

**A PEOPLE'S COMMISSION?: HIGH MODERNISM,
DIRECT DEMOCRACY, AND THE ROYAL COMMISSION
ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL LIFE, 1952-1957**

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the public's role in the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life (RCARL), which took place in Saskatchewan between 1952 and 1957. The RCARL's purpose was to restructure rural society and agriculture in a way that would allow it to flourish in the modern future. This thesis argues that the tension between the competing philosophies of direct democracy and high modernism influenced public participation in the Commission. Although the commissioners attempted to involve rural people in the RCARL process, the influence of high modernism, which relied on science and objectivity, ultimately led the commissioners to limit the influence of public concerns and recommendations. Through an analysis of the RCARL's structure as well as the way in which rural people experienced participation, it is clear that although many of Saskatchewan's residents felt involved in the RCARL, their influence on the commissioners' recommendations was limited.

Keywords: High Modernism; Direct Democracy; Development; Public Participation; Saskatchewan; Co-operative Commonwealth Federation

To everyone who is there for me.

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INTRODUCTION

The 1950s marked a crossroads for Saskatchewan. Population fell, technology altered agricultural practices and community structures, and farming lost some of its economic and social importance.¹ This trend alarmed residents of rural Saskatchewan, who had close social, economic, and cultural ties to wheat farming.² The diminishing importance of agriculture placed Premier T. C. Douglas and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) government, first elected into power in 1944, in a difficult position. They believed that it was necessary to modernize and diversify Saskatchewan's economy to keep pace with the national trend towards industrialization, yet the people's close connection to farming would make it difficult for major changes to gain local acceptance. To deal with this dilemma, Douglas formed the *Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life* (RCARL), which would "investigate and make recommendations regarding the requirements for the maintenance of a sound farm economy and the improvement of social conditions and amenities in rural Saskatchewan."³ Douglas believed that if the CCF did not take action to revolutionize rural society and the economy, agriculture's decline would steepen, bringing the province's economy down with it.

¹ Roger Gibbins, *Prairie Politics and Society: Regionalism in Decline* (Toronto: Butterworth, 1980), 78-79.

² Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2005); John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History* (Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980), 100-105.

³ Saskatchewan. Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life (Hereafter cited as RCARL), *Report No. 1- The Scope and Character of the Investigation* (Hereafter cited as Report No. 1), (Regina, Government of Saskatchewan, 1955), v.

Royal commissions in Canada had historically ignored public perspectives, and instead favoured the input of experts and relied on technical knowledge.⁴ The CCF proposed involving citizens in the RCARL's investigative process, which they hoped would bring social improvements and a greater sense of democracy to rural areas. Involving rural people in the RCARL was also politically beneficial for Premier Douglas. In the political context of 1950s Saskatchewan, the RCARL could not exclude public input *and* support CCF policy, because direct democracy was at the base of Douglas' political platform. Direct democracy was the idea that every individual could participate in government and that citizens could only gain social improvements through interaction with elected officials.⁵ Because of the importance the CCF placed on direct democracy, the RCARL differed from other royal commissions and encouraged public participation.

Planning for long-term rural improvement around modernization was also central to the RCARL's mandate.⁶ Although the RCARL did involve the rural public in certain aspects of the information-gathering process, their desire for a long-term, uniform improvement plan led them to rely heavily on the input of specialists with technical knowledge of rural issues. Although the commissioners did not intend to overpower local views with technical knowledge, their aspiration to make large-scale changes to rural society often made them more receptive to experts, who took a similar approach to development, and ambivalent towards public input, which they often considered too localized.

⁴ John Childs Courtney, "Canadian Royal Commissions of Inquiry, 1946 to 1962: An Investigation of an Executive Instrument of Inquiry" (Ph.D. Diss., Duke University, 1964), 94-97.

⁵ Dale Eisler, *False Expectations: Politics and the Pursuit of the Saskatchewan Myth* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 2006), 124.

⁶ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 13.

Along with the RCARL, states around the world relied on scientific knowledge to inform their decisions as they set about improving society and increasing the potential for harnessing resources. James C. Scott has termed this development philosophy “high modernism”. A high modern approach to social reorganization tends to ignore local perspectives, despite the fact that people who live in the affected areas experience the consequences of such planning. State leaders believed that people would be resistant to change that would threaten their existing way of life, no matter how backwards or inefficient it appeared to be. The leaders believed that technical data and expert opinions had no such biases against modernization, and considered these the best means to envision the future. High modernism also erased local variations within a region, rendering broad planning more realistic.

High modernism was common in Canada during the 1950s, as numerous mega-projects designed to harness land and natural resources led to the relocation of thousands of people and the destruction of several communities. In some ways, the RCARL’s aims were typical of projects that placed modernization ahead of citizens’ concerns, but distinguishing it were its attempts to involve people in the process. Significant public opposition in the impacted areas characterized many high modern projects in Canada during this period, but was not the case during the RCARL because citizens were, to some degree, involved in the project.

In this thesis, I argue that the process through which the RCARL gathered and evaluated local knowledge represented a tension between the CCF’s belief in direct democracy and the high modernism embraced by Canadian federal policy in the 1950s. The RCARL encouraged rural participation and emphasized that social improvement

would come through public cooperation with technical experts and the state. However, the influence of public input was limited in many of the RCARL's final recommendations. Since much of the public participated in some element of the RCARL, the high modern influences that separated the public from the Commission's decisions were less pronounced than in other high modern projects. The limitations placed on public participation in the RCARL reflected a tension between the commissioners' efforts to combine local perspectives with broad development, rather than an intention to prevent the public from having input on development.

In order to understand the competing ideologies informing the RCARL, it is necessary to introduce the state of agriculture and rural life in Saskatchewan in the 1950s, the theoretical and contextual elements of high modernism, and the important role that direct democracy played for the CCF.

Rural Saskatchewan in the Early Twentieth Century

Homesteaders had begun to farm the Prairies in the late nineteenth century.⁷ Isolated family farms on quarter-section pieces of land formed Saskatchewan's social and economic structure until the 1940s.⁸ While one-room schools, seasonal roads, and small farms dominated the physical landscape of rural Saskatchewan throughout the early

⁷ Archer, 99-102; Rose Olfert & Jack Stabler, "One Hundred Years of Evolution in the Rural Economy," In *Perspectives of Saskatchewan*, ed. Jean M Porter, 128-130 (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2009); Doug Owram, "Uncertain Promise: The Prairie Farmers and the Post-War Era," in *The Prairie West As Promised Land*, ed. Douglas Francis & Chris Kitzan, 335-337 (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007); John Frederick Conway, "To Seek a Goodly Heritage: The Prairie Populist Resistance to the National Policy in Canada," (Ph.D. Diss., Simon Fraser University, 1968), 623.

⁸ A quarter-section was 160 acres.

twentieth century, rural experiences varied as farm families faced economic and political instability, drought, war, and technological change.⁹

The greatest upheaval in rural Saskatchewan occurred during the 1930s. Drought forced many families to abandon their farms, and some left the province entirely. From 1936 to 1941, Saskatchewan's population decreased by approximately 35 000 people, or 3.8 percent.¹⁰ Economic instability waned in the 1940s, but remained a factor in discouraging the creation of new farms and driving undercapitalized farmers into other occupations. The farming sector, especially small family farms, never fully recovered from the economic instability of the 1930s.

Changes in technology and the industrialization of Canadian society contributed to further rural depopulation in the 1940s. New tractors and combines introduced in the decade were much more efficient than non-mechanized farming techniques.¹¹ The introduction of such technology had a complex effect on the rural population. The machines made land more productive, as farmers could grow more wheat with new technology than with human labour and older farm machinery. However, the cost of machinery made small farms unfeasible. Even the most profitable farms did not generate enough capital to purchase new equipment. Only farmers who could afford to increase their holdings could make the new, more mechanized farming profitable. Therefore, farm sizes increased, but the number of farms declined, as those with capital to purchase new equipment and additional land expanded, while those without the resources to do so sold their farms and left rural areas. Rural population continued to decline through the

⁹ RCARL, *Report No. 7: Movement of Farm People* (Hereafter cited as Report No. 7), 39.

¹⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 7*, 49.

¹¹ Gibbins, 79.

1950s. In 1951, the province's total population was approximately 831 000, which was 100 000 less than in 1936. These changes forced residents and Saskatchewan's government to confront a tension between the social importance of life on small farms and the reality that agriculture was not supporting it (see Table 1).

Table 1- Farm Sizes in Saskatchewan: 1941, 1946, 1951

Year	Quarter Section	Half Section	Three Quarters	Four or More Quarters	Total Number of Farms
1941	43 523	46 790	20 165	28 235	138 713
1946	32 429	42 739	19 965	30 479	125 612
1951	20 988	36 522	19 932	34 576	112 018

Increased farm sizes changed rural society. Levels of indebtedness increased and led to greater economic insecurity. Many farmers could not afford to purchase additional land to expand their farms, and had to rent neighbouring plots from absentee property owners. Those who purchased the machinery and land necessary to continue farming were often so deeply in debt that a poor crop or low wheat price could lead to repossession by creditors, principally banks.

The social implications of these trends were similarly apparent. A declining rural population and greater space between farms increased social isolation, particularly in winter when roads were often impassable. The demographic changes also strained rural infrastructure that the previous governments had designed around quarter-section farms. Rural education provides a good example of the social impact of depopulation. One-room schools were previously rural staples, but by the 1950s they had become obsolete, as enrolment in many dipped below five students. Building centralized schools was a

logical alternative, but funding roads and buses to transport students was difficult, as depopulation reduced tax revenues.¹² Rural children could not receive quality education in their existing schools, but had limited access to centralized schools. The problems facing rural education indicated how much economic change influenced farm families.

Provincial leaders believed that rural society was not adapting to economic changes and they doubted the ability of rural people to grasp the scale of adaptation necessary. T. C. Douglas appointed the RCARL to determine which institutions were out of touch with rural needs, and to develop a plan for a full-scale restructuring of the province that would allow agriculture to remain a viable industry while creating alternate employment opportunities for people who could no longer afford to farm. Although rural people were involved in the RCARL, the commissioners, government leaders, and technical experts ultimately created the broad plan for rural development. The next sections will explain the competing motivations behind the vision that they developed.

High Modernism in Saskatchewan and the RCARL

Transnational trends, including a commitment to high modernism, influenced Saskatchewan's CCF government in the 1950s. James C. Scott defines high modernism in the following way:

[High modernism is] a strong...version of the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and North America. At its centre was a supreme self-confidence about linear progress, the development of scientific and technical knowledge, the expansion of production, the rational design of social order, the growing satisfaction of human needs, and, not least, an increasing control over nature (including human nature) commensurate with scientific understanding of natural laws. *High* modernism is thus a

¹² See RCARL, *Report No. 4: Rural Education* (hereafter referred to as Report No. 4).

particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of scientific and technical progress might be applied – usually through the state – in every field of human activity.¹³

By standardizing all aspects of life, high modernists believed that they could harness and control the natural world. They also believed that designing towns, transportation networks, and social institutions in the most efficient possible way would position people to take advantage of technological advancements. High modernism typically excluded local perspectives because planners believed that such views lacked the objectivity necessary to consider the best interests of the state. Planners had the resources and information to view all of the communities within a state as elements of a larger whole, while residents of such communities had more local interests in mind. Practitioners of high modernism wanted to improve the state, but their obsession with objectivity and technical knowledge resulted in oversimplifications that ignored local practices that shaped society for those living in it.

High modern projects were common in Canada during the 1950s. The most notable examples include the damming of the Arrow Lakes in British Columbia, the construction of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the industrialization of the Newfoundland fishing industry, and the razing of Africville. The B.C. government dammed the Arrow Lakes in order to increase the province's supply of hydroelectricity, which they believed would attract industry to the province. The project resulted in the relocation of several thousand people into new, pre-planned communities, despite local resistance. Political leaders in Ontario and New York as well as federal officials in Canada and the United States supported the Saint Lawrence Seaway as a means to allow large cargo ships easy

¹³ James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 89-90.

entry into the Great Lakes. It flooded several communities in Canada and the United States and forced the relocation of thousands of residents. In Newfoundland, the introduction of new fish harvesting and processing technologies intensified the volume of fish that companies caught and led to the corporatization and industrialization of the province's fisheries. Planners and politicians in the provincial government largely supported the industrialization plans, despite concern from fishers and small coastal communities about the impact that such abrupt changes would have on their way of life. In Halifax, municipal leaders removed residents from the Africville neighbourhood in order to develop it into an industrial complex. All of these projects aimed to harness the potential of the land to generate revenue and resources. In each example, officials dismissed residents' resistance to the relocation, forcing them into communities that they promoted as "modern." Such projects ignored the connection people had to their homes, and officials were not willing to see that the organization of the existing communities was logical to those living in them.¹⁴

Aside from the RCARL, the most prominent modernization project in Saskatchewan in the 1950s was the South Saskatchewan River Dam (SSRD). Federal and provincial funds financed the SSRD's construction in 1958, but the CCF had been promoting its economic potential to the federal government and the people of

¹⁴ For details, see Donald H. Clairmont & Dennis William Magill, *Africville: The Life and Death of a Canadian Black Community* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars Press, 1999); J.W. Wilson, *People in the Way: The Human Aspects of the Columbia River Project* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973); Heather M. Cox and others, "Drowning Voices and Drowning Shoreline: A Riverside View of the Social and Ecological Impacts of the St. Lawrence Seaway and Power Project," *Rural History* 10, no. 2 (October 1999); Tina Loo, "People in the Way: Modernity, Environment, and Society on the Arrow Lakes," *BC Studies* 142/143 (Summer/Autumn 2004); and Miriam Wright, *A Fishery for Modern Times: The State and the Industrialization of the Newfoundland Fishery, 1934-1968* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Saskatchewan since the 1940s.¹⁵ Despite costing \$196 million, officials believed that it “would add incalculably to the well-being of [the] Saskatchewan people.”¹⁶ The SSRD was important enough that the federal government appointed a royal commission in 1952 to determine its feasibility. In evaluating the desirability of the dam, the SSRD Commission prioritized economic potential over local concerns about land redistribution and relocation, as was shown in the final report:

There [are farmers in the SSRD area] who are successfully farming large acreages by dry farming methods [who] are unlikely...to take kindly to having their farms broken up into small blocks suitable for irrigation. This has been the experience in irrigation projects elsewhere. There are cases where dry land farmers have successfully resisted plans to incorporate their holdings into irrigation developments. How the large holdings in the Project would be made available in small blocks for irrigation was not discussed at the Commission’s hearings. Nevertheless, the territory included in and affected by the Project would be helped a great deal by irrigation. If it came into...operation, it would have favourable effects on the economy of the province. It would provide opportunities and amenities to attract new population.¹⁷

Despite being responsible for considering the social effects of the SSRD, the commissioners ignored local concerns and focused on economic potential to justify the project.¹⁸ Although Douglas promoted direct democracy and the rights of rural people, the SSRD showed that high modernism also influenced the CCF in the 1950s.

The promotion and development of the SSRD was characteristic of high modernism as an ideology that used the objectivity of science to justify economic expansion without input from affected communities. James C. Scott explains that in many cases, state surveyors and planners only consider land’s commercial potential and

¹⁵ Archer, 301.

¹⁶ Archer, 302.

¹⁷ Canada. *Royal Commission on the South Saskatchewan River Project* (Hereafter referred to as RCSSRP), (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1952), 5.

¹⁸ RCSSRP, 1.

ignore other uses it may have for those that live on it.¹⁹ This was evident when the SSRD Commission acknowledged that farms had adapted and succeeded in the arid conditions but the commissioners still decided that the land could be more productive with artificial irrigation, so planners should ignore any resistance to the project.

The RCARL had much in common with other modernization projects. It too emphasized economic prosperity, a reliance on experts, a disconnection from the past, and an unquestioned embracing of progress. However, it was unique in two crucial ways. Firstly, the RCARL's scope was much broader than many high modern projects. While damming projects and neighbourhood relocations affected a relatively small area, the CCF appointed the RCARL to restructure Saskatchewan's entire rural economy and society. The breadth of development made planning complex and intensified the use of statistics and technical data to reach conclusions.

Secondly, Douglas expected the RCARL to make changes that would improve Saskatchewan and involve the rural public in the process. Other high modern projects ignored local opinions by relying on technical knowledge that non-specialists lacked.²⁰ The RCARL did not ignore local opinions, but instead attempted to incorporate public input into a development plan that included economic diversification, industrialization, and the reorganization of rural society. The commissioners worked with technical specialists to determine the aspects of rural life that most needed change, then solicited the public to describe rural problems and possible solutions. After the commissioners gathered public input, they reconvened with specialists and provincial leaders to draft plans for improvement. In some cases, the plans supported the public consensus. In

¹⁹ Scott, 47.

²⁰ Scott, 304.

others, however, the public proposed adjustments that did not fit with the RCARL's modernization view. In such cases, the commissioners dismissed rural perspectives as being unaware of the broad context in which the RCARL was operating. The RCARL consulted the public, but high modernism took precedence over direct democracy when the commissioners determined their final recommendations for rural change.

