Ottawa, were met with loud applause.⁷⁰

In the mass meeting in the Opera House representatives from the individual provinces were afforded the opportunity to speak of the concerns directly affecting the residents of their own province. It is perhaps here where

⁶⁷ Toronto Globe, 16 December 1910.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 12.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 11, 15. First, a proposal was made for reciprocal free trade between Canada and the United States for horticultural, agricultural and animal products, spraying materials, fertilizers, fuel, illuminating and lubricating oils, cement, fish and lumber. A second proposal was that reciprocal free trade be achieved between the two countries in agricultural implements, vehicles and machinery. A third proposal was for the lowering of duties placed on British imports to half of the rates charged under the general tariff, and that any trade advantages given the United States in reciprocal trade relations be extended to the Britain. Understanding that the proposals would lower the country's revenue capacities, the resolution stated: "That farmers of this country are willing to face direct taxation in such form as may be advisable to make up the revenue lost under new tariff relations."

the strong western sentiments became most clear, as delegates from the three western provinces wasted no time in making their concerns known. James Speakman of Penhold, Alberta, stated that although he was initially hesitant to make the trip to Ottawa, the meeting had far surpassed his expectations. Speakman took issue with the notion that a free trade arrangement with the United States would lead Canadians to abandon the British market altogether. Speakman argued, "If the United States throw open their market to us through this treaty and we get better profits selling there, naturally we will sell there, and if we don't get better profits there, if we can sell as well to Great Britain if we make most there."⁷¹ Similar remarks were made regarding transportation, another topic of particular importance for western farmers. Speakman noted that if westerners could ship their produce more cheaply and more effectively by running through American rail lines than through Canadian lines, the Canadian lines would realize that they have competition and would be forced to reduce their own rates.⁷²

Roderick McKenzie was the spokesman for the MGGA, and as had others, pointed to the significance of this deputation. McKenzie stated: "It is unique in the history of Canada, and it marks a new era in Canadian history for farmers to come here in this way to present their views to Parliament."⁷³ He argued that the coming together of the various delegations was the foretaste of what was to come in the future for the country's organized farmers. He called

⁷¹ Ibid., 17.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid., 18.

for a lifting of the burden placed on farmers by the tariff, asserting that a change was needed in the system for collecting revenue. His speech was met by loud applause from the entire assembly; additionally a "three cheers for Manitoba" echoed through the room.⁷⁴

In comparison to western farmers, what particularly agitated the Ontario farmers at the meeting was the unprecedented massive urbanization and the concomitant rural depopulation that was occurring. Protection, eastern farmers argued, helped inflict this problem on the country.⁷⁵ According to the CCA,

The greatest misfortune that can befall any country is to have its people huddled together in great centres of population and the bearing of the present customs tariff has the tendency to encourage that condition and realizing also that in view of the constant movement of our people away from the farms, the greatest problem which presents itself to Canadian people today is the problem of retaining our people on the soil.⁷⁶

Following the speeches, the deputation held a closed-door meeting in the afternoon to put the final touches on other memorials and resolutions, which were to be presented the following morning in the form of the "Farmers' Platform."⁷⁷ The meeting also offered the delegates the opportunity to oppose any of the final resolutions. When the delegation was asked if the journalists should remain to witness the meeting, there was a mixed response. Most, however, believed that the meeting should be closed to those not party to the

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Charles M. Johnston, E. C. Drury: Agrarian Idealist (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 31.

⁷⁶ Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 7.

⁷⁷ "Farmers Adopt the Resolutions: They Ask For Reciprocal Free Trade With the United States," Montreal Gazette, 14 December 1910, 1.

deputation. McCuaig asked the journalists to withdraw, stating that the talk that was to follow was a private matter. The press was not allowed in the meeting because it was possible that there would be a difference of opinion between eastern and western delegates, and it was thought not advisable to make these possible disagreements public through newspaper coverage. This meeting was the last chance for delegates to pose questions, pass resolutions, and map out their final plan of campaign for the Friday meeting. Topics discussed at the meeting included terminal elevators, chilled meat plants, and co-operative societies for the buying and selling of produce.⁷⁸ Free trade was not discussed in the afternoon meeting. The meeting went so well that George Chipman, editor of the Guide observed, "Never was the business of any convention conducted with more dispatch or in a more businesslike way."⁷⁹

In the afternoon meeting in the Opera House the delegates endorsed the "Farmers' Platform" which became the most important lasting symbol of the farmers' trip to Ottawa. It was a product of tireless debate within local meetings and conventions across Canada, in the Guide, and in the CCA. By 6:00 p.m. that evening the entire "Farmers' Platform" was given final approval by the assembly of farmers, and direct excerpts from this seminal document would be presented to government the next morning. The "Platform" was important because, for the first time, it articulated in a comprehensive way the farmers' demands and their hopes for the future of Canadian agricultural policy.

⁷⁸ "National Council of Agriculture Is Preparing Memorial for Government," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 1.

⁷⁹ Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 8.

Preparing for the events of the upcoming morning, George Chipman and E. J. Fream made sure that representatives from over thirty newspapers, who were by now in Ottawa, received copies of the resolutions that had passed and of the memorials that were to be presented to government the following morning. Most major newspapers across Canada and abroad made the farmers' descent on Ottawa, as well as their resolutions, their cover story the next day. The importance of the newspaper coverage given to the deputation has been described this way: "Canada sat up Friday morning and rubbed its eyes to see that the farmers were at last coming to the front and were capable of doing business at Ottawa."⁸⁰ Evidently, the deputation's business in the capital was no secret operation and was anything but an unimportant event reserved for the back pages of North American newspapers. Instead, it was a breaking national and international story, full of speculation and intrigue over what would come of the meeting in the Commons chamber the next day.

The farmers' assembly at the Opera House was the topic of gossip and debate in the halls of the House of Commons.⁸¹ The coming of the delegation had been discussed in private and at caucus meetings for an entire week before its arrival. Support for the delegation was mixed. Some MPs, particularly those representing western ridings, saw the upcoming meeting as positive, offering a chance for them to become acquainted with and learn the concerns of western farmers. Others expressed discontent over the circumstances of the protest,

⁸⁰ Ibid., 9.

⁸¹ "National Council of Agriculture is Preparing Memorial for Government," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 1.

arguing that their time could be better served addressing more pressing matters. The arrival of the delegates in Ottawa enabled some of the western MPs to gauge public opinion regarding the topics of greatest agricultural concern to western farmers. In fact, a number of MPs had constituents who were members of the delegation and entertained these constituents during their stay. A small number of grain growers had gone to Parliament Hill the morning of December 15 and had received a warm reception.⁸² Now that the meeting between the farmers' delegation and Laurier was less than one day away, the topic of the arrival and assembly of the delegation spilled from informal talk in the halls into the debates in the House of Commons chamber. One MP, Mr. Maddin, complaining about the farmers' arrival in the nation's capital, bluntly stated in a House debate:

There is no occasion to be exercised over the farming population. Those of the West, we know, in seed-time and in harvest time work very hard. . . . What do they do in the winter? Why, they spend their winters in Florida and California. Almost every farmer owns his automobile. And when they have garnered their wheat and take it to the elevators, they think nothing of coming to Ottawa in car-loads to present their demands. But men from the industrial centres of Canada would find it difficult, indeed – the men who work ten hours a day in the mines or workshops to come before the House . . . when important legislation is engaging our attention.⁸³

Clearly, this MP, as was the case with some other eastern representatives, was unsympathetic to the farmers' cause.

⁸² ibid.

⁸³ Canada, House of Commons Debates, 15 December 1910, 1446.

The farmers' activity in Ottawa was by now the hottest topic of discussion in the city, if not the entire country. On the eve of the much-anticipated meeting in the House of Commons, the delegates were prepared to meet Prime Minister Laurier and the country's other leading politicians and statesmen face-to-face. The farmers had come, often at great expense, to press home their demands relating to the agricultural matters affecting them and those they represented. Farmers from across the country had come together with the hope that their actions would lead to change. The delegates demanded nothing new and had no surprises in store. All they asked was for equitable legislation and that their role in the national economy be appreciated. The only question which remained was how Laurier would respond to their calls. The farmers were optimistic and looked forward to the meeting, only hours away, in great anticipation.

CHAPTER FOUR Talking Turkey

*"We have asked for bread, and you gave us a stone."*¹

The farmers' much anticipated day had arrived. The monumental meeting set to take place in the House of Commons was the culmination of months of careful planning and organization, as well as much sacrifice on the part of organized farmers. The meeting was the first time that Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier and his cabinet, or any leader and his administration for that matter, received a deputation of similar size on the floor of the House of Commons.² A Globe reporter described the speeches by the Canadian Council of Agriculture (CCA) as "the most significant four hours of straight talk which has been heard in Parliament for years."³ Political scientist David Laycock notes that the organized farmers' decision to march on Ottawa, combined with the presentations from the "Farmers' Platform" that took place that morning, represented "the first major demonstrations of prairie farmers' opposition to national economic policy and national colonialism."⁴ The meeting can rightly be considered one of the first noteworthy events in the history of Canadian rural protest.

¹ "We Have Asked For Bread, and You Gave Us A Stone," Ottawa Evening Journal, 17 December 1910, 1.

² C. F. Wilson, A Century of Canadian Grain (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1978), 42. As of 1978 this concession had not since been repeated.

³ Toronto Globe, 17 December 1910.

⁴ David Laycock, Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies 1910-45 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 4.

On the morning of December 16, 800 delegates representing Canadian farmers from the Alberta foothills to New Brunswick, mobilized at the Ottawa Grand Opera House and then marched four-to-six abreast through the streets of the capital to Parliament Hill.⁵ One Calgary Herald newspaperman stated that the deputation was the largest to have ever visited Ottawa.⁶ The line of farmers stretched along the length of Wellington Street to the entrance of the Commons.⁷ Many Ottawa citizens watched as the farmer deputation reached the front door of the House of Commons *en masse*. A Montreal Gazette reporter described the delegates as "big bearded men from the prairies."⁸ Another account emphasized their stateliness: "Although their clothing was not of the latest cut, nor their whiskers trimmed in the most approved style, they realized the part they were playing in the upbuilding of the nation, and their feeling of dignity did not desert them."⁹ The coverage given to the delegation, however, was not all positive. Some newspapers attempted to downplay the importance of the moment. An article in the Dublin Express lambasted the delegates, calling them "wild men from the west" and "freak free traders" who should not be taken seriously.¹⁰ The article went on to note that farmers were "Crying for the moon," and that they were simply being used as pawns by the free trade unions

⁵ "The Farmer's Delegation," Calgary Herald, 15 December 1910, 6.

⁶ ibid.

⁷ "Many Delegates Disappointed Sir Wilfrid Didn't Say Enough," Ottawa Saturday Evening Citizen, 17 December 1910, 24.

⁸ "Farmers Go Home In Quieter Mood: Their Demands for Free Trade Not Enthusiastically Received," Montreal Gazette, 17 December 1910, 1.

⁹ George F. Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa (Winnipeg: Grain Growers Guide, 1911), 9.

¹⁰ "Wild Farmers of the West Raid Ottawa: Freak Free Traders Crying for the Moon, Says Dublin Express," Dublin Express cited in Edmonton Evening Journal, 16 December 1910, 5.

in England.¹¹ Another article in the London Standard argued that the true importance of the delegation's trip to Ottawa was that western farmers had become an organized force capable of determining the policy of the Dominion. "But at the moment," the article lamented, "they do not realize some of the consequences of closer commercial ties with foreign nations."¹²

Upon reaching Parliament Hill, the delegates were photographed as a group. They then entered the House in a long and serpentine stream, filling both the chamber floor as well as the galleries. Few delegates had ever had the opportunity to see, let alone sit in, this grand room or come face-to-face with Canadian lawmakers.¹³ By 10:00 a.m., the entire place was filled to overflowing in anticipation of what many delegates believed would be a heart-to-heart meeting and an opportunity, as a column in the Calgary Herald declared, to "talk turkey" with Laurier.¹⁴

As the delegates entered the House chamber, the scene was much like a traditional image of a siege, except that the farmers had been invited there.¹⁵ Once inside, those who were to present the memorials were seated on the floor of the House. The members' benches were also full of delegates. Most of the cabinet ministers were present and some were forced to find seats on the steps of the

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² "Crying For Moon: Deputation of Farmers Said to Be A 'Junketing Tour'," Toronto Globe, 16 December 1910, 1.

¹³ "Farmers Go Home in Quieter Mood: Their Demands for Free Trade Not Enthusiastically Received," Montreal Gazette, 17 December 1910, 1.

¹⁴ "The Farmers Delegation," Calgary Herald, 6

¹⁵ As the term suggests, the organized farmers did place the city of Ottawa and the House of Commons under "siege" when they descended on Ottawa. The farmers wanted Laurier and his government to surrender to their demands, so in this sense, the meeting was siege-like. Its given title is therefore appropriate.

Speaker's dais.¹⁶ The Speaker did not sit in his usual chair and the mace was not on the table. Representatives and officers of the Canadian Manufacturers Association (CMA), including its president, W. H. Rowley, were seated in the Senators' gallery and followed the proceedings intently.¹⁷ Although the Canadian Senate had adjourned for the Christmas holidays on December 16, a surprising number of the members of the Upper House were present that morning.¹⁸ Approximately 200 MPs, after mingling with delegates, found any of the remaining seats they could. As the farmers assumed their positions and the excitement mounted even further, one western MP, William Staples, was heard calling out: "three cheers for the western farmer."¹⁹

Remarkably, key delegates were allowed to sit in the prime minister's seat as well as that of the leader of the opposition. In Laurier's seat was D. W. Warner, a delegate from Alberta and a member of the executive of its association. He was described as: "a spectacled gentleman with whiskers of a saffron hue and an expression as serious as though he were assuming the full measure of responsibility of the statesman whose place he filled."²⁰ The seat of Robert Borden, the Conservative leader, was occupied by an unidentified red-whiskered delegate. The unusual seating arrangements, particularly those allowing for the occupation of the chairs of the country's two leading statesmen, reinforced to all in attendance the significance of the day and that the deputation was to be taken seriously.

¹⁶ The Speaker's dais is where the parliamentary pages sit when the House was in session.

¹⁷ "Canadian Farmers Oust Parliament," New York Times, 17 December 1910, 1.

¹⁸ "Parliament to Receive Farmers," Grain Growers' Guide (GGG), 7 December 1910.

¹⁹ "Canadian Farmers' Demonstration Was Greatest of Kind Ever Seen In Capital," Regina Leader, 1.

²⁰ Ibid.

A few minutes past 10:00 a.m., Sir Wilfrid Laurier entered the House, accompanied by D. W. McCuaig, president of the CCA, and Roderick McKenzie, who was secretary of the organization. They were greeted by scattered cheers and applause. An article in the Montreal Gazette pointed out that, "It was noticeable that while the reception accorded to the Premier was a friendly one, it was not enthusiastic. . . ." ²¹ Laurier sat at the head of the table of the Clerk of the House. To the left of Laurier sat the Minister of Trade and Commerce Sir Richard Cartwright, and to his right sat D. W. McCuaig, E. C. Drury, and R. McKenzie, all delegates. Other cabinet members present were: Hon. Sydney Fisher, Hon. William Lyon MacKenzie King, Hon. William Patterson, Hon. Frank Oliver, Hon. Chas Murphy, Sir Frederick Borden and Hon. L. P. Brodeur. Sitting in the rear row of the government benches were three western women, who were the wives of delegates. "They did not measure up, the Ottawa Citizen described the unidentified women, "to the conception of the militant woman suffragist and there was no demonstration on their part." ²²

McCuaig was the spokesperson for the delegation and he chaired the day's proceedings. He introduced the delegates who were to submit memorials based on the "Farmers' Platform" to the ageing statesman Laurier, his government, and Parliament. He opened his address by noting that those making up the delegation represented every province in Canada with the exception of Prince Edward Island

²¹ "Farmers Go Home in Quieter Mood," 1.