In summary, high modernism was common in Canada during the 1950s. In Saskatchewan, the CCF applied it to a broad plan for the future. The RCARL was not a single project, but rather a general guide for rural planning and improvement. Provincial leaders described the RCARL as an exercise in direct democracy, and many aspects of the Commission reflected that ambition. However, in shaping their recommendations for future development, they relied mainly on experts and a belief that uniform planning and community development were preferable, even if public input differed. The next section will examine the importance of direct democracy to the CCF in the 1950s and why, unlike other high modern projects, public participation was necessary in the RCARL.

A Path to Direct Democracy: the Saskatchewan CCF

The commissioners' emphasis on public participation was characteristic of the CCF's focus on direct democracy in the 1950s and served an important political purpose. The term "direct democracy" has multiple meanings, and is often associated with the use of referendums, but it can include different forms, including town hall meetings or, as in the context of the RCARL, forums and workshops.²¹

²¹ Patrick Boyer, *Direct Democracy in Canada: The History and Future of Referendums* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1992), 13.

In the early twentieth century, Saskatchewan was Canada's hotbed of direct democratic ideals. Farmers associated the unpredictability of the farm economy with government indifference towards agriculture.²² They began to form organizations to improve rural economic and social conditions and criticize the existing political system, which they believed was controlled by elitists who did not care about farmers.²³ Although such dissatisfaction did not translate into the organization of an agrarian political party until 1932, the groundwork for direct democratic participation was laid early in the twentieth century.²⁴

As rural conditions worsened in the 1920s and 1930s, agrarian leaders decided to move beyond pressuring government from outside of formal politics, and ally with other social reformers to form a new political party.²⁵ In 1932, a coalition of farmers, reformers, and intellectuals formed the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). In 1933, they issued the "Regina Manifesto", a radical socialist document that called for dramatic and fundamental change to economic society.²⁶

Shortly after the CCF's establishment, tension developed between radicals and moderates within the party. Radicals argued that the CCF should spread socialism by adhering to the Regina Manifesto, which stated that "no CCF government will rest content until it has eradicated capitalism and put into operation the full programme of socialized planning which will lead to the establishment in Canada of the Co-operative

²² Peter R. Sinclair, "The Saskatchewan CCF: Ascent to Power and the Decline of Socialism," *The Canadian Historical Review* 54, no. 4 (December 1973), 421; Boyer, 78.

²³ Conway, 631.

²⁴ Archer, 224

²⁵ Conway, 692.

²⁶ Eisler, 91.

Commonwealth.”²⁷ The moderates believed that the CCF should encourage the political involvement of farmers, which would increase rural democracy and improve social and economic conditions. The moderates believed that state ownership, for example, was necessary only for monopolistic industries. Moderates sought to improve the economic circumstances of farmers by enhancing rural political power, while radicals aimed to eradicate rural economic exploitation through widespread state-ownership.

Despite internal tension, the CCF gained political traction by moderating their rhetoric away from land reform and resource nationalization. After modest electoral success in the early 1930s, the CCF launched a new platform in 1936.²⁸ It was a “simple, direct, moderate, pragmatic platform” without any “ringing declarations about socialism and eradicating capitalism.”²⁹ It promised security against debt, socialized health services, equal educational opportunities for all, and the “retention and extension of the Democratic rights of people”.³⁰ While socialism sought to destroy capitalism, the CCF’s new platform represented “the people” within the capitalist framework.

From 1936 to 1944, the CCF gained popularity by advocating the protection of small farms and businesses from external economic interests. In 1942, the party elected T. C. Douglas as leader, and in 1944, the people of Saskatchewan elected him Premier.³¹ The CCF based their 1944 campaign on protecting family farms from debt and

²⁷ For the full Manifesto, see <http://economics.uwaterloo.ca/needhdata/Regina_Manifesto.html>.

²⁸ In the 1934 provincial election, the Farmer-Labour Party, which was the forerunner to the CCF, received 24% of the vote and the title of official opposition, although they were unpopular in urban areas. The CCF fared poorly in the 1935 federal election, nearly losing its hold on the radical sector of the agrarian community to a Social Credit upsurge. See Conway, 719-722.

²⁹ Conway, 723-724.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Archer, 260.

repossession by creditors.³² In his first speech from the throne, Douglas stated that “the day is past when it can be left to the forces of private enterprise exclusively to develop the resources of the community and to organize its business activity.”³³ The speech established promises to secure tenure for farmers and collective bargaining for workers, and solidified the CCF as a “people’s party.”³⁴

Douglas created crown corporations to place transportation, electricity, and other fields that were essential to the welfare of the province under provincial control, which he hoped would democratize access to such services.³⁵ He developed a central planning process to remove the burden of funding and planning from municipalities, many of which had limited tax revenue due to depopulation. Other initiatives included the introduction of health insurance, larger school units, seniors’ pensions, and protection for unions.³⁶ The legislation highlighted Douglas’ belief that “the people of Saskatchewan were entitled to a better life and could achieve it through activist government.”³⁷

By the 1948 provincial election, the CCF had become Saskatchewan’s political power. Prior to 1944, the party had been in a position to criticize Liberal policy, but the CCF’s success had reversed the roles of the parties for the 1948 election. The Liberals were on the offensive, criticizing CCF policy and associating it with communism.³⁸

³² Co-operative Commonwealth Federation, *CCF Land Policy: Read It; Remember It; Support It* (Regina, 1944). As cited in Conway, 763.

³³ Saskatchewan Legislature, *Journals XLIII* (19 October to 10 November 1944), 10-15. As cited in Conway, 771.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Archer, 275. After the election, it was clear that the CCF was not pursuing socialization. Douglas said that there was room for public, cooperative, and private ownership.

³⁶ Ian MacPherson, “The CCF and the Co-operative Movement in the Douglas Years; An Uneasy Alliance,” *Building the Co-operative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Canada*, ed. William J. Brennan (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1984), 185.

³⁷ Eisler, 124.

³⁸ Conway, 805.

These attacks forced Douglas to spend much of the campaign defending himself against allegations that he was leading the province into a dictatorship.³⁹ In response, the CCF further moderated their policy, replacing their populist rhetoric with the philosophy of direct democracy, as Douglas saw public participation in government as vital for satisfying voters and silencing critics.⁴⁰

Direct democracy dominated Douglas' political platform after the 1948 election:

[After 1948,] the CCF would venture no further experiments with land ownership or state-owned industries. Douglas came to symbolize a government that was activist, rather than overtly socialist. His policies appealed to individual values: pride in one's province, a fair return for the farmer, opportunities for the children.⁴¹

The opportunity for "the people" to participate in government was a logical political rallying point to replace revolutionary ideologies that many voters did not find appealing. Seymour Lipset explained that due to the large number of social and economic crises faced by Saskatchewan farmers in the first half of the twentieth century, they had become accustomed to forming many formal and informal committees to solve problems and were wary of governments that isolated themselves from the public.⁴² Charles Schwartz similarly characterized the province, stating that "the history of the farm movement in Saskatchewan...is a history not of a few 'giants' among the farm leadership, but of groups

³⁹ Conway, 814.

⁴⁰ Ivan Avakumovic, *Socialism in Canada: A Study of the CCF-NDP in Federal and Provincial Politics* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978), 179.

⁴¹ Ian McLeod & Thomas H. McLeod, *Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1987), 181.

⁴² Seymour Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1968), 192-193. Lipset points to the newness of Saskatchewan in explaining the expectation of direct democracy. Prior to WWI, farmers worked together to establish local government, hospitals, schools, and roads in isolated areas. Farmers' organizations developed in response to concerns of economic instability. In short, the province was young enough that many CCF supporters were used to being closely involved with the formation of government and social services.

of ordinary farm people organized for a common purpose.”⁴³ The CCF started with ordinary farm people, but its success carried the potential for alienating its base.

Douglas hoped that advocating direct democracy would maintain the political support of Saskatchewan residents.

Direct Democracy and High Modernism: A Strange but Necessary Combination

As the rural population continued to decline in the 1950s, Douglas could no longer rely on farm votes to maintain his political power. Even though farm production was increasing, machinery was replacing human labour, reducing the rural population and weakening the political power of rural areas.⁴⁴ By the 1952 election campaign, which occurred shortly before the RCARL, Douglas jettisoned his 1944 goal of preserving small farms and rural life.⁴⁵ While Douglas’ political rhetoric revolved around direct democracy, he believed that in order to ensure a prosperous future for the province, the CCF’s economic plans would have to become increasingly oriented towards large-scale ventures, including oil and resource development, industrialization, transportation improvements, redistribution of the northern population, and the SSRD project, which would increase irrigation and encourage large-scale, industrialized farming.⁴⁶ Douglas’ 1952 campaign proposed projects that would alter Saskatchewan’s economy and social structure. The CCF framed their modernizing campaign as beneficial to agriculture, but did not discuss the adverse effect that a comprehensive road

⁴³ Charles Schwartz, *The Search for Stability* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1959), 1.

⁴⁴ Gibbins, 87.

⁴⁵ Conway, 842.

⁴⁶ Conway, 842-843.

system, a massive dam, or industrial development may have had on farmers who lacked the capital to take full advantage of such changes.

The RCARL began at a point when the CCF had transitioned from a party based predominantly on rural issues to one concerned with large-scale economic development. The RCARL represented an effort by provincial leaders to foster direct democracy, one of the last ties the CCF had to its agrarian activist roots. The challenge for the commissioners was to balance direct democracy with high modernism. Ultimately, the RCARL promoted rural participation, but dismissed anyone critical of development. The RCARL sought participation from all Saskatchewanians through the opportunity for public participation and the diversity of the appointed commissioners. After looking at which groups the commissioners recruited, limited, or ignored, it is clear that high modernism influenced public participation. A political rhetoric that relied on local participation was incompatible with a development rhetoric that valued technical knowledge and alleged objectivity. Although the RCARL attempted to use public input, the lure of uniform development based on scientific principles ultimately won out, and steered the commissioners' vision for the future.

The following chapters will analyze the tension between the RCARL's economic model based on high modernism and a political model based on direct democracy. Chapter 1 will examine the RCARL's commissioners and internal organization, comparing the Commission's public portrayal of its structure with internal rationales circulated among commissioners and government officials. In Chapter 2, I compare the how different groups of rural people participated in the RCARL to show that direct democracy had different meanings to different groups. Chapter 3 examines the limited

role of public input in determining solutions to specific rural issues. Lastly, the epilogue analyzes the Commission's vision of Saskatchewan's future. The commissioners attempted to extend the RCARL's philosophies into future development planning. In doing so, they unintentionally exposed the contradictions inherent to a philosophy that used direct democracy to encourage a high modernist development agenda.

1: INSIDE THE RCARL: COMMISSIONERS, COMMUNITIES, AND REPRESENTATION

In a 1953 *Regina Leader-Post* article, the commissioners of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life (RCARL) stated that they wanted to utilize “the combined judgement of the people with their folk knowledge and of the expert with his scientific knowledge.”¹ An RCARL representative later explained the important role that the commissioners foresaw for “folk” knowledge:

It is the first time in history that a Royal Commission has used this type of approach, actually going out to the people who meet in community forums to present their own local problems. Even the United Nations organization has expressed great interest of this manifestation of democracy in action.²

Although public input was to feature prominently in the Commission, the commissioners relied on technical knowledge to compensate for the subjectivity that they believed was inherent in local views, as an RCARL report states:

Practical experience...is too limited to deal effectively with modern complex problems which involve changes more rapid and larger than problems in the past. Scientific knowledge compensates for the limitation of practical experience. The scientist tries to describe accurately things as they exist, applying facts from many sources and maintaining a wide, impersonal perspective.³

The commissioners combined technical knowledge with local input to plan the social and economic future of Saskatchewan, but they valued the two very differently. While public input had less technical value, the RCARL hoped to generate a high level of community

¹ “Now to Catch the ‘Problems’,” *Regina Leader-Post*, 24 February 1953.

² “Rural Life Forum Finds Posing Dozen Problems Easier Than Finding One Solution,” *Moose Jaw Times Herald*, 13 February 1953.

³ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 13.

involvement in order to intensify the sense of direct democracy that was central to the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation's (CCF) political platform. Although the RCARL did not completely dismiss local input when formulating their final recommendations, they placed greater value in technical knowledge and the advice of experts, even when it was contrary to the suggestions of rural people.

In this chapter, I argue that the tension between direct democracy and high modernism led the commissioners to design the RCARL in a manner that placed limits on the degree to which public input influenced their recommendations for social and economic change. Premier T. C. Douglas advocated the importance of direct democracy and its central role in determining provincial policy. He also believed that long-term planning by specialists was central to making Saskatchewan's economy more competitive with other Canadian provinces. This chapter will examine both the identities of the commissioners and how they organized public participation. It will show that although many aspects of the RCARL promoted public involvement, the input of rural people was often far removed from the commissioners' final recommendations.

1.1 The Commissioners

The tension between the CCF's modernizing goals and its effort to design the RCARL around direct democracy was evident in T. C. Douglas' choice of commissioners. Each of the six commissioners had farming experience, which was a background to which rural people could relate. Thus, the commissioners had a greater personal interest in the province than academics or experts from outside the province would have had. The RCARL emphasized the agricultural backgrounds of the commissioners to promote the recognition that they had for public participation. For

example, a document that explained the RCARL to the public stated that “each of the commissioners has had wide experience and training in Saskatchewan and has an important stake in the future of the province.”⁴ However, all of the commissioners (with one exception) occupied prominent leadership roles in provincial organizations such as the Saskatchewan Farmers Union (SFU) and the Homemakers’ Club of Saskatchewan (HCS) (see Table 2). As high-level members of provincial organizations, the commissioners represented rural people from across the province more broadly. They were not in a position to acknowledge and cater to specific needs in every rural community. For example, SFU leaders represented relatively prosperous wheat farmers in central Saskatchewan as well as farmers on marginal agricultural land in the northern fringes of the province. Due to the commissioners’ leadership roles, they were not in a position to consider local concerns, and as Chapter 3 of this thesis will show, often collapsed diverse local issues into broad development policies.

Table 2- RCARL Commissioners and Their Affiliations

Commissioner	Affiliation
W.B. Baker	Director- School of Agriculture, University of Saskatchewan
J.L. Phelps	President- Saskatchewan Farmers Union
Nancy Adams	President- Homemakers’ Club of Saskatchewan
Charles Gibbings	Former Director- Saskatchewan Wheat Pool
H.L Fowler	President- Saskatchewan Co-operative Trading Association Secretary- Saskatchewan Federated Co-operatives Limited
T.H. Bourassa	Merchant (No listed organizational affiliation)

⁴ Saskatchewan Archives Board (hereafter referred to as SAB), R-236: Royal Commission on Agriculture and rural Life Fonds (hereafter referred to as RCARL Records). 2. Community Forum and Hearing Files, *Handbook on Community Forum Procedures*, Appendix II.

The ability to connect with rural people was important in garnering public support for the RCARL, but seeing rural life from an impersonal, scientific perspective was vital to enacting the changes the CCF believed were best for the province. William (W. B.) Baker, whom Premier T. C. Douglas appointed as chairman, met both requirements. Baker's practical experience in agriculture and his educational background in rural development allowed him to express the need for modernization to rural people without trivializing the personal importance of their existing way of life.⁵ His academic career as a rural sociologist led him to believe that in order to prosper, rural people had to modernize and abandon many practices and methods that were socially significant, but no longer efficient or feasible.⁶ Baker's tendency to call for modernization yet acknowledge the connection that rural people had to their existing way of life was clear in many of the speeches he presented as RCARL chairman. In a 1954 speech to the Moose Jaw Chamber of Commerce, he stated that rural residents "live in an age which is and will require a revolution in our thinking relative to farm problems which must be just as forthright as the vast changes that have been and will continue to be found in the technologies of agricultural production."⁷ He was also sure to acknowledge the role that direct democracy had in planning, while aligning it with high modern development:

[T]he Commission has stressed from the beginning that [planning the future] was not a job for the technical person alone; any interpretation of Saskatchewan's future can be realistic by taking into account not only the great mass of objective facts assembled through careful research, but also

⁵ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 13.

⁶ "Introduction: A Tribute to William B. Baker, 1919-1968," *Dignity and Growth: Citizen Participation in Social Change*, eds. Harold R. Baker, James A. Draper, & Brett T. Fairbairn (Calgary: Detselig, 1991), 14.

⁷ SAB, RCARL Records. 1. Minutes, Staff Organizations, and General Policy Files, *Administration: Chairman's Addresses*, W.B. Baker, "A Glance into the Future of Rural Saskatchewan." Address, Moose Jaw Chamber of Commerce, Moose Jaw, SK, 2 February 1954.

by becoming sensitive to the experience and aspirations of Saskatchewan's farm people.⁸

He also emphasized the importance of the public in planning a new future, but he worried that they would be reluctant to embrace change. Change was necessary, he argued, for individual welfare flowed from rural improvement. He explained that

if [Saskatchewan residents], as people, are not able to make changes in our thinking [about technology and progress], then the twin goals of *producing a living* and *living a life* [his emphasis] may produce frustrations as those which followed the early phases of the Industrial Revolution, or the great depression of the thirties.⁹

Baker believed that broad changes in technology would shape rural society in the near future and that Saskatchewan residents had to embrace the developments, or else the consequences for the province would be dire.