²² "Canadian Farmers' Demonstration Was Greatest of Kind Ever Seen in Capital: 800 Free Trade Delegates in the Commons and Galleries," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 16 December 1910, 1.

and British Columbia. "I think you will agree with me, sir," he remarked, "that this delegation is something out of the usual line." McCuaig continued:

You have, in the past, no doubt, received many delegations, but I think I am quite safe in saying that this is the first organized delegation you have received from the farmers of the Dominion of Canada. Now, as I have mentioned, we have met to present to you some of the requests we have to make of your government. And, as you look upon these delegates here, I would like to mention that they have come together to-day at great expense and, in many cases, at great inconvenience to themselves."²³

McCuaig then asserted that the delegation had come to Ottawa to show that they were earnest in their requests. He concluded his address by thanking the prime minister for the opportunity to meet and present their requests to him.

Throughout the proceedings little time was wasted. Each speaker clearly showed through his words that he realized the importance of the day. Everything the speakers said was read in the form of memorials, which ranged in length from 2,000 to 4,000 words and were as direct and as to-the-point as possible.²⁴ The organized farmers' case was given in the form of memorials or set speeches because this left the presenters with little room to diverge from the carefully prepared text of the "Farmers' Platform." Topics included the tariff, terminal elevators, co-operative societies, banking, the chilled meat industry, and the Hudson Bay Railway. The majority of the demands had been made over and over to Laurier during his 1910 summer tour stops, as well as in letters to him and Robert Borden in the

²³ National Archives of Canada (NAC), Robert Sellar papers, MG 29 C 86 File 1, Report of the Proceedings in the Hearing By Members of the Government of the Farmers' Delegation December 16, 1910 With Corresponding Preliminary to the Hearing, 9.

²⁴ "Canadian Farmers' Demonstration Was Greatest of Kind Ever Seen In Capital," Regina Leader, 1.

months leading up to this meeting. The frankness of the speeches was also similar to the past exchanges. A New York Times reporter described the tone of the speeches as stern, making it clear to all that the farmers were requesting no special favours, but simply asking for their rights and for justice.²⁵ Similarly, Historian W. L. Morton noted their "blunt, harsh eloquence" in his description of the delegates' delivery of their memorials.²⁶

For four hours, speakers from the different provinces, one after another, submitted memorials or statements in support of resolutions. Supporting addresses were also presented by a number of farmers from Ontario. Clearly, this design was to show that the protest movement was not simply confined to farmers in the western provinces. Most of the event, however, was marked with western flavour. Strong points made by the speakers were met with loud cheers. The majority of the leading representations, particularly in relation to free trade, were made by western grain growers. Probably for climactic and strategic effect, the memorials dealing with reciprocity and free trade were kept until close to the end. Of the twenty speeches delivered that day in the House of Commons, nine of them were concerned directly with the tariff.²⁷

After listening to the farmers' memorials and resolutions for close to four hours, Laurier rose to give a brief but somewhat cautious reply. Greeted with a short ovation, he expressed his appreciation for having received such a large and

²⁵ "Canadian Farmers Oust Parliament: Fill Dominion House of Commons and Demand Free Trade as Their Right," New York Times, 1.

²⁶ W. L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 21.

²⁷ Sharp, The Agrarian Revolt in Western Canada, 43.

representative delegation. The prime minister had a good understanding of the problems brought before him. "While the delegation represented all of the Dominion," he exclaimed with his usual urbanity, "it seemed to be the western spirit that prevailed."²⁸ Laurier then stated that "the ideas of the west are more advanced and radical than those in the east. Of this we do not complain."²⁹ "We are," he noted while laughing, "prepared for the domination of the west at an early date."³⁰ He added that he was not surprised by the strong western presence, and emphasized again that, "The resolutions you have put before us are certainly impregnated by western spirit."³¹ Laurier appeared to believe and hinted that the delegates from eastern Canada were not prepared to go as far as those from western Canada in their demands. Laurier, it seems, associated the "western spirit" with radicalism. It is quite probable that Laurier used terms such as "radical" to describe the western farmers' demands so he could more easily downplay or dismiss them.³²

Besides the praise given to the western delegates, Laurier, in his usual style, was able to deflect and counteract the anticipated criticism from the delegates. Prime Minister Laurier's response was not patronizing but instead, it was rather cautious, even diplomatic. He realized that the movement had gained enough support that it could not be ignored. He had to take the delegates' requests

²⁸ "Grain Men and Premier," Regina Leader, 16 December 1910, 1.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Laurier Throws Bouquets and Ice Water," Edmonton Evening Journal, 17 December 1910.

³² Laurier would later tell back-bench MPs in a private meeting that the resolutions presented by the farmers were much too "exaggerated" to be effective.

seriously. Historian Bradford James Rennie, most appropriately, refers to Laurier's response as being "vague and non-committal."³³ One leading Canadian newspaper referred to the response in a similar way, calling it a simple display of the prime minister throwing a mix of "bouquets and ice water" at the deputation.³⁴ Choosing such a response was clearly intentional on the part of Laurier; a technique that he had no doubt perfected during his decades of public service. Clearly, Laurier's response to the farmers' memorials had been strategically planned, as he understood that the delegates in attendance would intently listen to and later pore over every word that he had said. He chose his topics carefully, his words even more so. He did not want the words spoken in this speech to come back to haunt him, as they had on his previous trips through the West. As well, Laurier now had the backing of his cabinet and he therefore did not need to be as conciliatory as had been during his speeches at his summer tour stops.

On the question of government ownership and operation of public utilities, such as the Hudson Bay Railway, Laurier noted that he could be persuaded on the principle of government ownership, but not on public operation. As for the question of reciprocity, the prime minister made clear that steps could be taken to improve trade relations for natural products. "I think," Laurier stated, "that if we can improve relations in the direction of having more markets for natural products and farm products, the country will be immensely benefited."³⁵ For manufactured products, however, he believed reciprocity would be much more difficult to attain. Laurier

³³ Bradford James Rennie, The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta 1909-1921 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 38.

³⁴ "Laurier Throws Bouquets and Ice Water," Edmonton Evening Journal.

³⁵ Chipman, The Siege of Ottawa, 65.

argued that he could not put the Canadian fiscal structure at risk by opening the country's doors to complete free trade with Britain, even if done gradually. He did promise, however, that a reciprocity arrangement with the United States would be pursued some time in the next session. In fact, by this point, arrangements for a trade agreement were already being pursued by the Taft administration in Washington. Finally, in reference to the issue of terminal elevators, he gave no definite opinion, but did express hope that things would improve in this area as a result of this consultation with grain growers.

At the completion of Laurier's reply to farmers, the proceedings in the House of Commons came to a close. Representatives of the CCA had presented their case to a packed house of interested onlookers for roughly four hours, while Laurier had responded with a reply that was only a matter of minutes in length. When Laurier finished his reply there was no cheering, and a feeling of obvious and widespread disappointment filled the room. Although Laurier's response to the deputation in Ottawa may have been somewhat more definite than his answers to questions posed to him while touring the West that summer, in reality, he added little to what he had told farmers during his tour stops. Despite the enormous pressure placed that day on his administration by Canadian farmers, particularly western grain growers, he refused to take a firm stand on any of the matters raised.

Immediately following the completion of the meeting, the delegates' attention turned to whether or not the meeting on Parliament Hill that day was a worthwhile protest. Referring to the disappointing reply by Laurier, as well as questioning the value of the farmers' trek to Ottawa, the Calgary Herald noted, "it is questionable

whether the delegates will think after carefully considering Sir Wilfrid's answer, that they received value for the money spent on the excursion."³⁶ The newspaper also went on to claim that:

The Herald does not believe that the west will be satisfied with the statements of Canada's first minister to the farmers' delegation. He dealt too much in generalities, and one can almost hear him breathe a sigh of relief when the interview was over and say to himself: "Well, we are through with that nicely, and it will be a long time before those fellows will ever get together in a delegation of that kind again."³⁷

Following the meeting in the Commons chamber, the executives of the CCA were busy trying to secure another meeting with Laurier for the following morning. The executives wanted to get his views on a number of issues that had not been discussed because of time constraints.³⁸ These attempts, however, were destined to fall on deaf ears. During the late afternoon, a small committee, including E. C. Drury, did meet with Robert Borden to put the farmers' case before the Conservative leader. Drury would later remark in his memoirs that this encounter was also discouraging because Borden, like Laurier, was "non-committal and talked nothing but platitudes."³⁹ Some 500 delegates, meanwhile, were escorted to a gathering at Rideau Hall, where Governor General Earl Grey and Lady Grey were hosts. The gathering, a true display of hospitality on part of the government, would be the last time that the delegates would congregate as a whole before returning home.