Baker was unsympathetic to any sentimental attachment to the past. In a 1955 speech to the Saskatchewan Homemakers' Club, he explained that

we must make up our minds whether we shall honestly pursue the facts of our present situation and, having accepted those facts, turn our minds from a possessive and narrow interest in preserving the past despite the incessant pressures of an emerging future. If we can free ourselves to the point of bringing balance between the mind and the heart; between the realism of the present and our sentimental attachment to things rooted in the past, then and only then will we be prepared to...build for the future.¹⁰

Baker's privileging of rationality over tradition was characteristic of high modernism, which treats the past as an impediment to progress, rather than as a cherished part of a culture's identity.¹¹ If the people were able to be "realistic" and look to the future, than

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid, W.B. Baker, "Agriculture and Rural Life in Saskatchewan's Future." Address, Saskatchewan's Homemakers' Club Forty-fifth Annual Convention, Saskatoon, SK, 3 June 1955.

¹¹ Scott, 95.

they should have a role in planning. Thus, Baker was able to combine the RCARL's emphasis on future planning that was necessary for high modern development with the public participation element involved in direct democracy. Baker also combined a rural background with a perspective that favoured high modernism and was, therefore, a logical choice as RCARL chairman.

T. C. Douglas appointed Baker as chairman of the RCARL and five other individuals to serve as commissioners. They were Joseph Phelps, Nancy Adams, Charles Gibbings, H. L. Fowler, and T. H. Bourassa. Analyzing the backgrounds and philosophies of each commissioner will show how their appointments embodied the philosophical tension present in RCARL.

Commissioner Joseph Phelps had been involved in rural politics from the age of 17. He had run successfully for the provincial legislature representing the CCF in 1938 and again in 1944, when the party came to power.¹² When Douglas became Premier, he appointed Phelps Minister for the Department of Natural Resources and Industrial Development (DNRID), where his responsibilities included leading new ventures into public ownership, establishing Crown Corporations in fields such as electrification, transportation, and others that the CCF deemed monopolistic, and developing the north for resource extraction.¹³ In the 1948 provincial election, Phelps lost his seat in the legislature. In 1949, with his career in party politics over, Phelps successfully ran for

¹² *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*. s.v. "Joseph Phelps." Retrieved from <http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/phelps_joseph_1899-1983.html> (accessed 4 February 2010).

¹³ Archer, 261, 264; David M. Quiring, *CCF Colonialism in Northern Saskatchewan: Battling Parish Priests, Bootleggers, and Fur Sharks* (Vancouver, University of British Columbia Press, 2004), xvii.

president of the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union (SFU), an organization that campaigned for improved rural economic conditions and greater political power for farmers.¹⁴

Although the RCARL marketed itself as objective, Phelps did not hide his desire to use his position to empower the SFU.¹⁵ The SFU had historically been a group that aggressively campaigned for greater political power among farmers and economic policies that favoured the agricultural sector. The organization had moderated its political activity in the 1940s, but when Phelps' became SFU president in 1949, he worked to radicalize the membership and re-focus the organization on campaigning for political and economic improvements in agriculture.¹⁶ Phelps' focus on increasing the political power of farmers was evident in his assertions that farm organizations should have greater political power in Saskatchewan and that the RCARL should place greater emphasis on increasing the rural population. The other commissioners did not concur, and the disagreements culminated with a minority report written by Phelps at the conclusion of the RCARL that he centred on rural depopulation's effect on farmers and the importance of a strong agrarian organization.¹⁷

¹⁴ Archer, 282.

¹⁵ The section "The Main Features of a Royal Commission" in *Report No. 1* describes commissioners as non-partisan. See RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 6. W.B. Baker emphasized the RCARL's objectivity in public appearances and newspaper articles. For examples, see "Objectivity Most Important," *Regina Leader-Post*, 27 November 1952; 'Commission will be 'Objective, Unbiased','' *Regina Leader-Post*, 25 November 1952; "Looking it Over," *The Commonwealth*, 9 September 1953.

¹⁶ The SFU traced its origins to a group of militant farmers who split from conservative agrarian organizations in the 1920s. The SFU hoped to control wheat elevators, eliminate the intermediary in the grain trade and unite with farmers' organizations worldwide to protect the interests of all farmers. See Lipset, 84; Archer, 282.

¹⁷ Although Phelps' position as SFU president led him to defend agriculture and the need to maintain a large farm population, he believed that this could only be achieved through industrial development, which would help farmers by creating larger markets and a stable economy. He took a high modern view of the situation, disregarding the impact that mechanization and industrialization may have had on communities, and seeing the changes in economic terms.

Given the SFU's roots in agrarian socialism and its popularity among farmers, Phelps was a logical choice for a Commission that was to promote direct democracy. On the other hand, Phelps' history in formal politics, especially as minister of the DNRID, showed him to be a staunch high modernist.¹⁸ When Phelps was in charge of development in northern Saskatchewan, he aggressively centralized the population and economy by moving people from isolated settlements into newly organized towns and attempting to create state-run mines and logging operations.¹⁹ Despite being unpopular as DNRID minister and losing his local seat after one term, Phelps' modernizing agenda fit with the CCF's goal of diversifying the economy and moving away from a reliance on agriculture. Phelps' inclusion demonstrated the tension that was present throughout the RCARL, as he wanted to improve life for farmers and grow rural populations, but believed that the best way to do that was to centralize planning and develop industry in order to increase the province's population and create more markets for agriculture.

Commissioner Nancy Adams was born in Yorkshire, England, in 1908 and settled in Saskatchewan in 1920.²⁰ She combined rural life experience with a formal education. After receiving her Bachelor of Arts in English and French from the University of Saskatchewan in 1931, Adams obtained a teaching degree from the Regina Normal School.²¹ She was active in women's organizations in the province, and was President of the Homemakers' Club of Saskatchewan (HCS), a women's organization that began in 1911. The HCS typically discussed both rural issues, such as managing a farm home and

¹⁸ Quiring, 17-18.

¹⁹ Quiring, 38.

²⁰ *The Encyclopedia of Saskatchewan*. s.v. "Nancy Adams." Retrieved from <http://esask.uregina.ca/entry/adams_nancy_1908-98.html>. Accessed 4 February 2010.

²¹ *Ibid*; SAB, RCARL Records, 8. Press Coverage, *Press Clippings*, Margaret Kesslering, "Farm Life has Advantages Says Commission Member," *Regina Leader-Post*, 10 October 1952.

gardening techniques, and social issues such as temperance and healthcare.²² The Homemakers' Club had a history of campaigning and pressuring the provincial government to improve rural society, so Adams' appointment represented the RCARL's acknowledgement of women's roles in improving the province.

Adams was often in the media spotlight as the only female commissioner. The Commission used her presence to encourage women's participation in the RCARL. For example, shortly after Douglas appointed the RCARL, Adams attended the Saskatchewan Livestock Convention specifically to speak with women. Addressing the crowd as an RCARL commissioner, Adams explained that the Commission needed women's input. She stated that "your enthusiasm will help you to do something about the problems yourself...and show that you can make democracy work."²³ Selecting Adams as a commissioner provided the RCARL with a link to rural women who faced tremendous change on farms and in communities. At the same time, her organizational affiliations and education meant that she had experience working closely with the provincial government and the technical knowledge to understand high modernism.

Commissioner Charles Gibbings was born in Rosetown, Saskatchewan, in 1916. He had experience in large-scale mechanized farming and was active in farmers' organizations. Prior to his appointment, he was director of the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (SWP), an organization formed by farmers in the 1920s due to dissatisfaction with government wheat marketing. Under the pre-SWP marketing system, farmers had sold grain to private elevator companies that had based the prices on market demand. Many farmers believed that this system forced them to be reliant on prices set by the two major

²² Archer, 157.

²³ "Special Women's Program Attracts Many Visitors," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* (22 January 1953).

elevator companies.²⁴ Those who formed the SWP eventually developed a co-operative wheat pool to provide farmers with an alternative to the private elevator companies.

Like Phelps, Gibbings held a prominent position in an organization that fought to increase the economic and political power of farmers. The SWP became less radical in the 1940s as it became more powerful, but in years when farm conditions were poor, they advocated direct political action to fight federal policies.²⁵ Gibbings had farming experience, but his political career made him attuned to high modern development. The SWP's main concern was with the economics of agriculture, and Gibbings owned a large, highly mechanized farm that set him apart from most other farmers. Gibbings represented farmers through the SWP, but his financial stability and political influence distanced him from localized perspectives on modernization.

Commissioner H. L. Fowler was a banker and a farmer, and heavily involved in the cooperative movement in Saskatchewan.²⁶ He was President of the Saskatchewan Co-operative Trading Association from the late 1930s until his appointment to the RCARL. He was also the secretary of Saskatchewan Federated Co-operatives Limited (SFCL).²⁷ The SFCL assisted local consumer cooperatives (commonly known as co-op

²⁴ The two companies were the Grain Growers Grain Company and the Saskatchewan Co-operative Elevator Company. Although both were owned by farmers, Lipset explains, they were controlled by early settlers who owned the best land. Most of the owners were conservative and interested more in productivity than political or economic power. So although technically both organizations were farmer co-ops, only the most established and, in most cases, the most prosperous farmers had access to them. See Lipset, 67-68.

²⁵ Two examples of radical responses by the SWP are as follows. In 1930, the organization supported a proposal by the SFU for the Prairie provinces to secede from Canada. In the early 1940s, the SWP organized mass meetings of farmers to protest the wheat price set by the Canadian Government. These meetings led to the "On-to-Ottawa" trek. See Lipset, 248-250.

²⁶ SAB, RCARL Records. 1. Minutes, Staff, Organization, and General Policy Files, *Appointment of Commission: Documents and Correspondence*, Correspondence between W.B. Baker and T.C. Douglas, "Representation on Royal Commission on Agriculture".

²⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 7.

stores) in Saskatchewan. It functioned as a wholesaler, purchasing or producing lumber, coal, oil and retail merchandise.²⁸ In addition to supplying co-op stores, SFCL promoted co-operatives across the province.²⁹ The SFCL was a member of the Interprovincial Co-operatives Limited (ICL), which aligned it with similar organizations in other provinces to maximize merchandise available to co-op stores.³⁰

Fowler was in a similar position to the other commissioners with respect to representing rural people while occupying a powerful position within the province. Rural residents saw co-op stores and the SFCL as symbols of community interdependence and solidarity.³¹ Appointing an SFCL official suggested that the RCARL respected rural institutions, and by extension, the input of rural participants. The SFCL worked with co-op stores, but also belonged to the ICL, a national group of retailers that aimed for the development of a co-operative network, a goal that took them beyond the concerns of local co-op stores. In addition to taking a broad view in the development of co-op stores, the SFCL sought to modernize and diversify its investments beyond rural retail. By the 1950s, the SFCL had expanded its oil exploration in Saskatchewan and Alberta, owned a lumber mill in B.C., and coal mines in Alberta.³² The SFCL's simultaneous local and expansionary interests demonstrate why Fowler's appointment signified the tension within the RCARL. Many rural people identified their local co-op stores, and by extension, the SFCL, as a symbol of rural Saskatchewan. At the same time however,

²⁸ Jim F.C. Wright, *Prairie Progress: Consumer Co-operation in Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: Modern Press, 1956), 200-203.

²⁹ Wright, 189.

³⁰ Wright, 205.

³¹ Wright, 88-89.

³² Wright, 200-201.

SFCL officials were in the process of integrating into a national organization that would contribute to the homogenization of consumer cooperatives across the country.

T. H. Bourassa was the final commissioner appointed to the RCARL.³³ Unlike the others, he did not have an organizational affiliation, and RCARL documents usually identified him as a merchant. In part, Bourassa's appointment was intended to lessen the tension that had historically existed between Francophone and Anglophone residents in Saskatchewan.³⁴ For example, in 1916, conflict had flared over funding for French-language schools. Organizations such as the Saskatchewan Grain Growers Association (SGGA) had condemned the use of French in schools, as they thought that it deprived children of the "untold benefits of an English-speaking teacher."³⁵ Selecting a Fransaskois merchant to serve as a commissioner was an attempt by Douglas to appeal to Saskatchewan's Francophone community. However, the lack of publicity surrounding Bourassa's French-Canadian background was likely intentional. Bourassa's presence would satisfy the Fransaskois, while publicizing that the CCF based his appointment on his occupation as a merchant would avoid controversy with the Anglophone majority, who may have believed that the Fransaskois did not make up a large enough segment of the population to warrant representation.

The commissioners had a variety of affiliations and identities that appealed to a wide segment of Saskatchewan's rural population. Douglas recognized the importance

³³ Douglas decided on Bourassa on 30 September 1952, the same day that he publicly introduced all of the commissioners.

³⁴ Ibid, Correspondence between W.B. Baker and T.C. Douglas, "Recommendation of T.H. Bourassa". In a correspondence between Baker and Douglas, the two decide that Bourassa's French-Canadian ethnicity was important to his selection.

³⁵ Richard Lapointe and Lucille Tessier, *The Francophones of Saskatchewan: A History* (Regina: Campion College, 1988), 201.

that connecting to the public would have in promoting the RCARL as an exercise in direct democracy. Commissioners who were from rural Saskatchewan and active in agrarian organizations would appear to be much more understanding of rural concerns about large-scale development than scientific experts from outside the province. A *Regina Leader-Post* article quoted Nancy Adams as stating that

[commissioners] are representatives of the people rather than technologists. Members of the commission, being directly connected with the agricultural industry in the province, are completely familiar with the problems the commission hopes at least partially to solve.³⁶

Most rural people belonged to the SFU, SWP, HCS, or SFCL. Even if participants did not know the commissioners, organizational ties signified values that were important to rural people. This made participation in what the RCARL described as a “broad analysis of the conditions of agriculture and rural life” less intimidating than it may have been under the leadership of experts from outside of Saskatchewan.

The commissioners also had much in common. With the exception of Bourassa, they all served in provincial or national organizations that focused on rural life. These affiliations encouraged public participation by providing familiarity to rural people who considered such organizations central to farm life. However, the affiliations also placed the commissioners in a position to view the province broadly, which was not the case with most farmers who were primarily concerned with local issues and solutions. The provincial branches of organizations such as the SFU rarely focused on local issues, but rather on how they could shape their relationship with government to improve the economic position of agriculture and therefore improve conditions for all of their

³⁶ “Speaker Explains Role of New Commission,” *Regina Leader-Post* (29 January 1953).

members. For example, high-ranking officials within organizations often spent more time with government officials and specialists than the rural people whom they represented.³⁷ The commissioners' dual roles as public symbols of rural life and as modernists who believed that broad changes were necessary for improvement, represented the internal tension between high modernism and direct democracy that existed throughout the RCARL.

1.2 Structure of the RCARL

Focusing on the structure of the RCARL is important for analyzing the tension between high modernism and direct democracy within it. This section will examine the RCARL's system of gathering and interpreting information. It will compare how rural people experienced participation with how the commissioners actually used public input and technical knowledge from specialists to construct a plan for rural improvement.

The RCARL's information-gathering process contained a number of steps, some of which involved public participation, others that did not (see Table 3). "Provincial Problems" conferences, provincial briefs, and provincial hearings linked the public with the commissioners, but participation was by invitation only and restricted to government officials, individuals that represented provincial organizations, and university students and professors. The provincial events helped the commissioners to establish broad categories of improvement before they included rural people in community events, and to refine the categories following public participation. In between the provincial events, the commissioners organized community forums, community briefs, and community

³⁷ For example, the SFU was divided into dozens of local branches. While representatives of locals would have contact with provincial SFU leaders, most members were not involved beyond their own communities.

hearings. These provided rural people with the opportunity to voice their opinions about rural life and potential improvements, although the discussion categories were limited to areas that the commissioners had already defined. Following the community and provincial events, the commissioners conducted research projects and worked closely with technical specialists to establish official recommendations for rural improvement. Overall, although the public was more involved in the RCARL than in other Canadian royal commissions, their role was still much less than that of experts. Specially selected individuals that participated in provincial events voiced their concerns with few restrictions, but the vast majority of public participants at community events participated within parameters that specialists and provincial participants had previously defined.

Table 3- Chronology of the RCARL

Event	Date
Appointment of RCARL	October 31, 1952
“Provincial Problems” Conferences	November 25-29, 1952
Community Forums	January-March, 1953
Provincial Briefs	February-Early March, 1953
Final Problem Areas Established	March 25, 1953
Community Briefs	April-May, 1953
Community Hearings	June 1953
Provincial Hearings	October 1953
Release of Final Report- Volume 1	March 18, 1955
Release of Final Report- Volume 14, Completion of RCARL	April 10, 1957

The Commission’s first step in constructing an improvement plan was to work with experts, government officials, and leaders of provincial organizations to establish

broad problem areas. The rural public was not involved in this stage because the commissioners believed that they would not see deficiencies in rural life that experts, officials, and commissioners did.³⁸ It was the responsibility of those shaping the problem areas to determine how broken rural society was and which areas were most in need of repair.