³⁶ "Sir Wilfrid's Reply to Farmers," Calgary Herald, 17 December 1910, 6.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ "Farmers Present Claims and Sir Wilfrid Replies: Striking Scene in the Commons Chamber at Ottawa," Toronto Globe, 17 December 1910.

³⁹ E. C. Drury, Farmer Premier: Memoirs of the Honourable E. C. Drury (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 65.

Special arrangements had been made by the Ottawa organizing committee to have the delegates shuttled by special street cars to the governor general's residence. Once assembled, a formal program got under way. Grey presented the executive officers of the CCA, who had by now arrived at the reception, with copies of Sir Horace Plunkett's book, The Rural Problem of the United States.⁴⁰ Grey took the opportunity to thank the delegation for coming to the nation's capital and expressed his interest in the successful and rapidly expanding Grain Growers Grain Company (GGGC). That evening, the delegates attended a dinner at the Parliamentary restaurant, which was hosted by the Minister of the Interior, Frank Oliver. There, the delegates listened to a music program and the night was capped off with a toast to "Canada." D. W. McCuaig, E. C. Drury, R. McKenzie, A. G. Hawkes, and Dr. T. Hill, a prominent veterinary surgeon and farmer from Saskatoon, gave addresses that night.⁴¹

Despite the spirit behind these social events, a general feeling of discontent was obvious amongst a number of western delegates. The farmers had not come to be wined, dined, and entertained. They had descended on the capital looking for direct answers from the dominion government, answers that many believed they did not receive. Just as delegate discontent had been made abundantly clear immediately following the meeting that afternoon, disappointment was also noticeable after the reception. Clearly, the farmers had received only vague

⁴⁰ Horace Curzon Plunkett, The Rural Life Problem of the United States: Notes of an Irish Observer (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1910). This book was a study of co-operative methods used by farmers in the United States.

⁴¹ The next morning some of the western delegates visited the Chaudiere manufacturing plants, and the Ottawa experimental farm.

promises from Laurier, despite their tireless efforts to confront him with their full strength. Historian Charles M. Johnston suggests that, Drury and McCuaig, although disappointed, realized that "the pledge was better than nothing and if handled adroitly could become the thin edge of the wedge for undermining the whole tariff structure."⁴² A number of western farmers, however, seemed more concerned. J. A. Maharg of Moose Jaw, who was an executive member of the SGGA and CCA, was frustrated that more time had not been set aside for a discussion of the memorials presented that day. "It always seems strange to me," he confessed, "that when we get an interview with government, time is so limited. I am not at all satisfied. It's peculiar that the government can adjourn for the holidays, and yet limit the time of hearing a deputation such as ours, coming such a distance. Put two and two together, and it seems as if we were not getting a deal."⁴³ In particular, the western portion of the deputation had traveled such a distance that it is possible that for this reason alone, a number of delegates were disenchanted with what they considered to be a short, rushed meeting.

Most of the delegates believed that the meeting in Ottawa was a monumental achievement in Canadian history, but argued that government did not seem to understand this fact. The consensus among western delegates was that Laurier should have said and offered more than he did, especially since the meeting reinforced the same concerns that had been raised during his summer tour of the

⁴² Charles M. Johnston, E. C. Drury: Agrarian Idealist (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 32.

⁴³ "Many Delegates Disappointed Sir Wilfrid Didn't Say Enough," Ottawa Saturday Evening Citizen, 17 December 1910, 1.

West. W. J. Tregillus stated, "Sir Wilfrid Laurier does not seem to have grasped the true nationalism of the movement. He had plenty of time to think over our demands, the effect of which he learned on his trip West. I am keenly disappointed with his reply."⁴⁴ E. J. Fream expressed similar sentiments: "We are keenly disappointed just now, and have arranged to meet the premier again on several of the points."⁴⁵ T. Hill, a delegate from Kenlis, Saskatchewan and a member of the executive of the SGGA, was blunter in his assessment: "We were treated lightly by Sir Wilfrid. He does not seem to realize the greatness of our movement."⁴⁶ George Chipman, editor of the Guide and an individual who had devoted months of time and energy to the Ottawa protest, simply declared that the meeting was, "Not satisfactory at all."⁴⁷

Laurier was not the only target of criticism. Others voiced complaints that no words were spoken during the main meeting by the Opposition Leader Robert Borden, since a number of the delegates were just as anxious to hear his perspective. Some delegates, such as F. W. Green and J. W. Scallion, realizing the nature of Canadian party politics, were more understanding of the situation in which Laurier found himself. Green, secretary of the Saskatchewan Association, stressed the significance of Laurier's replies in a longer term perspective. He pointed out that as chairman of a large committee, Laurier did not have the authority to give definite answers to the memorials presented to government that day. Laurier was surrounded by rivals, and any leader in his situation would have chosen his words

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

carefully. Green stated, "He could not make promises which he might not be able to carry out because he depended on the will and action of those associated with him."⁴⁸ The long term effectiveness of the delegation's meeting, Green argued, would come as a result of the perception of the cohesion and force represented in the movement and through influencing "the opinion of those who have the power to give effect to the expressions of the representation."⁴⁹ In a similar vein, Scallion, who would later become the honorary life president of the MGGA, looked ahead to the possibility of a future meeting with the government. He stated: "We could not expect much offhand, but we are going to meet Sir Wilfrid Monday regarding terminal elevators."⁵⁰ Scallion may have been a bit too hopeful, as this particular meeting with the prime minister never did materialize. Although disappointed, the delegates increasingly realized that they should not have expected too much in terms of immediate and direct answers from the government. Even though Laurier was the head of the dominion, he was only one member of government, not the whole authority.

The December 16 meeting not only remained fresh in the minds of the delegates, but occupied the thoughts of the government officials who participated in the meeting as well. For the most part, the majority of politicians, who were there to witness the presentation of the farmers' memorials, believed the demands of the deputation, especially on the question of the tariff, were too drastic. Most politicians understood, however, that the issues raised by the farmers could not simply be

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

forgotten and that something would have to be done to address at least some of the demands. It was widely believed, for example, that the most immediate effect of the deputation would be found in the ongoing reciprocity negotiations. The next round of discussions was scheduled for January in Washington. By late December, speculation was rampant that a trade agreement between the two countries was on the horizon. It was known that the Liberals were seriously considering entering into a reciprocity treaty with the Taft administration in the United States. Because of this consideration, the government was not directly opposed to the views expressed by the farmers' delegation that day in the Commons.⁵¹ The presentation of their views, Liberal officials believed, could actually strengthen the party's hand in the reciprocity negotiations.

The extraordinary significance of the farmers coming before Parliament was not only detailed in Canadian newspapers, but was also covered in some leading publications in Britain. The Times of London, pointing to the importance of the Ottawa meeting, stated that, "Nothing in the history of the Canadian Parliament has ever equalled the scene in the House of Commons this morning."⁵² The article also noted that many delegates from western Canada had traveled two thousand miles, at an aggregate expense of roughly twenty thousand pounds, to attend the Ottawa meeting.⁵³ There was also positive coverage in American newspapers. An article from the Springfield, Massachusetts Republican noted that, "the remarkable

⁵¹ "Farmers Seek to Control the Conventions of Both Parties," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 19 December 1910, 1.

⁵² "The Canadian Tariff: Farmers' Deputation at Ottawa," The Times of London, 17 Dec 1910, 5.