The commissioners scheduled “Provincial Problems” conferences to solicit government officials, organization leaders, and university students to help define problem areas. They scheduled two conferences, one in Regina on 25 and 26 November 1952, and one in Saskatoon on 28 and 29 November 1952. The commissioners invited approximately 300 people to the two conferences, most of whom were representatives of provincial organizations, government agencies, or the University of Saskatchewan.³⁹ Based on the objectives of the conferences, the Commission expected provincial leaders to define rural problems, and rural people to later accept and discuss them.⁴⁰

The conferences allowed participants considerable freedom in determining problem areas. On the first day of the conference, participants were grouped according to interest. For example, representatives of agricultural organizations met together in small groups, students met together, and commercial representatives met together. On the second day, the commissioners reorganized the groups so that each contained members with different interests. The mixed groups discussed the most common problems

³⁸ SAB, RCARL Records, 1. Minutes, Staff Organization, and General Policy Files, *Research Policy and Study Areas*, “Procedure Guide for the Definition of Key Problem Areas,” 11-12 December 1952.

³⁹ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 47.

⁴⁰ Examples of questions given at community forums were “do you have any problems in your community with regards to roads?” or “what problems do you have in your community with regard to land tenure, such as co-operative farming, family farms, renting, crown leases, community pastures, etc.?” By the time the Commission organized community forums, they had already defined the parameters of rural issues. Local communities were given the role of providing specific examples of problem areas, rather than defining what the areas were.

identified on the previous day by the uniform groups, and the problems that the mixed groups agreed were significant contributed to the RCARL's final list of problem areas.⁴¹ The guide provided to "Provincial Problems" conference participants exemplified the freedom they had in defining problem areas. It did not focus on specific issues, but rather on five general categories: changes in rural life, changes in farming methodology and technology, problems with social and retail services in rural Saskatchewan, problems with public utilities, and potential government programs that could improve rural life.⁴² The flexible categories were not designed to limit the discussion, but rather to help start conversation. Through both their grouping of participants and their definition of discussion parameters, the commissioners demonstrated an effort to provide as much freedom as possible within the "Provincial Problems" conferences.

After "Provincial Problems" conferences, the commissioners organized community forums to gather local perspectives from across the province. The forums were run by "initiating committees" comprised of men from two groups: field staff from the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool (casually called "Wheat Pool men"), and agricultural representatives from the Saskatchewan Department of Agriculture (casually called "Ag. Reps"). Here again, individuals affiliated with either a prominent voluntary organization or a government agency led the process. Initiating committees organized forum participants into groups of six. The RCARL expected each group to list problems they considered important with respect to marketing, extension services, roads, electrification, credit, recreation, home and social life, health and welfare services, education, local

⁴¹ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 47-48.

⁴² SAB, RCARL Records. 5. Provincial Briefs and Hearings- General Policy, Conferences, Arrangements, etc., *Problems Conferences- Regina and Saskatoon*, Problem Census Guide.

commercial services, movement of people away from farms, and the trend towards larger farms.⁴³ They then had to decide on the five most important problems from their list to present to the rest of the forum. The initiating committee counted how many times each problem was identified and recorded the five most common. At this point, the initiating committee would assign one problem to each group in the forum for what they called “discussion and solution.” The commissioners designed the forums, but rural people participated by expressing themselves within the problem areas.

The RCARL organized forums in ninety-five communities across the province, and a total of 8170 rural people participated.⁴⁴ The forum locations were spread evenly across southern Saskatchewan. The largest forum was in Estevan on 3 March 1953, with 206 people in attendance. The smallest forum was in Cantaur on 20 March 1953, with ten participants. Although the forums were held across southern Saskatchewan and in relatively large towns such as Estevan and Kindersley as well as small centers such as Cantaur and Matador, the RCARL had specific requirements that determined which communities received forums. The Commission comprised a list of logistical preferences such as location, accessibility, and availability of accommodations to decide which communities would host forums.⁴⁵ Economic and political considerations also influenced the RCARL’s choices. When selecting forum sites, they considered:

- Economic success of various agricultural pursuits

⁴³ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 30.

⁴⁴ Approximately 430 000 people were considered to comprise Saskatchewan’s rural population as of 1951. See Figure 14 in RCARL, *Report No. 3: Agricultural Credit* (Hereafter cited as Report No. 3), 50.

⁴⁵ SAB, RCARL Records, 2. Community Forum and Hearing Files- General, *Administration: Workshop, Criteria for Selection of Communities for Forums*. The presence of roads in determining forum locations was hypocritical considering that a major problem identified by many communities was inadequate road and transportation systems. Logically, a community without roads or reliant on very poor roads would be a great resource.

- The community's ability to provide a cross-section of people that included various racial groups, economic standards, vocations, and professions
- Whether a community was progressive or "backward"⁴⁶

The commissioners did not explain their logic in selecting forum sites based on economic, political, and ethnic make-up, but the larger purposes they identified for community forums suggested that having diverse groups of people working together within the RCARL would increase local cooperation and improve direct democracy in communities in the future.⁴⁷ No explanation was given as to why economic success and progressiveness (or "backwardness") was relevant to forum selection, but these considerations indicate that the RCARL had specific preferences and expectations when considering which communities would represent Saskatchewan's rural public.

Although the commissioners placed limitations on the location and content of community forums, many of the participants were satisfied with the opportunity to participate in shaping Saskatchewan's future. The commissioners had originally planned to hold between thirty and forty forums, but the popularity of the idea necessitated the organization of an additional fifty to sixty. *A Prince Albert Herald* article stated that the forums "proved to be a very effective method for getting farm and town opinions on rural problems."⁴⁸ According to the RCARL, many participants expressed satisfaction with the forum process when they were asked about it afterwards. Some participants

⁴⁶ Ibid. The source was not clear on whether they favored progressive or "backward" communities, or what they considered either of the terms to represent. However, the fact that the commissioners characterized communities in such a way and determined their selections around an arbitrary designation suggests that they had certain pre-determined expectations about which segment of the public had the most valid or helpful perspective.

⁴⁷ SAB, RCARL Records, 2. Community Forum and Hearing Files- General, *Administration: Workshop, Community Forums* (3 January 1953).

⁴⁸ "Community Forums Popular," *Prince Albert Herald*, 26 March 1953.

suggested that a forum of the same type be organized annually at the municipal level in order to keep citizens involved in local affairs. Other groups felt proud that the provincial government was interested in their opinions. For example, a group from the forum that was held on 16 February 1953 in Mistatim wrote that “this community is an average community with many nationalities represented. We believe that our problems are the problems of the average community. Bringing them to the attention of the government through the Royal Commission is a definite step in the right direction.”⁴⁹ While the forums did not provide complete freedom of discussion due to the problems areas that had already been defined, they embodied a sense of direct democracy for participants, many of whom were appreciative of the opportunity to congregate and discuss rural issues.

In February and March 1953, at the same time the Initiating Committees were organizing community forums, the commissioners were receiving provincial briefs from groups that had participated in the “Provincial Problems” conferences in November 1952. While the organizations had earlier worked to craft broad problem areas at the “Provincial Problems” conferences, provincial briefs provided them an opportunity to bring to the attention of the commissioners very specific rural issues that were not included in the problem areas. Seventy-two non-governmental organizations submitted briefs, which satisfied the Commission, who believed that since the membership of many organizations was scattered across the province, it would be challenging for members to cooperate in forming consensus opinions.⁵⁰ Forty-four Saskatchewan government

⁴⁹ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 35.

⁵⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 52; For a complete listing of organizations that submitted briefs, see RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 115-117.

agencies and sixty-three individual civil servants submitted briefs, as well as thirty-six University of Saskatchewan departments and twenty-one individuals who had been either invited to the “Provincial Problems” conferences due to their technical knowledge, or who disagreed with the consensus reached by their organization and decided to submit an individual brief instead. The commissioners classified the material from the 236 briefs they received into “study area books,” with one for each problem area.⁵¹

The commissioners designed a guide for the submission of provincial briefs that they distributed to organizations and individuals who had participated in “Provincial Problems” conferences. In it, they defined a provincial brief as “a summary of facts and opinions which has been drawn up and considered by individuals, professional and non-professional, organizations and agencies for presentation to the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life.”⁵² The briefs consisted of a description of the problems that each organization or individual considered most important and their proposed solutions. Although the guide for provincial briefs served as an outline for topics that each participant could focus on, the final decision on what constituted a problem was left to each organization. For example, the brief from the College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan identified four problems relevant to rural life: a shortage of dentists in the province, a particularly severe shortage in rural areas, a lack of public education about the importance of dental care, and the need to stress the prevention of dental disease.⁵³ The brief submitted by the Saskatchewan Agricultural Societies’ Association (SASA)

⁵¹ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 53.

⁵² SAB, RCARL Records. 5. Provincial Briefs and Hearings- General Policy, Conferences, Arrangements, etc., *Provincial Briefs and Hearings- Policy and Progress Reports*, “Guide: Preparation of a Provincial Brief”.

⁵³ SAB, RCARL Records. 7. Provincial Briefs and Hearings, Special Hearings, etc., *Provincial Briefs*, “College of Dental Surgeons of Saskatchewan”.

identified rural problems that were similar to those outlined by the commissioners. Among the ten problems they identified were issues surrounding education, rural roads, crop insurance, price stability, and rural depopulation.⁵⁴ As the discrepancy between the specific concerns of dentists and the broad concerns of SASA exemplified, provincial briefs provided few restrictions on defining what was or was not a relevant rural problem.

Although those who submitted briefs had also helped to shape the problem areas in the “Provincial Problems” conferences, if the specific problems raised in their briefs did not conform to the areas that guided the commissioners, their input was left out of the RCARL’s plans or given brief mention in one of the problem areas that the commissioners were using. For example, although dentistry was the main rural concern for members of the College of Dental Surgeons, the commissioners did not feel that it warranted its own study area. As a result, such concerns were absent from the final reports. Although provincial briefs followed “Provincial Problems” conferences, the commissioners used the two very differently. The conferences helped the commissioners to establish study areas, but the content of many of the briefs were not included in the final reports. Overall, organizational leaders, government officials, and academics had a role in shaping what the RCARL considered problematic in rural society. However, many of the concerns that these participants brought forth through provincial briefs were overlooked if they did not fit into one of the pre-determined problems areas.

Community briefs were similar to provincial briefs in that they expressed the specific concerns of a community. However, they were much more rigidly structured and were based only on the conclusions reached in community forums. In April and May of

⁵⁴ SAB, RCARL Records. 7. Provincial Briefs and Hearings, Special Hearings, etc., *Provincial Briefs*, “Saskatchewan Agricultural Societies’ Association”.

1953, the RCARL called for the submission of community briefs. After each community forum, participants selected a group of citizens to draft a brief summarizing the most prevalent problems and potential solutions as expressed in the community forum. Each brief committee received an outline from the RCARL that explained how to structure the brief and how to list problems and solutions (see Table 4). The committee used the outline to summarize the results of the forum, and they met with the community to confirm the brief's accuracy. The final draft was then sent to the RCARL.⁵⁵ Those with dissenting opinions could present individual briefs, but this was rare. While ninety of the ninety-five communities that had hosted a forum submitted a brief, only thirteen individual briefs were written.⁵⁶

The community briefs mirrored the tension between direct democracy and limited public participation that was visible in the community forums. On one hand, they provided communities with an opportunity to work cooperatively and have their problems heard by the RCARL. According to an article in the *Moose Jaw Times-Herald*, the rural public believed that community briefs were a very effective way to voice local opinions: "Because of the way in which they have been prepared through the combined efforts of a large number of people, briefs from community forums are regarded as...the most effective way to get a general picture of the views of farm and town residents on rural problems."⁵⁷ An article in the *Regina Leader-Post* praised the uniformity of community briefs as a sign that the local problems facing rural Saskatchewan spanned the entire province. The article stated that

⁵⁵ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 37.

⁵⁶ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 38.

⁵⁷ "Community Briefs Said Most Effective Method of Survey," *Moose Jaw Times-Herald*, 19 June 1953.

Table 4- Outline for Community Brief

Section	Description
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Place and Date • Number of people at community forum • Number of people involved in writing brief • Statement on method of assembling material
Historical and Descriptive Material of the Area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Years of settlement, etc. • Description of soil • Nationalities, churches, etc. in area • Settlement trends
Statement of Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Problem I, Problem II, etc.- this is a listing of the problems as used by the forum for discussion of solutions.
Problem I	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Statement of problem • Background information on problem- some facts and/or figures which show that over the years this has become an important problem • Proposed solution- include responsibilities and procedures for implementation • Other possible solutions
Problem II-V	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow same outline as above

because of geography and topography there is a greater uniformity over a large area in Saskatchewan than in any other part of the nation. It is only logical that the problems [written in briefs] at Gravelbourg [in southwest Saskatchewan], for example, should differ little from those at Unity [in

west-central Saskatchewan], at Semans [in east-central Saskatchewan], and most other places that the Commission is visiting.⁵⁸

While the media viewed the uniformity of problems as a sign that a broad program of development was an effective way to improve rural society, an examination of the structure of public participation in the RCARL suggests that it was more likely a product of the limited discussion topics in community forums. Unlike the provincial briefs, which placed no limits on problems that an organization could address, community forum participants and community brief committees worked within parameters determined by the commissioners. Had rural people had fewer constraints on what they could discuss in community forums, more specificity and local context may have been present. While the briefs provided another opportunity for public participation, their structure served to further reinforce the commissioners' vision of a broad program for improvement.⁵⁹

The commissioners concluded public participation with community and provincial hearings. Community hearings occurred first, in June of 1953. They were chaired by two commissioners and held after the RCARL received all the briefs and synthesized the public input from community forums.⁶⁰ The commissioners used the hearings to emphasize direct democracy in the RCARL by describing them as “a direct two-way communication between the Commission and the public.”⁶¹ The hearings allowed individuals to interact with commissioners for clarification purposes, but new

⁵⁸ “Tough Problems Face Commission,” *Regina Leader-Post*, 20 April 1953.

⁵⁹ For example, the commissioners only identified nine “priority problems” as arising from community briefs (what defined a priority problem was not clarified). In essence, the entire community forum process was simplified into a conclusion that defined credit, education, electrification, local government and roads, markets and prices, movement of people, rural recreation, rural health and welfare, and service centres as the major “public” concerns. While such simplicity was necessary for a project of such magnitude, it certainly obscured other issues brought up in community forums and lumped many sub-issues into nine broad categories. See RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 88.

⁶⁰ The three teams were Adams and Baker; Bourassa and Gibbings; and Fowler and Phelps.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

ideas were rarely brought forth. The purpose of the hearings was for commissioners and participants to discuss the brief that had been submitted. The commissioners decided that it took at least one hour to discuss a problem in detail, so they assigned themselves the responsibility of selecting only the most important problem from the brief for clarification.⁶² On the surface, it appeared that community hearings provided the public with an opportunity to converse directly with two of the commissioners. While this was true, the terms of the discussion were set by the RCARL, and the majority of the hearings were dedicated to clarifying material from community forums, rather than facilitating an exchange on new concerns or recommendations.

Provincial hearings took place in October of 1953, and were the final stage of public involvement in the RCARL. Fifty-five provincial organizations, fifteen departments from the University of Saskatchewan, eight departments from the Government of Saskatchewan, and seven individuals attended. Like the “Provincial Problems” conferences, they were only open to an exclusive segment of the population. The overlapping purpose of provincial and community hearings was to clarify the content of a submitted brief, but provincial hearings also provided participants with a chance to discuss province-wide issues with the commissioners that community forums did not offer to local residents.⁶³ For example, the commissioners envisioned provincial hearings as a chance to speak directly with representatives of provincial organizations in order to discuss elaborations and examples of the problems and solutions that had already expressed in provincial briefs. Rather than simply clarify the brief, the commissioners

⁶² RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 40-41.

⁶³ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 54.

chose to put it aside and speak with participants informally.⁶⁴ To assist with discussion in the provincial hearings, the commissioners drafted a series of probe patterns around what they considered the most pressing rural issues. The probe patterns focused on education, mechanization, credit, and movement of people, among other issues. The questions contained significant detail and assumed that members of organizations would possess the knowledge necessary to answer and discuss them, even if such detail was absent from their briefs. For example, the probe pattern on education asked direct questions about the causes of declining high school enrolment, but also linked education to a shortage of skilled labour in the province and asked participants how they might remedy such a situation.⁶⁵ Unlike the community hearings, which only clarified a single issue that participants had already addressed through the community forums and briefs, provincial hearings pushed participants to move beyond their original discussions and connect issues to the larger provincial context.

Provincial hearings concluded the majority of the RCARL's interaction with the public, but the commissioners also trained correspondents to venture into rural areas for a small number of interviews with rural people whom they considered experts in specific issues. The most notable of these interviews, which usually addressed content that was absent from community forums, was the series of studies that the RCARL organized for rural women. The study topics, which I discuss in detail in section 3.2 of this thesis, addressed domestic work, children, and other so-called "women's" issues.

⁶⁴ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 55.

⁶⁵ SAB, RCARL Records. 5. Provincial Briefs and Hearings- General Policy, Conferences, Arrangements, etc., *Provincial Hearings: Agendas, Procedures, and Probe Patterns*, "Probe Patterns for Provincial Hearings: Education".

The RCARL also gathered information from technical consultants (or “experts”) throughout the Commission process. The commissioners used three types: university, government, and non-government. The RCARL data does not list how many university and non-government sources the commissioners used, but a total of 107 different government agencies or departments submitted a brief.⁶⁶ Professors participated from at least eight universities, including Prairie schools such the University of Alberta and the University of North Dakota, as well as more distant institutions such as Harvard.⁶⁷ Those contacted were specialists in agricultural sciences or sociology. Some participating government officials were from Saskatchewan, although many were from other areas of North America. Several consultants from the United Nations lent suggestions from development programs implemented elsewhere. Non-government experts worked for corporations or foreign voluntary organizations.⁶⁸

Upon the conclusion of public participation, the commissioners worked closely with government officials and other specialists to shape the data that they had gathered into a series of recommendations to improve rural Saskatchewan. While direct public participation was paramount to the RCARL’s activities in 1952 and 1953, it was non-existent from November of 1953 until 1957, when the Commission disbanded.

Even during the period in which the public was active in the RCARL, a division between the “general” public and those that the commissioners considered to be more knowledgeable about rural society emerged. Community-level events gave rural people an opportunity to vocalize how major rural problems effected their day-to-day lives and

⁶⁶ For the complete list, see RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 119-120.

⁶⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 67-68.

⁶⁸ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 68.

potential solutions to those problems. This was a positive experience for many rural people, as it strengthened their sense of democracy and increased confidence that government leaders were listening to them. It also inspired some communities to follow a similar model of cooperation to identify and solve future problems. However, although the RCARL sought public participation, they were clear that rural input would have a limited role in determining the structure of the information-gathering process or their final recommendations. In a handbook describing public participation, they stated that

[the RCARL] is to be a “peoples” [sic] Commission. It is the first time that a Commission has really gone to the men and women out in the country for advice. This does not mean that the point of view of experts will be ignored, but rather that the Commission wants everybody to express their opinions since it will be these people who are affected by its recommendations.⁶⁹

The above quote indicates, and the limitations that the RCARL placed upon public input supports that direct democracy was an important part of the RCARL, but the commissioners did not consider the public to be the primary source of knowledge about the province. The public played an important role in the RCARL, but direct democracy was one of many methods of information gathering used by the commissioners. From 1953 to 1957, the public played no role in interpreting data and input into final recommendations. Although the RCARL allowed the public to work together with the province’s decision-makers, its structure and organizations placed limitations on how rural people could participate and what topics were open for public debate, which was reflective of other high modern projects in Canada during the 1950s.

⁶⁹ SAB, RCARL Records, 2. Community Forum and Hearing Files, *Handbook on Community Forum Procedures*, Appendix II.

Limitations that the commissioners placed on community events were also visible in comparison to the relative freedom associated with provincial events. Community forums, briefs, and hearings were the most publicized aspects of the RCARL, but they were only three of the methods used by the commissioners to gather data and make recommendations for rural improvement. “Provincial Problems” conferences, provincial briefs, and provincial hearings formed a second, less accessible, layer of public input. Nearly anyone could participate in community forums, but provincial events were reserved for academics as well as leaders of governmental, voluntary, and professional organizations. According to the commissioners, these leaders were “gatekeepers” of rural progress because “it is in these groups that the leadership of the province tends to be concentrated. Frequently those who lead in voluntary organizations and government also lead in communities.”⁷⁰ Those invited to participate were positioned between community-level participants and experts. They were rural residents with practical knowledge of the province, but they also had technical expertise that the RCARL valued enough to necessitate separate meetings.

In summary, although the RCARL marketed itself as one of the first royal commissions to involve the public, how the commissioners used information suggested that public input had little influence in suggesting solutions to rural problems. The RCARL presented rural people with basic problems and encouraged them to provide general solutions. Therefore the public did participate in the Commission, and for the most part valued the experience; but the commissioners had the opportunity to interpret and shape their input into specific recommendations informed by specialists and technical

⁷⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 45.

data. Separating public participation from the RCARL's final recommendations for improvement represented the commissioners' attempts to balance high modernism, which had no use for local perspectives, with direct democracy, a philosophy built on public participation.

This chapter has explained the RCARL's political context, membership, and relationship with the public. It questioned the extent to which the RCARL's structure matched its rhetoric about public participation. The next chapter will move beyond how information was gathered. It focuses on how the RCARL treated different groups of rural people, and whether or not individuals' roles within their community or their views on development affected how they were able to participate in the RCARL.

2: GROUPING THE PUBLIC: DIRECT DEMOCRACY AND PARTICIPATION IN THE RCARL

This chapter will examine how and to what degree the RCARL extended direct democracy, defined as public participation in politics and development, to different groups of people in rural Saskatchewan. Although the commissioners involved rural people in some aspects of the RCARL, individuals with organizational affiliations received a greater opportunity to participate than the rest of the public, and the commissioners often ignored or denigrated individuals who disagreed with the RCARL's vision for rural improvement. Although direct democracy was present in some parts of the Commission open to everyone, and the way that commissioners interacted with different members of the public reflected the influence that the commissioners' vision for a specific rural future had on the RCARL.

I will focus on three groups— farm men (whom the RCARL referred to as farmers), farm women, and residents who criticized rural reorganization and the RCARL— to show how the structure of the Commission, as described earlier, effected participation within these groups. Each of the groups had internal diversity that influenced their level of participation. For example, farmers who did not have organizational affiliations or were only involved at a local level were limited in their participation, but the commissioners granted farm organization leaders a larger role in

shaping the future.¹ Farmwomen, in addition to having the commissioners treat them as less knowledgeable than farmers, faced similar differences in their level of participation based on organizational affiliation. When conducting supplementary interviews with randomly selected women, the commissioners only requested their input on issues that related to children and home maintenance, but asked members of women's organizations to connect such issues to broad changes in the rural economy and society. Finally, RCARL chairman W. B. Baker was often confrontational with individuals who were publicly critical of the RCARL. Conflicts emerged through letters to the editor in which citizens and Baker traded barbs. Baker was not interested in hearing from those who disagreed with the RCARL's premise or tried to participate outside of their pre-determined structure. These three examples show, in different ways, that direct democracy was not universal, and that the commissioners' goal of broad rural improvement often influenced the degree to which different groups were able to participate in the RCARL.

2.1 Farmers, the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union, and Direct Democracy

Farmers comprised the majority of rural residents and RCARL participants; therefore, their support was central to the successful transformation of rural Saskatchewan. Despite this, the commissioners did not provide ordinary farmers with an opportunity to play a major role in deciding the province's future, limiting their

¹ Twenty-one percent of participants at "Provincial Problems" conferences identified as being in "professional agriculture", while seventeen percent called themselves farmers. The fact that the RCARL made such a distinction suggests that professional agriculture was an occupation related to farming, but did not actually require work on a farm. Salaried organizational leaders, politicians who focused on agriculture, equipment dealers, and distributors would fall into this category. Even those who identified themselves as farmers would have also occupied a prominent role in a provincial organization in order to be invited to the conference. For a complete list of participants, see RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 112.

participation to community forums, briefs, and hearings. Agrarian organizations represented farmers in the planning portions of the RCARL, such as “Provincial Problems” conferences. These leaders were most involved in the RCARL, as many ordinary farmers’ recommendations made in community forums were absent from the Commission’s final recommendations.

The capital needed to mechanize and expand farms was beyond many farmers’ reach, and was leading to a reduction in Saskatchewan’s rural population in the 1950s. Despite this, the success of nearly all other industries was still dependent on the farm economy, so its preservation in some form was vital to the province’s evolution.² Agriculture’s continued importance also translated into the demographic realm. In 1951, 99 970 homes were defined as “farm,” compared to only 51 780 “rural non-farm” homes and 69 705 “urban” homes.³ However, as mechanization intensified, farms became more specialized and machinery replaced human labour, which reduced the amount of farm work available (see Table 5). Despite the capitalization and mechanization of agriculture, there was no separate rural proletariat and bourgeoisie in the 1950s, as much of the rural population consisted of farmers who owned their own land or equipment, and thus had some control over their means of production, and ultimately, the replacement of human labour with machinery.⁴ Although the need for efficiency and mechanization was threatening their livelihood, farmers still dominated rural society, both demographically and through their control of labour and land.

² Conway, 776.

³ RCARL, *Report No. 10: The Home and Family in Rural Saskatchewan* (hereafter cited as Report No. 10), 50.

⁴ David Monod, “The End of Agrarianism: The Fight for Farm Parity in Alberta and Saskatchewan, 1935-1948,” *Labour/Le Travail* 16 (1985), 121; Voisey, 202; Jean Burnet, *Next-Year Country: A Study of Rural Social Organization in Alberta* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951), 69-70.

Table 5- Number of Persons Employed in Agriculture and Number of Tractors on Farms in Saskatchewan, 1941, 1946, 1951

Year	Number Employed in Agriculture	Percentage of 1941 Total	Tractors on Farms	Percentage of 1941 Total
1941	187 000	N/A	54 129	N/A
1946	164 000	87.7	71 596	132.3
1951	148 000	79.1	106 664	197.1

Participants in community forums recognized the threat that mechanization and depopulation presented to rural society, particularly to those who had not amassed the credit and capital to purchase equipment and land necessary to farm successfully in the mechanized age. For example, the brief presented by the town of Moosomin stated that

the larger farmer has the necessary finances and machinery to pick up land for sale, by paying all or nearly all cash, while the young person trying to start up has not the necessary finances to do this. Thus the big farms are getting bigger and the little ones are having a tough struggle to exist or expand into an economic farm unit⁵

Community briefs from Loreburn, Broderick, Abernathy, Gravelbourg, Assiniboia, and Kerrobert expressed similar concerns. Rather than admit that this trend was inevitable and agriculture was destined to be a way of life for fewer and fewer in Saskatchewan, forum participants, most of whom were farmers, put forth proposals that would allow people to keep their farms and succeed in the new agricultural context. For example, briefs submitted by the towns of Unity, Biggar, Kamsack, and Assiniboia recommended government promotion of cooperative farming as a way for young farmers to gain land and capital, and the town of Grenfell's community brief emphasized the money that

⁵ RCARL, *Report No. 5*, 10.

farmers could save by purchasing farm equipment cooperatively.⁶ In addition to recommending ways to ease the entrance of young people into farming, many communities recommended legislation that would prohibit or penalize large farms that hoarded land. For example, the community of Gravelbourg recommended that the provincial government tax all farms with a land value over a certain amount.⁷ In addition to proposing solutions to assist small farmers and limit large farms, many rural communities recommended an improved credit system, in which larger loan amounts were available to new farmers, and the provincial government kept interest rates at a manageable percentage.⁸ No community briefs advocated lowering the rural population by offering incentives for struggling farmers to transition into industrial work. Several provincial organizations that did not represent farmers but were still invited to “Provincial Problems” conferences made this suggestion, however. For example, briefs submitted by the Canadian Manufacturers Association, the Saskatchewan Board of Trade, and the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour recommended that the province work to create more industrial jobs and attract struggling farmers as employees in order to make the province competitive with other areas of the country, which were more industrialized.⁹ Farmers and other rural Saskatchewanians used community forums and briefs to make creative recommendations that would preserve farms and maintain agriculture as livelihoods for as many people as possible, while many agricultural and voluntary organizations were more concerned with improving Saskatchewan’s economy, regardless of the consequences to rural life. Rural people were aware of the changing

⁶ RCARL, *Report No. 5*, 136.

⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 5*, 137.

⁸ RCARL, *Report No. 3*, 85.

⁹ RCARL, *Report No. 7*, 121.

economics of agriculture, but unlike many organizations, they believed that it could still be economically feasible without a complete overhaul.

The commissioners correctly believed that farmers were aware of the need for economic reforms, but also assumed that they lacked the power and resources to undertake the developments that the RCARL believed were necessary.¹⁰ The RCARL's *Report No. 8: Agricultural Markets and Prices* stated that farmers had long ago realized that they could not achieve fair prices due to the chain of processing, distributing, and pricing that separated growers from consumers.¹¹ The past creation of cooperatives and farmer-run grain elevators showed the RCARL that farmers could adapt to economic challenges. Despite this, the report concluded that farmers could no longer improve their situation through specific revisions to rural society because the "solution...requires a much broader and more comprehensive program than that encompassed by marketing and price measures."¹² The RCARL believed that conditions had begun to change so rapidly that even if farmers wanted to adapt, they lacked the sophistication to do so.

The RCARL's *Report No 2: Mechanization and Farm Costs* came to similar conclusions. The report stated that mechanization would lead to a society in which those with skills and intelligence would "adjust to change, although they may adjust differently, depending on their ability and financial resources."¹³ In the opinion of the RCARL, however, most farmers were simply "buffeted about" by the changes caused by mechanization. Farmers needed state planning to survive in the changed environment, but the commissioners did not acknowledge the role that rural people could potentially

¹⁰ "Says 'Way of Life' Farming Now Becoming a Business," *Grenfell Sun*, 8 April 1954.

¹¹ RCARL, *Report No. 8: Agricultural Markets and Prices* (hereafter cited as Report No. 8), 1.

¹² RCARL, *Report No. 8*, 203.

¹³ RCARL, *Report No. 2*, 9.

have in improvement, despite the recommendations they made in forums and briefs. As the table below shows, some public proposals made in *Report No. 2* and *Report No. 8* were ignored or altered by the commissioners, while others, like the need for a wheat marketing board, appeared in both the public's and the RCARL's recommendations (see Table 6). Although the commissioners expressed a lack of confidence in the public's ability to understand issues and solutions relating to mechanization and agricultural prices, the public's proposals appeared reasonable and well-developed.

Table 6- Examples of Differences and Similarities Between Public Proposals and Final Recommendations in *Report No. 2* and *Report No. 8*

Public Proposal	RCARL Recommendation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardize replacement parts for farm equipment and pass a law that requires machinery manufacturers to supply dealers with a full line of such parts (Report 2: 113) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Study issue further in the future Reform equipment industry and distributing system as it now exists (specifics not given) (2:127)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More widely spaced but better equipped machinery repair centres (2:114) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No mention in <i>Report No. 2</i> Reorganize all rural services based on a model of consistent service centres throughout the province, rather than irregularly spaced rural towns (12: 139)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote the cooperative purchase of farm equipment (2: 115) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analyze the feasibility of the cooperative manufacturing and distributing of farm equipment (2: 127)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create provincial and national Wheat Marketing Boards in order to stabilize the price of wheat (8:193) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government of Canada be urged to establish the Canadian Wheat Board as the sole marketing agency for wheat, oats, barley, flax, and rye (8: 217)

Despite the fact that farmers put forth many proposals for changes to the rural society and economy, W.B. Baker continued to assume that many farmers lacked adaptive ability. In a 1954 speech to the Saskatoon Rotary Club, he dichotomized

sentimentality and science to divide Saskatchewan's history into two eras. He termed Saskatchewan's first fifty years as the "settlement era," which he associated with small farms and instability. He designated the second era as "technological change."

According to Baker, technology had increased productivity to the point that small farms were no longer viable. He argued that despite this, farmers who lacked the capital to expand their farms refused to withdraw from agriculture because of a sentimental attachment to "settlement era ideals." He stated that "even though the settlement era as a means of growth is practically dead, *it is very much alive in terms of both our prevailing farm size and in traditional attitudes towards the 'right size of farm'* [his emphasis]."¹⁴ He argued that changing farm sizes would alarm rural society, but that "this alarm may have greater support from our settlement ideals than from the hard economic and social facts of the mid-century."¹⁵ Baker implied that farmers' resistance to progress was due to an irrational attachment to the past, but as community forum results showed, participants were eager to make changes that would improve agriculture for small farmers.

Farmers contributed their views to RCARL through community forums, and organizations like the Saskatchewan Farmers Union (SFU) represented agriculture at the "Provincial Problems" conferences, which took place on 25 and 26 November 1952 in Regina and 28 and 29 November 1952 in Saskatoon.¹⁶ The "Provincial Problems" conferences were invitation-only and held before community forums. They served to provide leaders of voluntary and government organizations with an opportunity to work

¹⁴ SAB, RCARL Records. 1. Minutes, Staff Organizations, and General Policy Files, *Administration: Chairman's Addresses*, W.B. Baker, "Small Farm- Large Farm: Whither Bound in Saskatchewan," Address, Saskatoon Rotary Club, Saskatoon, SK, 15 March 1954.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Although I focus on the SFU's participation at the conference, the Saskatchewan Federation of Agriculture, the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, and several specialized farm organizations participated. For a list of participating organizations, see RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 115-117.

with the commissioners to shape general problem areas and development goals, and had none of the limitation that characterized community forums. Although many farmers that participated in community forums were members of the SFU, the Union's delegates used "Provincial Problems" conferences as an opportunity to increase the organization's political power and were more concerned with guarding their role in agriculture against the interference of outsiders than they were in the actual ideas and recommendations that other conference participants discussed. SFU delegate Bernice Norman:

I have no quarrel with [urban people] presenting their conclusions and theories but I do take exception to farm viewpoints being smothered by the neutralization process of the majority opinion...Surely when the rural people are the ones concerned and the ones who know by experience the situation and the discrepancies as they now exist, they should have some priority of expression. Obviously, people on the outside looking through dark-coloured glasses cannot possibly see the true picture. I, for one, am completely disgusted with outsiders presenting solutions for the farming population and cannot justify the arrangements on this particular commission.¹⁷

Norman also lamented the commissioners' decision to exclude SFU members from the initiating committees that organized and supervised community forums. The RCARL's appointment of Saskatchewan Wheat Pool members to initiating committees angered Norman because they only had "one specific interest- namely the pool." Norman believed that the SFU was more suited to the role because they focused on all agricultural problems, and thus had the capacity to see the issues in a way that the SWP could not.¹⁸

The SFU's brief to the RCARL focused on rural issues more than the delegates at "Provincial Problems" conferences, but it overlooked potential consequences that large-

¹⁷ SAB, RCARL Records. 5. Provincial Briefs and Hearings- General Policy, Conferences, Arrangements, etc., *Problems Conferences- Regina and Saskatoon*, Saskatchewan Farmers Union- Report on the Problems Conference of the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life held in Saskatoon on November 28th and 29th, 1952.