⁵³ Ibid.

delegation appeared full of confidence and enthusiasm in the cause of greater freedom of trade with the United States first, and then with Great Britain.⁵⁴ It was a petition "with boots on," the article stated, but not the same as one in the United States when an army composed largely of the unemployed marched on Washington to demand work. In the case of the farmers' delegation, the article noted, "These well-to-do Canadian farmers demand the opportunity which belongs to them in natural right – broader markets in which to buy, for which they are ready to concede broader markets in their own products for the advantage of others."⁵⁵ This international support lent even more credence to their cause as readers from outside Canada gained insight into issues affecting Canadian farmers.

Not all newspapers, however, supported the actions of the delegation and even attempted to downplay the significance of the Ottawa meeting. An article in the Financial Post, commenting on the western farmers' tariff demonstration, characterized the delegation in the Commons as, "Some four or five hundred whose desires seem to be towards the immediate good to themselves rather than ultimate good to themselves and the country." The article did go on to note, however, that "The numbers and earnestness of the deputation was a surprise to the Easterner who heretofore had looked upon the agitation out west as largely a local and scattered move on the part of a few malcontents."⁵⁶

⁵⁴ "The Canadian Farmers," Springfield, Mass. Republican, 4 January 1911.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ "The Security Review" Failure of Farmers Bank Did Not Cause a Ripple," Financial Post, 24 December 1910, 1.

The farmers' meeting in Ottawa was the centre of attention well into the New Year. As was the case in a number of newspapers, this scrutiny was not all positive. In the days and weeks following the meeting, the CMA busily prepared hostile rebuttals to the demands issued by farmers, arguing that the farmers' deputation was not representative of widespread agricultural opinion throughout the country. The CMA declared that the farmers had "made their demands with western vigor," had painted their grievances with "western exaggeration," and called for other farmers to say no to the demands made by the grain growers' deputation.⁵⁷ The CMA further asserted that the problem with the agricultural situation in Canada was that "the west has seemed to have lost its sense of perspective, living in the air of continual self-advertisement."⁵⁸ The CMA's statement also expressed disappointment over the promotion of the Hudson Bay Railway as a remedy for the country's national transportation problems. The manufacturers claimed that although the project may be suitable for westerners, little was known about it in the East and it appeared as though it would have little value for those living in eastern Canada.⁵⁹ Within days of the delegates' return home from Ottawa, eastern retail merchant associations began organizing their own counter move to the farmers' deputation. Although nothing came of this deputation, initial estimates were that as many as 5,000 protesters would take part, another sign of the continued opposition to the demands and issues being raised by organized agriculture.

⁵⁷ "The Manufacturers Reply," GGG, 11 January 1911, 7.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

There were other concerns over the demands made by organized farmers. One criticism was that the delegation represented only twenty-five percent of western farmers and that their fiscal policies were based on diverting trade from Britain to the United States. Others believed that the movement was simply class-based and influenced by agricultural agitations found in the United States. Another concern was the perceived tendency in western Canada to believe that their future lay not in an association with eastern Canada, but with the western United States.⁶⁰ The latter point was particularly contentious. Canadians feared that the closer, intimately woven commercial ties with the United States could lead to a loss of identity, given the fact that the arrangement was being pursued so heavily by the American government.

Several protestors even went so far as to declare that the farmers' descent upon Ottawa as a government conspiracy. Anti-reciprocity Conservative supporters, doing everything they could to downplay the significance of the farmers' movement, claimed that D. W. McCuaig and J. W. Scallion had been induced to ask for reciprocity in order to help the Laurier government with a policy that had already been decided upon by the government.⁶¹ W. H. Sharpe, a one-time Conservative MP from Lisgar, Saskatchewan and harsh critic of the farmers' actions, supported this argument. He declared in the House of Commons on May 1, 1911 that the farmers had never asked for anything close to reciprocity until they invaded Ottawa in December. Sharpe's claim was either an obvious mistake or an attempt at

⁶⁰ The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1910 and 1911 (Toronto: The Canadian Review Company Ltd., 1911), 336

⁶¹ Saskatchewan Archives Board (SAB), Walter Scott Papers, G8 File 1911.9 [#11].

deception by the former MP. This statement was clearly incorrect given the fact that Scallion had used almost identical words during Laurier's summer tour as he had used in the presentation in the Commons chamber. Similar requests for reciprocity had been made during Laurier's train stop in Weyburn, when one speaker noted that President Taft was now in favor of closer trade relations.

The protests continued. Several government officials believed that the farmers' demands were too extreme. In a letter addressed to a constituent, an MP from Woodstock, Ontario remarked that the requests made by the western farmers were far too radical to stand the test of discussion and would have no chance of being adopted in the eastern provinces. "On the whole," the MP observed, "I am not dismayed by the extreme demands of our friends. They are a strong body, intelligent and very much in earnest, but I believe they can be made to see that there is another side to this question and their step is altogether too brisk for the present time."⁶² Another letter took issue with the demands of the delegates, noting that the deputation "was more a kind of winter holiday than a deputation for the purpose of interviewing government."⁶³

Similarly, Senator R. W. Scott wrote to Laurier on December 18 about the far-too-radical demands of the farmers' delegation, particularly those made by the western representatives.⁶⁴ He was clearly unsympathetic to the financial woes of the farmers. He noted that,

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ NAC, Manuscript Division, Wilfrid Laurier papers, MG 26G, 9 January 1911, 179334-5.

⁶⁴ Ibid., W. Scott to Laurier, 18 December 1910, 178325.

It must have required a good deal of forbearance on your part, to have to listen to the 'stand and deliver' attitude, and tone adopted by several of the oppressed husbandmen of the West who notwithstanding all the grievances they complained of, have, in a short space of a few years, according to reported statements, accumulated \$300,000,000 – economists would contend that the farmers have not contributed to public revenue their fair share of the cost of the country's development.”⁶⁵

The Senator also remarked, “I notice that 15,000 people (nearly all from the West) have left Canada in the last fortnight, to spend Christmas in Europe – a substantial evidence of their prosperity.”⁶⁶ Clearly, the tradition by eastern and central politicians of pointing to affluent farmers in order to negate the thrust of their grievances started early.

A few weeks after the meeting, F. W. Green, secretary of the SGGA, best summed up the delegates' march on Parliament: “I look upon our Ottawa trip as a gigantic success, that might have been much more successful.”⁶⁷ The farmers' trek to Ottawa was successful from the standpoint that the delegates had reached a number of their goals. Getting a meeting in the House of Commons with the prime minister and the rest of government was remarkable in itself. The fact that 800 farmers, most of whom were from the West, had committed themselves to such an important initiative was also commendable. Another positive outcome was that the delegates and others who followed in their path could forever draw on the memories of the experience. Green stated that a number of memorable images remained clear from the meeting in the Commons chamber. He recalled,

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ “Our Ottawa Trip,” GGG, 11 January 1910, 20.

It certainly was a sight that day not easily forgotten; to see Canada's two grand old men, Sir Wilfrid and Sir Richard [Cartwright], sitting like stoics with the government and opposition benches, as well as the galleries of the House literally packed with Canadian yeomen, while about a dozen were closely gathered around the table, and the stacks of paper gradually growing higher in front of Sir Wilfrid, as one by one the speakers presented them to him."⁶⁸

Green also recounted the thunderous applause that came from the packed floor of the House of Commons after each speech was delivered. In fact, the cohesiveness displayed by the delegates in the Commons chamber may have been one of their most effective arguments. In the end, it may not have been so much what was said during the meeting, but the atmosphere and unique images associated with the proceedings that many delegates would forever draw upon and remember.

Although the delegates were appreciative of the treatment they received throughout their stay in the capital, the majority of the farmers were disappointed with the results of the meeting. The farmers had come to Ottawa, in some cases thousands of miles, with what most believed were reasonable and moderate demands. The brief answers that the delegates received from the prime minister were not what many of them wanted to hear. Although Laurier made some promises, particularly in regard to reciprocity with the United States, he had "tried to rub over sore points" in his response.⁶⁹ The assurances he gave the farmers during the meeting had already been given previously. Farmers did not have to come all the way to Ottawa to hear them. Referring to their unfulfilled expectations, one

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ "Saskatchewan Canada's Hub," Saskatoon Daily Phoenix, 22 December 1910, 1.

unhappy delegate described the experience this way: "We have asked for bread, and you [Laurier] gave us a stone."⁷⁰

⁷⁰ "We Have Asked For Bread, and You Gave Us A Stone," Ottawa Evening Journal, 17 December 1910, 1. E. C. Drury also used the phrase to summarize the delegates' experiences in his memoirs published in 1966 entitled Farmer Premier: Memoirs of the Honourable E. C. Drury, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 65.