¹⁸ Ibid.

scale development would have on its membership.¹⁹ The brief writers were all high-ranking SFU members, and their conclusions mirrored Baker's belief that the 1950s was the dawn of a new agricultural era, and that the "old style of family farm" was no longer desirable.²⁰ The SFU brief predicted that as mechanization intensified, farms would fit into three categories: grain production in relatively dry areas, mixed farming and livestock in parkland areas, and intensive specialized areas associated with irrigation developed from the proposed South Saskatchewan River Dam (SSRD). Mechanization would continue to intensify, necessitating greater efficiency on farms; therefore, farmers who fell into the first category would have no choice but to shift to the third because the irrigation provided by the SSRD would be necessary to produce the large harvest needed for a profit. Spatial and social reorganization would be required, as those who farmed in dry areas would have to move to newly irrigated districts or leave the profession. The brief did not address the economic and social costs of relocation, saying only that "a marginal wheat producer could enjoy a higher standard of living by moving to such an area of intensive farming."²¹ The SFU's section on rural roads followed similar logic, suggesting that farmers could either move into towns or relocate along existing roads to gain better service.²² It was clear that the SFU's solutions sought the survival of the agricultural sector, but often at the expense of individual farmers.

¹⁹ The brief was written by Bernice Norman, SFU Women's President; Mary Greer, SFU Women's Director (District 1); Carl Goranson, SFU Second Vice President; and Ole Turnbull, SFU Director (District 11) and Brief Committee chairman.

²⁰ SAB, RCARL Records. 7. Provincial Briefs and Hearings, Special Hearings, etc., *Provincial Briefs*, Saskatchewan Farmers Union, 3.

²¹ Ibid.

²² SAB, RCARL Records. 7. Provincial Briefs and Hearings, Special Hearings, etc., *Provincial Briefs*, Saskatchewan Farmers Union, 5-6.

SFU President and RCARL commissioner J.L. Phelps released a minority report after the RCARL published their final reports. It was similar to the SFU brief, in that it proposed to strengthen the rural economy, but it did not consider the consequences that his ideas may have had for individual farmers. For example, Phelps criticized the other commissioners for accepting rural depopulation as inevitable. He argued that throughout the first half of the twentieth century, farmers and politicians had assumed that agriculture would always be an economic staple, and therefore they had not developed plans to sustain farming in an industrializing economy. He based his solution to depopulation on an argument common to high modernism, that progress would originate in state-designed industries and emanate outwards to “less developed” areas:

Saskatchewan’s industrial development program...should mean not only thriving and prosperous cities and towns that will afford job opportunities to an increasing population, but should also mean a thriving and prosperous agriculture capable of supporting many more people...A dense urban population will supply increasing market demand for a good many products including meats, vegetables and small fruits which can be produced profitably on smaller farms that presently operated in certain districts.²³

Phelps believed that agriculture should continue as a major part of Saskatchewan’s economy and society, but he assumed that industrial growth would save farms, not adjustments and policies suggested by farmers that focused on the internal structure of rural society. A growing industrial sector and expanding population would certainly have provided a greater market for Saskatchewan wheat, but recommendations proposed by farmers to limit farm sizes and improve credit options might have been effective in stemming the growth of large farms and rural depopulation. His

²³ SAB, RCARL Records. 1. Minutes, Staff Organization, and General Policy Files, *Correspondence of J.L. Phelps*, “Minority Report,” (22 March 1957), 10.

recommendation also ignored the challenges of diversifying agriculture and growing fruits and vegetables in a region suited to wheat growing. The importance that Phelps and other SFU leaders placed on industrialization pointed to an emerging division between rural residents, whom the commissioners believed were influenced by sentimentality, and provincial leaders who, even when they represented farmers, believed that industrialization and rural reorganization would dominate Saskatchewan's future.

In summary, participants in community forums, who were mainly farmers, proposed adjustments to rural land policies and credit opportunities as well as greater government support for cooperative farming as ways to strengthen rural society and stabilize the agricultural population. Provincial organizations, which had a larger role in the RCARL through "Provincial Problems" conferences and provincial briefs, often made recommendations that revolved around improving Saskatchewan's economy as quickly as possible, but which did not consider the security of individual farmers and rural people. While the commissioners did include some input from farmers in their final recommendations, particularly concerning an improved system of credit, they premised many of their recommendations on the inevitability of rural depopulation and the need to provide non-agricultural work for displaced rural people.²⁴ Even J.L. Phelps, who believed that the RCARL should pursue a way of increasing the farm population, ignored many of the recommendations made by farmers that would do just that. Farmers made up the majority of public participants in the RCARL, but their perspectives and suggestions rarely moved beyond community forum files, while the RCARL used input from organizations and specialists to shape Saskatchewan's future.

²⁴ RCARL, *Report No. 7*, 132.

2.2 Direct Democracy and Women in the RCARL

The commissioners controlled women's participation in the RCARL in two ways. Firstly, while they allowed women to make recommendations on any aspect of rural society in community forums, they also conducted a supplementary study, entitled the "Family Organization Study," that pursued women's input on stereotypically feminized issues such as home maintenance, cooking, and childcare – issues that community forums did not discuss.²⁵ Secondly, the RCARL solicited different types of input from different groups of women. The commissioners randomly selected women for the "Family Organization Study," which asked basic questions for statistical analysis and did not record individual voices. The commissioners then analyzed the statistical data gathered in the study and arrived at their own conclusions about how conditions within the rural home related to rural society. Following the random study, they sent a different survey, entitled "Homemaker Questionnaire", specifically to members of the Homemakers' Club of Saskatchewan (HCS), with questions that assumed these women had an understanding of the connection between economic and social trends and domestic conditions (see Table 7). Analyzing the different information gathering methods will demonstrate that the commissioners expected women affiliated with the HCS to be more knowledgeable about the province than those who were not.

²⁵ Of the 14 final reports published by the RCARL, Report No. 10 is the only one that does not feature any input from community forums or briefs in the section on public proposals for improvement. All of the proposals highlighted by the RCARL come from either provincial organizations (mainly women's organizations) or consultants.

Table 7- RCARL Interviews and Questionnaires Directed Towards Women

Name	Date	Distributed/ Returned	Recipients	Distribution Method
Family Org. Study	Summer 1953	160/160 (face to- face interviews)	Farm Wives	Random
Homemaker Questionnaire	June 1953	325/125	HCS members	HCS annual convention

In rural Saskatchewan in the 1950s, women usually maintained the home and often worked in town on a part-time basis, while men maintained the farm.²⁶ In the early twentieth century, women had tended crops and raised eggs and vegetables for family use in addition to their work within the home.²⁷ By mid-century, this had changed, as machinery had replaced much of the human labour on farms, meaning that one farmer (nearly always a man) and machinery produced what once required the work of the entire family to maintain.²⁸ For women, the family farm became less a locus of production, as farm families no longer needed extra labour. For families with small farms, the greatest necessity was increased capital to purchase equipment or land; so many rural women entered the paid workforce and spent less time on the farm.²⁹ This shift in production was common across rural North America in the 1950s, but the RCARL did not address it. For prosperous farm families in which women did not have to work outside the home, a capital-intensive rural economy meant the introduction of modern amenities like washing

²⁶ Julie Dorsch, “‘You Just Did What Had to be Done’: Life Histories of Four Saskatchewan ‘Farmers’ Wives’,” *“Other Voices”: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women*, eds. David De Brou & Aileen Moffatt (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center, 1995), 119.

²⁷ Candace Savage, *Foremothers: Personalities and Issues from the History of Women in Saskatchewan* (Saskatchewan: Government of Saskatchewan, 1975), ii; *Saskatchewan Women: 1905-1980* (Saskatchewan: Saskatchewan Labour Women’s Division, 1980), 21; RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 23-24.

²⁸ Although women were not routinely involved in farm work, in most families, they were still “on-call” if help was needed at certain busy times. See Dorsch, 123; RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 51.

²⁹ Deborah Fink, *Open Country, Iowa: Rural Women, Tradition, and Change*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1986), 3.

machines and, consequently, less domestic labour and increased free time for women. The RCARL focused on this shift, which few women in Saskatchewan likely experienced.³⁰ The RCARL did not address the fact that women spent less time on the farm for different reasons depending on their wealth, but it did assume that because most women no longer worked on the farm regularly, they would have a limited grasp of farm economics and other issues beyond the home.

The commissioners framed women as knowledgeable about domestic issues, but paid little attention to their views of rural society outside of the home, despite the fact that women in Saskatchewan had a long history of pursuing rural social reform and gender equality through women's groups.³¹ While many women did not have the opportunity to join such groups due to on-farm work commitments or the distance that they lived from the nearest community, the organizations were popular beginning in the early twentieth century. During that period, men formed groups like the SFU around economic inequalities in agriculture, but early women's groups usually organized around social and economic issues.³² The original aim of many groups was to gain women's suffrage and garner recognition for domestic work.³³ By the 1950s, the focus of women's groups had expanded to broader social issues and, for women who joined the SFU, concerns about the agricultural economy. A member of the West Weyburn Homemakers explained that

before automation, [...] women had little time for anything but running the home and helping with farm chores. Consequently, our bi-monthly

³⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 57.

³¹ Theresa Healy, "Engendering Resistance: Women Respond to Relief in Saskatoon," De Brou & Moffatt, 94-95.

³² Savage, iii; Dorsch, 129.

³³ Marlene Boocock, as quoted in *Saskatchewan Women*, 67.

meetings were limited mainly to improve our household efficiency and discussing ways to bring about such services as Baby clinics and tuberculin testing of cattle in our community. Quilt making and recipe exchanging as well as a chance to 'visit' were the backbone of those early meetings. However, the way of life has so changed that education is becoming more and more of prime importance and our club today is making every effort to bring a sound foundation of knowledge to our home and country.³⁴

Women had once used organizations to discuss local issues and increase efficiency in the home, but as their economic and social sphere expanded due to the need to work off the farm or an increase in free time, the focus of women's organizations expanded to provincial and national issues, both social and economic. For example, in 1953, the Regina Council of Women

conferr[ed] frequently with officials of the [provincial and federal] governments to promote welfare, education, and labour legislation. Through the years it petitioned governments for such things as separate courts for women, industrial homes for women, and appointments of women to the hospital and the library boards.³⁵

As domestic life changed, women became more active in community affairs and politics. Many organizations worked with the government to improve conditions. Women were aware of changes in rural society, and, based on the interest that women's organizations had in improving social services and working conditions, they would have had much to contribute to the RCARL.

Analyzing the "Family Organization Study" and the "Homemaker Questionnaire" will reveal the limitations that the RCARL placed upon women's participation and show how, as with farmers, the RCARL relied mostly on women with organizational affiliations to give more detailed, complex information on farm women's concerns. For

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Margaret Kesserling, as quoted in *Saskatchewan Women*, 69.

the “Family Organization Study,” the RCARL interviewed 160 women. In order to randomly select participants that accurately represented Saskatchewan’s diversity, the commissioners divided the province into four sections based on population trends between 1931 and 1951, which they believed were an accurate indicator of economic and social differences. The categories were extreme depopulation, moderate depopulation, stable population, and increased population. The commissioners selected forty women from townships that belonged to each category. Each interviewee belonged to a family with at least one child between ages six and eighteen. The RCARL gathered the information through interviews at the homes of participants. Interviewers worked from a sixty-five question survey that they read to the interviewee.³⁶

Most of the questions related to children and family, and none asked about changes in family structure over time, which is important because the bulk of *Report No. 10*, which focused on the rural family and domestic life, traced changes in the rural home throughout the twentieth century using census data and other statistics.³⁷ The interview did not ask about connections between services, economic instability, and the family. It was only concerned with the family as an individual unit, and about conditions within the home at the time of the interview. For example, the study asked twenty-one questions about what each respondent’s family did together, such as whether or not they went into town, whether or not they celebrated holidays, and how often they met with other relatives. These questions had the potential to tell much about how the economics of farming affected mobility and access to leisure time, but the commissioners chose to fit the information into their own limited categories of statistical analysis, rather than

³⁶ RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 154.

³⁷ For the complete list of questions, see RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 159-162.

include the voices of individual women in their conclusions. For example, the commissioners conducted a statistical analysis on questions surrounding family togetherness to arrive at an index that they called “Family Integration.” The commissioners described “Family Integration” as

a “wholeness” of family activity and thinking, a feeling of belonging or solidarity among family members...It means that family members know how to coordinate their activities, so that they can work and play together harmoniously. The concept includes the idea that there is a consistency among activities, beliefs, and attitudes of the family; they are all cut from the same cloth.³⁸

“Family Integration” was a broad concept based on not only the time that a family spent together, but also their psychological compatibility and the uniformity of their beliefs.

The commissioners acknowledged the difficulty of measuring such an abstract concept, but proceeded to condense the “Family Organization Study” from sixty-five questions to seven main items from which they measured “Family Integration” (see Table 8).³⁹ From these seven responses, the commissioners designed an index number that measured which families valued togetherness, with the highest score indicating the greatest family integration. Families living in extremely depopulated regions had the greatest integration, but because women were never asked why this was the case, the commissioners could only speculate:

Perhaps families in the moderately depopulated areas [with the lowest integration numbers] reflect a relatively greater state of social disruption in their communities as related to families in other areas; they may still be in the difficult process of adjustment. Even in the areas of extreme depopulation, family integration is greater perhaps because the remaining

³⁸ RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 66.

³⁹ RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 67.

families there have already made their adjustment to environmental conditions.⁴⁰

The commissioners approached women to provide them with data on the rural home, but rather than allow participants to explain why their families made certain decisions, the commissioners attempted to draw their own conclusions, and left the voices of individual women outside of their analysis.

A second example of the disconnection between women's input and the RCARL's conclusions from the "Family Organization Study" was evident in a section that asked women to reflect on who had authority over various family issues. The commissioners concluded that "in financial affairs generally, such as deciding to borrow money or even giving children their spending money, the father [still] tends to be highly influential."⁴¹ In two areas of decision-making – the planting of crops and the purchase of machinery – the survey results concluded that the husband was very influential. Of 160 families surveyed, 135 (84%) considered the husband most influential in crop-related decisions and 100 (62.5%) considered the husband influential in machinery purchase decisions. But in other areas, women perceived their husbands' authority as more limited. In 70 families (44%), the husband was the authority for borrowing, meaning that over half of the women interviewed reached such decisions alone or jointly.⁴² Upon close inspection of the survey data, the financial decision-making roles of men and women were much more varied than the commissioners acknowledged.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 74.

⁴² RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 73.

Table 8- Items Analyzed to Determine Family Integration

Item	Respondents Responding Positively (out of 160)
Whole family goes into town as a group	129
Stays together as a group when it gets to town	58
Family volunteers information on two or more activities it does as a group	109
Wife indicates pride in celebration of Christmas as a special <i>family</i> event	154
Other holidays also celebrated as <i>family</i> events	93
Special celebration for birthdays of children	120
Special celebration for birthdays of adults	65

When evaluating the degree to which decision-making in the farm home had changed, the commissioners placed little significance on which parent was responsible for caring for children. The survey data supported the conclusion that in most families, parents did not equally share in child rearing responsibilities. Only eighteen families (11%) reported that the husband, rather than the wife, gave children permission “to go somewhere,” while the husband disciplined children in only eight (5%) of the families. According to Julie Dorsch, a common misconception of rural societies was that stereotypical women’s work (maintaining the home, cooking, raising children) and men’s work (maintaining the farm, reaching financial decisions) were always separate. In most cases, however, women’s roles were quite flexible, as in addition to maintaining the home, women regularly assisted on the farm when needed, and, in the 1950s, often found wage work in rural communities, while men’s roles continued to revolve around

maintaining the farm.⁴³ The survey results on gender and family decision-making followed a similar logic. The RCARL measured gender-role flexibility based on the increased responsibility women had in making financial decisions, but did not consider if men's roles were becoming more fluid or demanding. What the RCARL did not consider was that women were taking on more responsibility around the home, in addition to an increase in off-farm work, while men continued to maintain the farm and became partners with other family members in financial decision-making. Without asking women for their view of this trend, the commissioners concluded that "whether one approves or not, the old type of family is gradually disappearing from Saskatchewan farms."⁴⁴

The "Homemaker Questionnaire" better addressed connections between family and rural society. RCARL officials distributed the eighteen-page questionnaire to HCS members in attendance at the organization's annual convention, held in Saskatoon in June 1953. The officials distributed 325 questionnaires, and 125 HCS members mailed them back, for a 38 percent response rate. Most of the women interviewed belonged to families with children living at home. The commissioners acknowledged that both the respondents and their husbands were more educated and wealthier than average based on the 1951 census (see Table 9). The commissioners justified distributing a more complex, detailed survey to the relatively well-off HCS members by reasoning that any problems reported by the respondents were likely experienced in an intensified form by the general

⁴³ Based on interviews with four Saskatchewan farm wives in the 1950s, Julie Dorsch states that "the oral evidence contradicts the usual division of labor that describes the farm wife as solely responsible for the nurture, maintenance, and reproduction of farm labor. [Women's] responses suggested another pattern: while women's labor might be flexible- women doing 'women's work' and 'men's work'- men's labor was not flexible. Except in the rarest of cases, men did not do 'women's work'." The data supports this claim, as "men's decisions" were often made jointly, while "women's decisions" dealing with children were not. See Dorsch, 123.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

rural population.⁴⁵ The commissioners also acknowledged that members of homemakers' clubs, because they usually had free time and access to resources about homemaking, were more skilled than the general population. Again, however, the commissioners did not see this as an obstacle to the validity of the survey, but rather that the respondents could represent a "yardstick" for what the average Saskatchewan homemaker should aim to become in the near future.

Table 9- Comparison of HCS Responses, 1953, with Saskatchewan Census Averages, 1951

Item Compared	HCS Data	Census Data
Average age	43	41
Average years of schooling	11	8
Average farm size (acres)	739	550
Average rooms in house	6	5
% with electricity	66	21
% with telephone	84	50
% with furnace	47	23
% with piped in water	22	6
% with power washing machine	96	60
% with gas or kerosene lamps	34	79

The "Homemaker Questionnaire" treated the home and family as components within a larger social context, as opposed to the "Family Organization Study," which asked specific questions about conditions within the home. The "Homemaker Questionnaire" asked about organizational affiliations within the family; how families spent money; the condition of the respondents' homes; and contact between the family

⁴⁵ RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 94.

and the community through questions about shopping, visiting, and listening to the radio. The questionnaire assumed that community connections existed, both physically and through the reception of information. However, like the “Family Organization Study,” it did not address change in the home. There were twenty-eight questions about the home, ranging from “how many clothes closets do you have?” to “what newspapers does your home receive?”, but none about whether or not the house had been improved, was in poor condition, or was in danger of being lost to creditors.⁴⁶

Although the commissioners offered members of the HCS an opportunity to address connections between the rural home and society that they did not offer to other women, neither the “Family Organization Study” nor the “Homemaker Questionnaire” addressed the evolution of rural society through mechanization and depopulation. Interestingly, the RCARL did not overlook the changing roles of farm women, but they drew on the knowledge of experts and ideas developed in American conferences to hypothesize about the connection between changes in society and the lives of rural women. For example, the commissioners cited a conference held at Michigan State College in 1955 at which participants suggested that rural women aged forty-five to sixty-five experienced feelings of frustration and uselessness as children left the home. The conference participants recommended that communities needed to devise ways to utilize the skills of these women, and that many local governments needed the abilities that “mature women have developed through the years – ability at developing human relationships and knowledge of education of children, health care, sanitation, community

⁴⁶ For the complete questionnaire, see RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 180-187.

housekeeping, and home management”.⁴⁷ The commissioners also cited author Pauline Trueblood, who coined the term “agathelian” as the vocation for a married woman. According to the commissioners, the term placed economic value on previously intangible characteristics of homemakers, namely “the ideas of mother, companion, sweetheart, homemaker, housewife, teacher, and creator of spiritual values.”⁴⁸ The commissioners cited another book – Warren Thompson’s *Population Problems* – in which he argued that in the near future, homemakers might receive a wage from the government as society recognized that their skills are as important as women who work outside of the home.⁴⁹ The commissioners addressed these issues separately from their discussion of the two RCARL surveys. They were willing to talk about the changing roles and increased capitalization of women’s work in general, but limited direct democracy by not discussing such issues with rural women.

In summary, even when the commissioners saw women as experts, their sphere of knowledge was within their homes and restricted to the present. Members of the Saskatchewan Homemakers’ Club participated in a more detailed questionnaire that conceived of the home as a component within a broad rural society, while other women selected to participate in the “Family Organization Study” were more limited in how they could conceive of the home. Although the RCARL tried to extend direct democracy to some women by soliciting their experiences about matters that were stereotypically feminine, the commissioners used their own assumptions and input from technical consultants and books to analyze the data that Saskatchewan women provided.

⁴⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 10*, 107.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

2.3 Public Criticism and the RCARL Response

The tension between the RCARL's intent to restructure rural society and the commissioners' efforts to involve the public in that process was clearest in disagreements that occurred between RCARL chairman W.B. Baker and several members of the public who were openly critical of the Commission. Most of the disagreements took place within the "Letters to the Editor" section of various Saskatchewan newspapers. Critics questioned if the RCARL cared about farm life, or if its emphasis on long-term planning overlooked negative impacts of development.

In an effort to be accountable to the public, Baker responded to letters to the editor that criticized the RCARL. This suggested that Baker was concerned about public opinion, but he often responded in a dismissive and condescending manner. The two most illuminating examples began with different criticisms, but resulted in Baker striking back at the writers and questioning their intelligence and intentions. In the first instance, D.L.W. Hood, editor of the *Hudson Bay Post*, a rural weekly newspaper representing Hudson Bay, a small town on the northeast fringe of agricultural land, published an editorial entitled "History Repeating Itself with CCF Appointed Royal Commission," which criticized the RCARL's recommendations regarding credit for young farmers. The article, written on 17 December 1953, argued that the commissioners were wrong to criticize the credit policies of the federal government. Instead, they should have criticized a CCF policy that denied farmers the opportunity to purchase Crown land in northern areas, which was stalling agricultural development on the land surrounding

Hudson Bay.⁵⁰ Hood also accused the RCARL of avoiding Hudson Bay and neighbouring Carrot River when organizing community forums, as residents of both towns would expect answers regarding the difficulty of purchasing Crown land. Hood's criticisms were significant. He questioned the CCF's commitment to growing agriculture, accused the RCARL of a bias towards CCF land settlement policies, and argued that the commissioners had denied Hudson Bay an opportunity to hold a community forum, therefore implying that the extension of direct democracy was conditional upon agreement with the RCARL and CCF.

Baker penned a response that criticized Hood's argument and questioned his character. Appearing in the *Post* on 28 January 1954, Baker's response both defended the RCARL in light of the specific criticisms that Hood had made, and attacked Hood's character and intelligence. Baker started by focusing on the criticisms. He adamantly stated that the RCARL was not critical of the federal government's credit policies, and accused Hood of taking comments that the commissioners had made out of context. In response to Hood's claim that the RCARL was afraid to visit Hudson Bay and other communities in the northeast, Baker shifted the blame onto community organizers:

In June and July of 1953 the Commission held extensive public hearings at Nipawin, Carrot River, Smoky Burn, Mistatim, Porcupine Plain, and Clemenceau after these communities had held community forums. May I also suggest that in April 1953 the Commission *requested* that a hearing be held at Hudson Bay in the month of June *but the local committee that sponsored the community forum did not reply* [his emphasis]...The residents of the Crown settlement projects may or may not agree with all the conclusions of the Commission when the report is made public, but

⁵⁰ "History Repeating Itself with CCF Appointed Royal Commission" *Hudson Bay Post*, 17 December 1953.

they will certainly not be able to accuse the Commission of side-stepping a complete knowledge of the local situation.⁵¹

Baker also responded to Hood's accusations that CCF leaders were controlling the RCARL. After first stating that such an accusation was so fraught with political bias that it was not worth his time to address it, he responded anyway, arguing the following:

If you object to the Commission's approach to its assignment, then you also object to a procedure which has made possible the active participation of thousands of Saskatchewan's farm people and our provincial organizations in a way that no other Commission has attempted. As chairman, I have insisted on the political neutrality of the Commission from the outset and shall continue to do so...I would go so far as to publicly commend the government, first for its courage in making possible an unbiased analysis of its programs as well as those of other agencies, and secondly because *it has quite definitely maintained a "hands off" policy* [his emphasis] in consistently refraining from directing the activities of the Commission.⁵²

Baker's responses to Hood's criticisms surrounding the RCARL's presence in the northeast and their objectivity were firm, but did not stray from the issues at hand.

Near the end of his response, Baker attempted to discredit Hood as both a newspaper editor and an informed citizen:

I regret very much that I should have to write a letter of this type to an editor of a Saskatchewan paper. I have and will continue to have a great respect for the important public service being rendered by the hard-working editors of our country weeklies. Your editorial does an injustice to them and to the citizens of your community. It is also the type of statement which discourages many citizens from taking responsibilities involving high standards of public service and personal sacrifice. If your practice should ever become general, then it would spell the end of the major virtue of our democratic way of life: *fair* and *honest* [his emphasis] criticism on the fascinating battleground of public policy.⁵³

⁵¹ "A Royal Commission Goes Kiting," *Hudson Bay Post*, 28 January 1954.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Without question, Baker, writing as the representative of an objective royal commission, allowed his personal views to taint what was an otherwise intelligent response to Hood's criticisms, suggesting that anyone who questioned the RCARL was subject not only to debate, but also personal attack.

Hood later published another letter that he wrote in response to Baker's allegations. He defended himself against the personal attack levied by Baker, and responded by accusing the RCARL of not being in touch with local opinions in the northeast, but rather serving only as a major public relations mouthpiece for the CCF:

Naturally the chairman is reciting what is distinctly a personal opinion when he makes the statement about whether the *Post* does an injustice to "the citizens of your community". If, however, it is a finding of the Commission, the *Post* would challenge the RCARL to provide the claim in one sure way – that of taking a plebiscite on it right up here in this community...The letter from the Commission is one more reminder of how scissor-like the ideas at bureaucratic level have become in this province. Who is he or who is the Commission to challenge the free expression of opinion of any editor on a personal basis such as the letter signed by the chairman of the RCARL [, which] lays down in mid stream against an individual hardworking editor of a weekly newspaper, who by the way too has been pretty close to agriculture and rural life in this province.⁵⁴

Hood identified the contradiction between Baker's claim that the RCARL was objective and his personal attack on the editor. Hood was at least one citizen who believed that the direct democracy promoted by the RCARL did not apply across the province, and based on his experience with the Commission, that feeling was justified.

A more striking exchange took place in the *Regina Leader-Post* in 1954. Piapot resident A.L. O'Farrell submitted a letter that was highly critical of the RCARL. She

⁵⁴ Ibid.

worried that the commissioners “appear to be conditioning farm people to accept the recommendations of the report.”⁵⁵ She also argued that

it was obvious from the [RCARL’s] beginning that a pattern of thought was being established by the commission in its explanations of what it proposed to do...[The commissioners] declare the pattern for things to come is cut for more centralization, more authority vested in favoured groups, and more “central planning”...It is being pointed out that the processes of democracy will be more completely removed from the people through the eventual establishment of such things as larger municipal units, central planning agencies, and boards. There is a growing belief that mechanization of the farm has been an excellent excuse for changing the form of things to come but that the change will be worse than the mechanization...One of the commission’s stated objectives was: “prepare a general blueprint or guide for communities, organizations, governments, and universities for the development of agriculture and rural life over the next quarter of a century.” But it is beginning to sound as though the blueprint will be for an expansion of the CCF party’s “Regina Manifesto”.⁵⁶

In a single letter, O’Farrell criticized the RCARL for ignoring rural people, using mechanization to justify (in O’Farrell’s view) negative changes to rural society, and cloaking an allegiance to the CCF in false objectivity. Two days later, Baker’s response defended the RCARL and questioned O’Farrell’s objectivity and intelligence:

Mrs. O’Farrell’s regrettable objective is to appear on the surface to say pleasant things about the commission but to not very subtly condition the reader for the conclusion that the commission is political. Her wildly speculative forecasts of the commission’s recommendations are the only predictions her own bias will permit...If presenting factual information which will help the public do some critical thinking about the commission’s report is “conditioning” then the commission pleads guilty. The commission’s purpose remains as it has from the beginning: to complete an immensely complex task as objectively as possible.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ A.L. O’Farrell, “The Pattern of Things to Come,” *Regina Leader-Post*, 28 April 1954.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ W.B. Baker, “Bias Indicated,” *Regina Leader-Post*, 1 May 1954.

Baker's response deflected O'Farrell's criticism back at her. He used similar language, accusing her of conditioning readers and being politically motivated. Not only did Baker emphasize the RCARL's objectivity, he described O'Farrell as irrational. His assumption that critical views of the RCARL were invalid was common to high modernism.⁵⁸ It was an effective way to silence critics without engaging in an exchange of ideas.

O'Farrell recognized Baker's implication that only the RCARL could objectively evaluate rural life. Her response, published one week later, typified how some residents saw their limited participation. She wrote that

[Baker] can't intimidate me with his insinuations that I lack intelligence and integrity; that I misconstrue and misinterpret in the interest of personal bias, and the information that I present lacks factual support. What *is* important is Professor Baker's own attitude towards anyone who dares to criticize his "untouchable" commission...He should realize he isn't just playing a game of paper dolls. It is our *lives* on the farm he is diddling with, and he should know how upsetting it can be not to be able to go forward with our plans because we don't know whether we're all to be moved out onto the highways, or raked into the towns, or just stay "put" until the commission's recommendations on what we're to have in the way of roads.⁵⁹

O'Farrell's comments point to the complexity of moving homes to the roadside or concentrating families in towns.⁶⁰ For example, O'Farrell lived near Piapot, a town in southwest Saskatchewan. Farming there was less productive than in other areas and population densities were low.⁶¹ Moving to the highway likely meant a move of several

⁵⁸ For an example of high modernism's dismissal of local concerns, see J.W. Wilson, *People in the Way: The Human Aspects of the Columbia River Project* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1973), 71.

⁵⁹ A.L. O'Farrell, "Farmer Viewpoint," *Regina Leader-Post*, 8 May 1954.

⁶⁰ The recommendations made by the RCARL illustrate the tension between high modernism and public input. They concluded that "rural communities [...] were deeply concerned about the movement of farm people out of agriculture and to village and town residence". Despite this, after the input of experts was taken into account, the Commission recommended "the encouragement of desirable movement out of agriculture into superior non-agricultural economic and social opportunities". See RCARL, *Report No. 7*, 122-134.

⁶¹ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 55.

miles, as well as constructing a new plumbing and electrical system. To the commissioners these changes were necessary for future prosperity, but they overlooked connections to specific places as well as the labour and costs required to move.

Although each debate lasted less than a month, they illustrated the tension between the commissioners' desire to involve the public and the limits that they placed on local input, particularly when it questioned the RCARL. The space for "constructive" participation was in forums and through briefs that the commissioners designed and evaluated. Such participation offered no chance for individuals to discuss the RCARL's structure or the tension between local input and the assumption that the province had to progress in a uniform manner. Both Hood and O'Farrell argued that the RCARL did not accept participation that deviated from their design.

In conclusion, involving the public in the RCARL was a complex and uneven process. Participation was on the commissioners' terms, and they opened the RCARL more to certain groups within the rural population. For example, farmers who were not affiliated with provincial organizations participated in community level events, in which their recommendations were included in the RCARL reports as public proposals, but often absent from the final recommendations. Organizations like the SFU represented farmers' interests in important aspects of the RCARL such as the "Provincial Problems" conference. Some of the SFU delegates at RCARL events were more concerned about their future political position than with questioning the benefits of rural change, and when preparing a brief, the SFU overlooked consequences that rural reorganization would have on small farms.

The commissioners were eager to involve rural women in the RCARL, but only acknowledged their domestic expertise. The commissioners used the growing responsibilities that women had in rural society to conclude that gender roles were becoming more fluid, but they did not consider that women continued to perform so-called women's work. The commissioners arrived at such misleading conclusions by controlling the extent to which women participated in community forums and through surveys and interviews. The RCARL solicited women's participation to describe to them conditions within their home, but women were not involved in interpreting the significance of the conditions, leaving the commissioners to speculation and the knowledge of specialists to draw conclusions about rural domestic life. Similarly to their treatment of farmers, the commissioners allowed women who were members of the HCS to provide greater insight about challenges surrounding rural domestic life, because the RCARL assumed that since affiliated women were the most knowledgeable, problems that they experienced must have been intensified for the other women.

When residents moved their participation beyond forums, the response from the RCARL was scathing. Considering that sanctioned methods of participation provided no opportunity for individuals to question the RCARL, Baker's aggressive reactions to criticism suggested that direct democracy could not bypass the commissioners' control. Accepting the RCARL's structure and philosophy allowed most residents to participate, but the public's lack of provincial influence meant that they could follow the path set by the RCARL, but could not lead with their own input or concerns.

3: ROADS AND MUNICIPAL REFORM: TENSION WITHIN THE RCARL REPORTS

The RCARL identified twelve major social and economic problems in rural Saskatchewan. They ranged from large-scale demographic changes such as rural depopulation to local issues such as access to electricity. Organizational and government leaders, described by the RCARL as “rural gatekeepers,” worked with the commissioners to define such issues. Next, the public provided their input as to which problems were most significant in their communities. The commissioners then consulted technical experts for recommendations about how to improve Saskatchewan and solve the previously identified problems. The RCARL culminated with the publication of fourteen final reports. Each one focused on a different issue and incorporated, to some degree, both local perspectives and technical input.