EPILOGUE

*"In the history of deputations to Ottawa, and they come here thick and fast, none has ever approached in size, if in importance, that which filled the chamber of the galleries of the House of Commons this morning."*¹

Whether the "Siege of Ottawa" by itself produced any long-term help for farmers in changing Canadian agricultural policy is questionable. What is not in question, however, is that the "Siege" clearly did usher in a new era in Canadian agricultural relations between farmers and the federal government. The farmers' fight for reciprocity had begun. Although the "Farmers' Platform," which was presented to Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier on December 16, failed to bring him immediately on side with the agrarian camp, the Canadian Council of Agriculture's [CCA] submission was subsequently referred to in the reciprocity negotiations that took place the following January. The farmers' actions in Ottawa also had an impact later that same year. Reciprocity would take centre stage in the 1911 general election.

In early January, 1911 W. S. Fielding, the federal Minister of Finance, along with William Patterson, the Minister of Customs, were dispatched by the prime minister to Washington in an attempt to negotiate a reciprocity agreement with William Howard Taft's Republican administration in the United States.

¹ "Canadian Farmers' Demonstration was Greatest of Kind Ever Seen in Capital: 800 Free Trade Delegates in the Commons and Galleries," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 16 December 1910, 1.

Pursuing reciprocity was an absolute necessity for the Laurier administration. Political commentator John Duffy states that Laurier pursued the agreement vigorously because he knew that a deal would, among other things, "galvanize his farm support in Ontario and the West and put a little zip back into his drifting caucus."² During the visit to Washington, both Fielding and Patterson found that the political climate in the capital had changed dramatically from past trips they had made. There was now increased interest in the United States in reaching a trade agreement. Because of the willingness of both sides to negotiate a deal in the ensuing months, a draft free trade agreement in the form of concurrent legislation was promptly worked out. The agreement provided for free trade between Canada and the United States for natural goods, and a reduction in duty on agricultural implements. The tariff for manufactured goods remained the same to guard against small-scale Canadian manufacturers from being taken over by their larger American counterparts.

The agreement received mixed responses from organized farmers. They had been demanding complete free trade for farm machinery and natural products, in addition to a substantial increase in the British preference. The agreement fell short in fulfilling these requests. There was still some reason for farmers to be optimistic. Although some farmers were hesitant to support the reciprocity arrangement, E. C. Drury noted that many farmers across Canada

² John Duffy, Fights of Our Lives: Elections, Leadership, and the Making of Canada, (Toronto: HarperCollins, 2002), 92.

supported reciprocity, "not for what it was, but for what it might lead to."³ A large percentage of organized farmers believed that reciprocity would yield only limited benefits for them because, in most cases, the United States produced many of the same products as Canada. The agreement, it was hoped, represented a move towards the possible removal of all tariffs. Drury argued, for example, that farmers regarded the agreement as the "entering edge of a wedge that could topple protection in its entirety."⁴

Farmer organizations across the country had followed the trade negotiations carefully. Representatives from these organizations pointed to the proactive role that farmers had played in influencing the direction of the agreement. After the deal was struck, for example, organized farmers maintained that the latest trade negotiations had been influenced by the demands made by the deputation in the House of Commons during the "Siege of Ottawa." Drury went even further. He declared that the farmers' deputation was widely credited with having brought about the reciprocity issue in the first place, and had even accelerated the signing of the agreement. In fact, excerpts from the "Farmers' Platform," which had been presented by farmers in the House of Commons, were included in the official reciprocity negotiations.

Once the agreement was announced, there was little outright public opposition to it. This state of affairs, however, was only temporary. Within a month, opposition quickly rose throughout the country. It soon became

³ E. C. Drury, Farmer Premier: Memoirs of the Honourable E. C. Drury (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 65.

⁴ Ibid.

apparent that the country's protected industries were concerned that the agreement represented the initial stages of complete free trade with the United States. Free trade, these interests argued, would bring about too much direct competition and weaken the Canadian economy and perhaps even lead to a complete takeover by the United States. Some, like Robert Borden, even went as far as to declare that reciprocity with the United States would destroy Canada's sense of British connection, and perhaps even lead to possible annexation. The reciprocity issue was so contentious that there was even opposition to it within the ranks of the Liberal Party. Some Liberal members, such as Laurier's former western lieutenant, Clifford Sifton, even abandoned the party line, turning their backs on Laurier because of his support for reciprocity.

Despite various public and party concerns, Laurier decided to call an election on the matter for September 1911. Reciprocity was made the central issue of the Liberals' election campaign. This decision would turn out to be a political nightmare for Laurier's administration. Canadian novelist, poet and popular historian, George Bowering asked: "How could such a clever old dude be so dumb all of a sudden?"⁵ Laurier's decision to go ahead with an election was questionable for a number of reasons. The Liberals were only at the midpoint of a four-year term and had a large enough majority in the House of Commons to counter a Tory filibuster. They had the option of sending the reciprocity question to the country's voters after a two-year trial period. Instead, Laurier decided to dissolve Parliament in mid-summer of 1911. The prime

⁵ George Bowering, Stone Country: The Unauthorized History of Canada (Toronto: Penguin, 2003), 211.

minister believed that reciprocity would be a good election issue and he was adamant that his party had a sufficient amount of support from the electorate to ensure a victory. Laurier had been deeply influenced by organized farmers' vocal support for reciprocity throughout 1910 and 1911, made most clear during his western summer tour and later during the "Siege." By putting the question of reciprocity to the country despite widespread opposition to it, the prime minister was, in many ways, responding to the demands made of him by organized farmers. But on election night September 21, 1911, the country spoke. Reciprocity was resoundingly defeated and Laurier's government had been swept from office.⁶ The Laurier era had come to an end.

The defeat of reciprocity, like the disappointing results stemming from the "Siege of Ottawa," represented another major blow to the morale of organized farmers throughout the country. E. C. Drury expressed his own disappointment over the election results. "Farm organizations throughout the country had worked for a great principle of economic freedom," the agrarian leader recalled years later. "We asked for no favours," he continued, "only to be relieved from the oppression of the favours granted to the protected manufacturers at our expense. When I went to bed that night I lay long awake in the grip of vast discouragement."⁷ Historian W. L. Morton refers to the defeat of reciprocity as

⁶ In British Columbia, all eight seats went Conservative. Support for the Liberals throughout the prairie provinces was quite strong. In Alberta, six of seven seats went Liberal. In Saskatchewan, all but one of the province's ten seats was Liberal. In Manitoba, however, only two Liberals were elected against eight Conservatives. Ontario elected 75 Conservatives, while the Liberals received only 13 seats. In Quebec, Liberal seats dropped from 53 seats to 36. The Liberals barely held the Maritimes. In all, the Liberals had entered the election with 133 MPs and came out with 87. The Borden Conservatives, on the other hand, began with 85 seats and finished with 134.

⁷ E. C. Drury, Farmer Premier: Memoirs of the Honourable E. C. Drury, 68.

"the first act in the agrarian revolt of western Canada."⁸ This slap in the face, combined with their disappointment over the "Siege of Ottawa," made farmer organizations realize that they would need to be more proactive in fighting for their own rights. The belief throughout western agricultural circles was that Parliament was at the mercy of the country's financial, industrial and transportation interests. It is for these reasons that farm organizations grew to be even more influential. The immediate result of the 1911 election was a strengthening of the co-operative movement in the West.⁹ Western farm organizations, for example, found success with their various wheat co-operative companies. E. A. Partridge once said that these co-operative institutions were "the sugar plum that coaxed the kids to school,"¹⁰ and allowed prairie farmers to assume a larger and more inclusive role in the marketing of their products. The co-operative approach, combined with a successful tradition of independent political action by the parties like the Progressives and the United Farmers of Alberta, would remain strong throughout the first half of the twentieth century. Both co-operatives and independent action still continue to define agricultural activity in the West to this day.

Why does the "Siege of Ottawa" represent one of the first momentous events in western and Canadian agricultural history? In terms of its lasting significance, no organized movement of a similar magnitude and nature had

⁸ W. L. Morton, The Progressive Party in Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950), 24.

⁹ Ontario told another story. Within the next few years, half of the provincial Grange branches folded. The annual conventions of 1911 and 1912 were poorly attended with only few dozen delegates, where before there were hundreds.

¹⁰ E. C. Drury, Farmer Premier: Memoirs of the Honourable E. C. Drury, 68.

ever before taken place in Canada. Before the farmers' trek to Ottawa, several small agricultural delegations had made trips to the capital to present their cases, but, for the most part, they accomplished little. Because of the determined efforts of the organizations composing the CCA, in conjunction with the calls made by the Grain Growers' Guide, the "Siege of Ottawa" was no ordinary sit-in or small-scale demonstration. Farmers from across the country had for the first time taken a firm stand for economic and social justice. The December 16 meeting in the Commons chamber, along with the events that preceded and directly followed it, kick-started the beginning of a long line of large-scale organized farmers' protests in western Canada. These farmers whole-heartedly believed that agriculture deserved more attention than it was getting. The farmers were much more than a special interest group. They believed that they had justice on their side. Those who played a role in the "Siege" not only recognized that something was wrong with the way the Liberal government was managing agricultural affairs, but they were also motivated to do something about it, and demand change. The great majority of organized farmers who went to Ottawa were dissatisfied with the treatment they had received at the hands of Wilfrid Laurier's Liberal administration, and were upset that many earlier promises made by the prime minister had never been fulfilled. The farmers who went to Ottawa were adamant that agriculture should occupy a more significant place on the national radar screen. They proposed remedies, made clear in the "Farmers' Platform," that they believed would cure the ills of the existing tariff structure, in addition to other problems. Their position was

strengthened by the fact that well over sixty percent of the deputation was composed of westerners who had come from as far as Alberta's foothills, a sure sign of their commitment to the cause.

In the wake of the "Siege of Ottawa," many believed that a new era in Canadian agricultural affairs had been ushered in. Writers for the 1910-11 Canadian Annual Review evidently believed so, referring to organized farmers as being party to, "The Greatest Delegation which ever waited upon a Canadian Government."¹¹ A wide belief among farmers and astute politicians alike was that the farmers' movement would now command a higher degree of political clout than it had in the past. In fact, the farmers were so proud of their accomplishment in Ottawa that another deputation representing the CCA descended on the capital on the third anniversary of the monumental protest.¹² Because of the "Siege of Ottawa," both farmers and politicians had developed a better understanding of the forces driving each side. The protest in Ottawa signaled that farmers were no longer prepared to work in quiet resignation, but were willing to resort to large-scale demonstrations to have their demands addressed.

The "Siege of Ottawa," it was believed, would take its place in the nation's permanent record. One of the enduring symbols of the "Siege" was the

¹¹ The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs, 1910 and 1911 (Toronto: The Canadian Review Company Ltd., 1911), 328.

¹² CIHM no. 74533, "Organized Farmers' Case: Resolutions Presented to the Dominion Government," 16 December 1913, (Winnipeg: Canadian Council of Agriculture, 1913). This time, tariff resolutions were once again presented. The meeting, due to the smaller size of the deputation, took place in the office of Prime Minister Borden, and not in the Commons chamber.

"Farmers' Platform," a document which would take on even greater significance for Canadian farmers years later. The first official "Farmers' Platform" that was made widely available to the public was compiled in 1916.¹³ It included many long-standing social and economic reforms, several of which had been included in the farmers' memorials presented to the federal government on December 16, 1910. In the summer of 1917 it was widely issued to the public in booklet form, and immediately following the Great War, the "Platform" was revised as a post-war blueprint for Canada. This 1918 version included such topics as prohibition, women's suffrage, and direct taxation. Other new features of the "Platform" dealt with, among other things, returning soldiers, national status, the War-Time Elections Act, Order-in-Council government, freedom of speech, freedom of the press, and proportional representation.¹⁴ Many of these topics have once again taken on recent importance. The CCA described the "Platform" as Canada's New National Policy. The main purpose of the "Platform" was to educate and inform the electorate rather than to be the backbone of a new political party. In the 1921 Dominion election campaign, however, organized farmers representing the National Progressive Party used the "Platform" in their election campaign, and were successful in securing sixty-five seats in the House of Commons.

¹³ CIHM no. 74515, "The Farmers' Platform: Drafted by the Canadian Council of Agriculture." (Winnipeg: Canadian Council of Agriculture, 1917).

¹⁴ CIHM no. 72461, "The New National Policy: As Adopted By the Organized Farmers of Canada," (Winnipeg: Canadian Council of Agriculture, 1920), 5-6.

The "Siege" will also be remembered for other reasons. The sheer number of farmers and government officials in attendance made the demonstration truly remarkable. The vast distance traveled by the western delegates, and the fact that the meeting itself had taken place in the House of Commons chamber, a scene never before witnessed nor since repeated, made the event truly remarkable. The "Siege" was also made the centre of attention in newspaper coverage throughout western Canada. The country-wide newspaper coverage provided to the delegation signaled that an interesting story had unfolded. The "Siege," however, was much more than a local, nation-wide, or even North-American story. The farmers' trip to, and their activities in Ottawa were international in scope and in significance. The delegates were making history. The front-page, international publicity pointed to the importance of the meeting. An article in the Ottawa Evening Citizen summed up the historical significance of the "Siege" best when it declared: "In the history of deputations to Ottawa, and they come here thick and fast, none has ever approached in size, if in importance, that which filled the chamber of the galleries of the House of Commons this morning."¹⁵

The western delegates had many accomplishments to their credit. They had organized themselves for the trip, a difficult and time-consuming task in itself. The farmers had occupied the Commons chamber for over four hours, reciting memorials, passing resolutions, and warning those in attendance of an

¹⁵ "Canadian Farmers' Demonstration was Greatest of Its Kind Ever Seen in Capital: 800 Free Trade Delegates in the Commons and Galleries," Ottawa Evening Citizen, 16 December 1910, 1.

impending agricultural crisis. The true significance of the farmers' delegation is that agriculturalists of western and central Canada had become a serious, unified and organized force that the federal government could no longer ignore. Additionally, many delegates believed that Canadian farmers were now capable of determining the future agricultural policy of the Dominion. Because of the publicity created by the "Siege," a positive outlook for the future success of organized agriculture in the country began to take root. Farmers who played a part in the Ottawa "Siege" realized that it was only a beginning, a beginning which had created a sense of possibility for the future of Canadian agricultural protest. The "Siege" awoke government into realizing that there was a significant movement afoot in the West that needed addressing.

1910 was a tumultuous year in Canadian agriculture, a year finally capped off by the "Siege." The "Siege," as a result, cannot simply be regarded as a distinct Canadian historical event unto itself. Rather, it should be examined as being part of a process, a process that was directly related to the actions of Canadian, and particularly western Canadian organized farmers, throughout 1910. The "Siege" had a history behind it. Although many of the issues raised during the "Siege" had been stirring for years, by 1910 they had reached their boiling points. Organized farmers realized that they needed to act. Beginning in the summer when representatives from western farm associations met Laurier during his western-swing, followed by the farmers' energies devoted towards planning their trip, as well as with the meetings on-board the train and in the Grand Opera House, all of these preparatory events built up to the capstone

event of 1910, the farmers' march to Parliament Hill. The December 16 meeting, in turn, became an important symbol to organized farmers. The complaints voiced by western farmers when Laurier toured the West in the summer of 1910, combined with the subsequent "Siege of Ottawa" and the events that accompanied it, demonstrated that the farmers of the period were proactive in fighting for their rights.

Why 1910? Moreover, what was it about the political, economic, and social situation of 1910 that enabled the "Siege" to take place when it did? First, one cannot overlook the importance of Laurier's western tour. So many central issues discussed during the House of Commons meeting were raised on this tour, that its importance cannot be overestimated. Second, the recent and ongoing success of the nation-wide farmers' movement was also of central importance. In addition to the fact that by 1910 the Prairie West was the site of major demographic changes, other developments also contributed to the farmers' final decision to go to Ottawa. The rising popularity of the Grain Growers' Guide was a key factor. By 1910, the publication had established a strong readership base, and its writers took on the task of advertising the planned trek to Ottawa. The recent formation of the Canadian Council of Agriculture, also had an important influence on the movement. The work carried out by this organization enabled the initiative to come together as quickly as it did. Finally, by 1910 a number of strong and charismatic leaders from western-based farm organizations played a vital role. These leaders included, among others, D. W. McCuaig, Roderick McKenzie and E.A. Partridge.

With the 100th anniversary of the "Siege of Ottawa" approaching, it is an opportune time to reflect on its contemporary relevance. Over the course of the twentieth century the "Siege" has been overshadowed by more recent protests in Canadian history. This is not to say, however, that the December 1910 protest is any less important. Rather, there are a number of important historical themes and symbols from the "Siege" that continue to resonate today. One such symbol stemmed from the western farmers' decision to travel to Ottawa in the first place. Their trip by train from Winnipeg to Ottawa is unique given the sheer number of delegates on board and the business nature of their affairs. What stands out even more from this trek, however, is the "On to Ottawa" slogan that farmers chanted and proudly displayed as they made their way to the capital. In the wake of their trip, the On-to-Ottawa theme has come to be symbolic. Numerous groups and individuals throughout Canadian history have, for a variety of reasons, made treks to the dominion capital in protest. The "On-to-Ottawa Trek" serves as the most popular example. On this occasion about 1,000 young, single, unemployed men left Vancouver in June 1935 on a cross-country journey with the intent of securing a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Richard Bedford Bennett. As the trekkers continued eastward, their ranks swelled to nearly 2,000 men. Realizing that the movement was gaining strength, Bennett ordered the Trek stopped in Regina. In turn, a bloody riot ensued in the city's downtown streets on a Dominion Day holiday. The trekkers did not reach their destination, never making it beyond Regina. Historian Bill Waiser notes, however, that the "idea of going to Ottawa was more important

than actually getting there.”¹⁶ The “On-to-Ottawa Trek,” Waiser contends, “has come to be a source of historical inspiration for western Canadians who are unhappy with the policies or inactivity of a distant, seemingly insensitive federal government.”¹⁷ The same can be said of the intentions of western organized farmers in 1910, who traveled to Ottawa to lay their case before a Laurier administration that had not effectively responded to their demands. Similar to the trekkers of 1935, the organized farmers of an earlier era felt frustrated by the federal government’s lack of responsiveness. They wanted direct answers and immediate action from government. They were willing to travel, in many cases over half-way across the country, to ensure that their rights were protected.¹⁸

The On-to-Ottawa theme continues in Canada to this day, as there are numerous examples of modern treks. Many of the treks today also relate to the harsh agricultural realities affecting Canadian farmers. Like the farmers of the first decade of the twentieth century, farmers of today are in the midst of a serious agricultural crisis. Due to plummeting world grain prices, prairie farm income levels have been reduced to their lowest levels since the Great Depression. Escalating farm costs, bankruptcies, the loss of family farms, and rural depopulation, and challenges linked to globalization are ongoing issues on

¹⁶ Bill Waiser, All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003), 274.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Comparing the “Siege of Ottawa” and the “On-to-Ottawa Trek” also raises an interesting contrast. The main difference between the two treks stems from the fact the farmers had been invited by Laurier to Ottawa, whereas Bennett was adamant the trek make it no further than Regina. Laurier, no doubt, believed that there was some credence to the farmers’ cause. Perhaps, he believed that the farmers’ memorials would strengthen Canada’s position in the upcoming reciprocity negotiations. Bennett, on the other hand, could not be convinced that the trekkers’ demands were just.

the prairies. Canadian farmers claim that they are shackled by unfair subsidies and a lack of federal support, as compared to the highly-subsidized farmers in the United States and Europe, and that federal aid and safety net packages made available to farmers are not working. As a result of these claims, the trek theme has once again gained prominence in recent years as a number of farmers have re-captured the spirit of going to Ottawa in protest. In February 2000, for example, British Columbia farmer Nick Parsons, drove his Massey Ferguson combine, nick-named the "Prairie Belle," cross-country to Parliament. Parsons' journey was fuelled by Prime Minister Jean Chretien's refusal to visit western farms hard-hit by the crisis. "I want to speak to the boss," Parsons exclaimed, "I want to speak to the top."¹⁹ "I'm going to stay here," asserted the tenacious farmer, "until Jean Chretien acknowledges I've arrived."²⁰ Similarly, on March 15, 2001 as many as 2,000 farm vehicles converged on Parliament Hill where farmers attended a national farm rally on the "Green Ribbon Day of Action."²¹ The convoy of tractors, farm trucks and horse-drawn wagons reached upwards of five kilometres in length, clogging Ontario's major highways. Most recently, Saskatchewan farmer Bryce Brodie, who was accompanied by two friends, rode a tractor some 2,880 kilometres from Saskatoon to Ottawa.²² They

¹⁹ "Farmer Riding His Combine to Ottawa to Speak to the Boss," National Post, 7 February 2000, A6.

²⁰ "Farmer Ends Combine Protest Journey in Ottawa," Cornwall Standard, 21 March 2000, 6.

²¹ "Farmers Sow Traffic Chaos: Protesters' Convoy Will Try Patience of Ottawa Drivers," Ottawa Citizen, 14 March 2001, A1.

²² "Tractor Trek Sets Off: Farmer Bound for Ottawa to Meet PM," Saskatoon Star Phoenix, 1 June 2002, A6.

were responding to the ongoing crisis of farmers being forced from their family farms and hoped to raise awareness for a farm aid concert.²³

Today, at a time when some academics suggest that Canadian democracy appears to be in decline, the "Siege of Ottawa," it can be argued, has taken on recent significance for some of the democratic principles imbedded within it. Canadian philosopher John Ralston Saul maintains that Canadian democracy is in trouble. He contends that it is suffering from an absence of organized alternative views and from an atmosphere of false populism. Consequently, he suggests, it is difficult to identify public interest.²⁴ The Canadian electorate is concerned that those who are elected do not represent popular opinion and therefore view them as unaccountable. The public, on the other hand, has increasingly been treated as a rival by government. Therefore, parliamentary democracy in Canada, some people contend, does not adequately allow for the expression of citizens' opinions and participation in government decision-making. Citizen input into the political process is often said to be a defining feature of democracy. Democracy is also intended to be based upon talking and debating, two principles embodied in the meeting in the Commons. The "Siege of Ottawa," Saul argues, represents a time when democracy did work better in Canada.²⁵ Roughly 800 organized farmers representing the CCA had come to Ottawa with an open invitation from

²³ "Tractor Odyssey Stirs Support for Farmers: Three Saskatchewan Men Heading to Halifax in Unusual Bid to Explain Plight of Family Farm," Ottawa Citizen, 2 July 2002, B7.

²⁴ John Ralston Saul, "Corporatism and Democracy," University of Alberta Parkland Institute, Edmonton, November 1998.

²⁵ Ibid.

Laurier and converged on the House of Commons for a meeting *en masse*. There, they voiced their demands for close to four hours to the leader of the country and other leading parliamentarians through the "Farmers' Platform." In turn, Prime Minister Laurier listened, thought and responded to their demands. Despite the fact that the farmers in attendance were overwhelmingly dissatisfied with Laurier's response, that the meeting took place in the House of Commons, or even at all, is unique in terms of today's context. In 1913, Englishmen Edward Porritt, a long-time contributor to the Guide, best summed up the democratic principles and significance of the "Siege." He stated, "Farmers and politicians had . . . come into contact with each other, and there was a clearer understanding of the forces on each side, and of the struggle that had begun between the protected interests and the privileged classes, and the great mass of the farming population which had adopted the motto of 'Equal Rights to all and Special Privileges to none'."²⁶

²⁶ Edward Porritt, Sixty Years of Protection in Canada 1846-1912: Where Industry Leans on the Politician (Winnipeg: The Grain Growers Guide, 1913), 453.

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