While previous chapters examined the tension between high modernism and direct democracy that was reflected in the RCARL’s structure and the role that different groups within the public played, this chapter will examine the tension between public and technical perspectives on a specific rural issue. I have chosen to analyze *Report No. 4: Rural Roads and Local Government* for several reasons. The development of a reliable road network was the issue most often raised by the public during the RCARL.¹ In many other reports, the public raised multiple and sometimes contradicting recommendations

¹ I based this conclusion on the frequency of each problem’s appearance in Community Briefs. See SAB, RCARL Records, 6. Community Briefs, Hearings, Report, etc. *Community Briefs*, “Subject Matter of Briefs”. Road issues were the most discussed problem at the Gravelbourg-Hodgeville pre-tests, which the Commission used to test the forum structure. See SAB, RCARL Records, 1. Minutes, Staff Organization, and General Policy Files. *Community Forum Pre-test: Gravelbourg-Hodgeville*, “Problems Listed by Sixteen Groups” (20 November 1952).

and solutions. However, in *Report No. 4*, nearly all of the participants agreed that road planning and construction were inadequate in their communities, and the solutions that the brief committees presented were relatively consistent throughout the province. This consistency makes *Report No. 4* appealing as a case study. The public's well-developed concerns and recommendations made on road planning provide an example of direct democracy as the RCARL hoped it would function. However, the commissioners' conclusions largely overlooked public perspectives.

The report explained that nearly all of the participants were aware of the inadequacy of rural roads and the mobility challenges, particularly in winter weather, that poor road quality presented. The commissioners assumed, however, that the public did not understand that the transportation deficiencies were a product of a broken municipal system, in which municipalities lacked the planning and technical knowledge to properly plan and build roads.² The public's solutions to road problems revolved around increasing financial and engineering support to the municipal officials who were responsible for road maintenance and planning. They did not identify the need to restructure municipal government. The commissioners argued that this was because they lacked the broad perspective needed to see the inadequacy of the present municipal system.³ James C. Scott explains that when local knowledge interacts with the state's administrative goals, it is often illegible to the state in its "raw form." In order for the state to fit local perspectives into their vision of the future, they must transform them into a legible, and often fictional, shorthand version that will support their interests.⁴ Such

² RCARL, *Report No. 4: Rural Roads and Local Government* (hereafter cited as *Report No. 4*), 264.

³ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 250.

⁴ Scott, 24.

alteration of local knowledge was evident in *Report No. 4*. Most public participants believed that road construction could be improved without abandoning the existing municipal structure. In order to fit the public's views into the plan for rural restructuring favoured by the RCARL, the commissioners fit the local concerns about roads into their agenda for municipal reorganization.⁵ Experts and technicians translated local knowledge into testimony that supported the restructuring of the existing rural municipal system into a series of large counties, even though the commissioners asked participants about roads, not municipal government.

The commissioners argued that the process of fitting public input into the CCF's agenda exemplified direct democracy in action, because it combined practical and technical knowledge to arrive at recommendations that would please everyone. The fact that the public almost never discussed rural municipal restructuring and that the final recommendations ignored road maintenance and planning that were important to public participants did not disturb the commissioners' depiction of the RCARL's direct democracy. *Report No. 4* showed that although the public used community forums and briefs to brainstorm a wide range of solutions to rural issues, the commissioners had the power to define the validity of public opinion to their vision for Saskatchewan's future.

3.1 The Public's Perspective of the Road Problem

Community forum participants were concerned with two issues surrounding the planning and construction of rural roads. Firstly, they believed that municipalities lacked adequate funds to design and build an efficient and durable road system. Secondly, they believed that the municipal leaders responsible for road planning lacked the technical

⁵ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 250.

knowledge necessary to decide on the proper road locations or construction strategies. In contrast, most participants focused on improving roads within the existing municipal structure.⁶ Contrary to the RCARL's claims that the public's recommendations were conservative, participants were open to reforming policies on taxation and municipal responsibility, as the upcoming analysis of community forum data will show. They did not address municipal reorganization because the RCARL did not present it as a topic for discussion.

The most reliable way to examine the views of rural participants is through the community forum data and the community briefs. As was discussed in the previous chapter, community forum participants divided themselves into groups of six and discussed five problems that they considered most pressing.⁷ The RCARL organized ninety-five forums, with an average of fourteen discussion groups in each. Analyzing every discussion group and every community brief is beyond the scope of this thesis. Therefore, my conclusions are based on community forum data and community briefs from several Saskatchewan towns.

Community forum groups submitted their recommendations in the form of a worksheet (see Figure 1). The initiating committees who led the forums provided all of the groups with the same worksheet – a single page that did not provide space for more than a short response to each section. Many of the responses were nearly illegible because groups had no choice but to write sideways on the margin or to use abbreviations

⁶ SAB, RCARL Records. 2. Community Forum and Hearing Files- General, *Community Forum Process*, W.B. Baker, "Some Thoughts on Community Forums".

⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 26-33.

so that they could fit a complete recommendation on the page, making elaboration and detailed responses nearly impossible.

Figure 1- Worksheet from Rosetown Community Forum

S-1 2.

Problem to be solved: Lack of good all weather roads.

Develop under the following headings a solution which your group believes could be implemented:

Statement of your Solution:
More main highways. More
Co-operation among the individual
and among the local and provincial
organizations and government.

What is the individual's responsibility, if any? To preserve
his own roads during Spring thaw.
Put up his own snow fences.

What is the responsibility, if any, of local organizations and government?
The responsibility lies on both
the local organizations and government.
They should work hand in hand.

What is the responsibility, if any, of provincial organizations and government?
The provincial government should
keep the highways in good shape.
Keep roads opened during winter

What is the responsibility, if any, of federal organizations and government?
The federal government should
put up some money towards
building or main-pave highway through
Dash.

Issues surrounding roads were among the top five problems discussed in all of the community forums analyzed. At each forum, several groups brainstormed solutions to

the road problem and recurring themes emerged. Nearly every group believed that rural residents needed to play a role in preserving roads by weeding and ridging roadside ditches adjacent to their property, forming snow removal clubs in the winter, and keeping trucks and equipment off wet or muddy roads. The willingness of all the participants to take responsibility for improving sections of rural roads indicated that, as James C. Scott explains, local communities constantly adapt to economic, social, or environmental trends.⁸ Their willingness to improve the existing road system signified an extension of direct democracy beyond the CCF's narrow definition of involvement in formal politics.

Based on an analysis of community briefs and hearings, most rural participants believed that the existing trend of municipally planned and maintained roads should continue, with increased technical and financial support from the provincial and federal government. Unity's brief suggested that the municipal council draft a comprehensive road-planning program in which roads would radiate from service centres out towards rural areas. Kindersley's brief elaborated on Unity's idea of a road-planning program by suggesting that the provincial government work closely with municipalities to provide assistance in planning roads. Nearly all of the communities emphasized the need for an increase in provincial grants to fund municipal road projects. Briefs from Central Butte, Carnduff, Loreburn, Senlac, and Stoughton all recommended that the provincial government should return a large portion of the province's gasoline tax to municipalities for investment in road construction. Other communities, such as Archerwill and Kerrobert, recommended that the province increase taxes on gasoline and distribute the excess revenue to municipalities. Some briefs also suggested that taxes be imposed on

⁸ Scott, 139.

liquor and large farm owners in order to provide more funding for road construction, but most recommendations for taxation revolved around fuel.⁹

Considerable interest surrounded an increase in individual responsibility over rural roads in order to reduce the financial pressure on local government. For example, 49 percent of all community briefs suggested that farmers should perform minor maintenance on roads that fronted their property.¹⁰ The brief submitted by the town of Kinistino explained that farmers in the area had organized road clubs, where the municipal government provided equipment, and local farmers used it to maintain roads.¹¹ Snowplow clubs were also popular recommendations in community forums. For example, the town of Shellbrook's community brief suggested that farmers should have to either join a local snowplow club or pay a tax specifically for snow removal service.¹²

Several communities and voluntary organizations suggested that multiple municipalities should cooperate in improving road conditions. For example, Estevan and Cut Knife proposed that several municipalities could cooperate to hire and share the services of a road-building engineer. The Saskatchewan Women's Cooperative Guild recommended the communal purchase and use of snow removal equipment, since it was not constantly in use in any one town.¹³ Many municipalities could not afford equipment and planning services because rural depopulation had severely lowered tax revenue. For example, Biggar's community brief stated that "the scarcity of population per road mile renders the cost [of road construction] prohibitive so that municipalities cannot raise

⁹ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 246-248.

¹⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 231.

¹¹ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 232.

¹² RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 231.

¹³ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 239-240.

sufficient funds for road building as desired without raising land taxes to too high an extent.”¹⁴ The growing need for all-weather roads to transport larger quantities of grain produced by increasingly efficient farms compounded the problem. Unity’s community brief explained that as rural population in the area declined, the need for roads grew, and the cost of new, technologically advanced road-building equipment had increased significantly from the cost of building roads in the early twentieth century, when residents created narrow dirt trails using horses and small scrapers.¹⁵

The willingness of communities to accept that the municipal structure was restricting the construction of road networks pointed toward an awareness that transcended local boundaries. For example, Eastend’s brief explained that residents understood the benefits of municipal reorganization, but that a previous attempt had failed because officials did not consult taxpayers. The writers of the brief were not necessarily opposed to reorganization, but wanted local people to be involved in the process.¹⁶ Public recommendations for inter-municipal cooperation on road issues contradicted the commissioners’ belief that participants could not see the larger problems inhibiting road construction. Their willingness to cooperate across municipal boundaries showed that rural people understood that a program for improving roads was more complex than simply begging the provincial and municipal government for more money.

However, informal municipal cooperation did not fit into the commissioners’ development agenda. As a result, they ignored the participants’ recommendations for increased cooperation among municipal governments and between local and provincial

¹⁴ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 16.

¹⁵ SAB, RCARL Records. 4. Individual Community Briefs and Hearings, *Brief by Unity Community Forum* (19 March 1953), 5.

¹⁶ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 240.

officials, as well as individual efforts to maintain existing roads because they disrupted the formal municipal boundaries that provincial officials used for taxation and gathering information. The commissioners included “Rural People’s Solutions” in a so-named section of the report, but they ignored these solutions when they drafted their own recommendations.

3.2 The RCARL’s Solution to the Road Problem

A desire to improve municipal services and democracy in rural areas motivated the RCARL to propose municipal reorganization. The commissioners were highly critical of the simplified nature of the existing municipal structure, which they believed had once served the needs of rural Saskatchewan. However, due to decreased population density and tax revenues, municipalities were no longer able to fund improvement projects.¹⁷ Moreover, citizen participation in municipal affairs was extremely low, if participation was defined, as the commissioners did, by voting frequency.

Commissioners also concluded that the municipal structure of rural Saskatchewan was weak precisely because so many residents had formed their own voluntary or road-maintenance organizations. This was despite the fact that participants believed such organizations strengthened municipalities. The Commissioners drew their own conclusions about municipal governance from public input on roads and did not verify these conclusions with public RCARL participants. Ironically, they excluded forum participants from the discussion on municipal reorganization in an attempt to impose a new structure that they believed would give rural people a stronger voice in the future,

¹⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 21.

even though rural people were already participating informally in order to make the existing structure work.

The commissioners had the best of intentions in recommending municipal reorganization. They recognized the limitations of the *Rural Municipality Act*, passed by the first provincial government in 1909. The act established uniform nine-township municipalities throughout the province. According to the commissioners, the uniformity did not account for varying population density and productivity in different areas of the province.¹⁸ In fact, the commissioners identified characteristics about the nine-township municipal system that were similar to James C. Scott's description of how high modern governments typically divide land. Scott explains that the uniform organization of state space functions to simplify land patterns that would be more complex if based on local conditions. Viewing the divisions on a map as straight lines based on previously determined boundaries allows the state a schematic view of the area from a distance. Had municipalities been divided based on population distribution or access to resources, the divisions would have been more logical from a local perspective, but would have inhibited the state's ability to make sense of them from a centralized vantage point.¹⁹ In criticizing the land policy of former provincial governments, the commissioners described the nine-township municipality in the following way:

[The existing organization of municipalities] is like taking a nine-township net and casting it out over the province. The taxable wealth and the population caught in this nine-township net varies almost by chance. Thus, some rural residents are fortunate enough to find they belong to a rural municipality with considerable wealth, while others find that for reasons over which they had no control, they belong to an impoverished municipal unit. Equality in resources among units can never be wholly

¹⁸ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 19.

¹⁹ Scott, 79.

attained of course. But gross inequities in resources can be eliminated by varying the size of the area, leaving further adjustments to such devices as the equalization grant.²⁰

The commissioners believed that in an effort to form municipal divisions quickly and inexpensively, the 1909 provincial government had not planned for the long-term emergence of local variations in wealth, population, and productive potential, all of which had become significant in the 1950s. This led to the development of a small number of wealthy municipalities with large tax bases, and many poor municipalities with limited population or tax revenue. The commissioners used this inequity as a justification to propose the reorganization of rural municipalities. Based on statistical data, they found that as districts grew in population, the increase in expenditure to maintain services expanded at a slower pace. Based on the analysis of land assessment and municipal expenditure statistics, the commissioners concluded that rural municipalities needed a population of at least 2500 to have a large enough tax base for fiscal sustainability.²¹

The commissioners also believed that the existing structure inhibited individuals' interest in local politics and democracy. The previous section showed that rural constituents were aware of the difficulties that municipalities had in funding infrastructure and were willing to approve major changes in provincial funding and technical support to rural government. However, the commissioners based local interest only on electoral participation. They found that half of all rural municipalities reported a voter turnout below 50 percent in recent elections, and that seven out of ten

²⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 74.

²¹ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 102-104.

municipalities reported instances of election by acclamation.²² These statistics suggested that rural interest was low, but did not explain why apathy had developed or how it had influenced local involvement in municipal government.

The commissioners were rightly concerned with the oversimplified nature of the existing rural municipal system. However, their critique was similarly oversimplified. The commissioners used low voter turnout to conclude that “widespread citizen apathy” characterized municipal politics.²³ Although voting is central to any democratic process, it is only one mechanism of involvement. Rural Saskatchewanians engaged with the local government through informal volunteerism, such as the previously discussed snowplow clubs and individual road-maintenance responsibilities. The small size of rural municipalities often led to a personal connection between citizens and political representatives, in which they discussed problems and ideas outside of formal, statistically definable meetings: “Municipal administration [in rural Saskatchewan] has been traditionally personal...because of the close relation between ratepayer and councillor [in isolated rural areas].”²⁴ By limiting their measure of democracy to voter turnout, the RCARL devalued other forms of interaction between rural people and local politicians.

The commissioners considered informal involvement in local politics as evidence that the municipal system was broken. For example, they argued that the willingness of rural residents to form snow removal clubs and other voluntary organizations indicated distrust of the municipal system. Although volunteerism may have provided limited

²² RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 114.

²³ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 256.

²⁴ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 82.

financial relief, they believed it was actually undemocratic and would have severely damaged municipalities in the long term by bypassing the formal municipal structure. The commissioners worried that such improvisation would “eventually destroy [rural municipalities], or, at best, create a chaotic situation which delays realization of an urgently needed all-weather rural road system.”²⁵ Rather than adapting the existing system, the RCARL believed, the only realistic solution to improve local democracy was through a completely new municipal structure.

The RCARL’s definition of democracy as a formal, state-organized political process contained an important high modern element. It depicted local democracy in both a limited and static form. Municipal elections occurred every two years, so the data did not account for informal democratic activities, such as speaking directly to a representative or the involvement of individuals in maintaining municipal infrastructure for the several hundred days between votes. Election results were an easy way for the state to measure political participation without speaking to individuals about rural municipal structure. High modern states often use maps or statistics selectively to draw conclusions that suit their development plans. Individual statistics represent the population at a specific point in time and provide very narrow data. Informal processes that are immeasurable through statistics, but which may account for deficiencies in formal data, are invisible to the state.²⁶ Such limitations are clear in the commissioners’ assessment of municipal democracy. The RCARL not only considered proposals for informal assistance to municipalities irrelevant to their evaluation of democracy, but used them as evidence that the official means of municipal politics were broken beyond repair.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Scott, 46.

The commissioners concluded that the only way to equalize rural services and create a politically active rural population was to overhaul the existing municipal structure and replace it with the same county system that Alberta had recently implemented. In the county system, several rural municipalities and rural school districts amalgamated to form a single administrative centre, which controlled all municipal affairs.²⁷ When the commissioners were drawing conclusions about Saskatchewan's future, they made assumptions that connected rural people's concern about roads to their own desire for larger municipalities. Within *Report No. 4*, the commissioners implied that rural people lacked the broad perspective to understand the importance of municipal reorganization.²⁸ Instead, the commissioners assigned themselves the task of translating local concerns about roads into a larger plan to destroy and alter what had been the foundation of rural democracy in Saskatchewan for almost fifty years.

In conclusion, the commissioners supported their recommendation to reorganize the municipal structure with several hundred pages that cited changes in farm sizes and disparities in land values, but no public insight about local government and democracy. The RCARL used statistical evidence from municipalities across the province to conclude that the existing municipal structure bred fiscal inequality and political apathy. They believed that "rural municipal government [was] a means to an end and not an end in itself, [therefore] it must be adapted to the service needs of a changing rural world."²⁹ However, the rural municipal system was not simply a means to an end from a local perspective. According to the commissioners, only 10 percent of community briefs

²⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 266.

²⁸ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 264.

²⁹ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 254.

mentioned municipal reorganization in any way. Report No. 4 stated that “the public emphatically registered its attitude that the problems of roads has reached the proportions of a crisis in the lives of rural people and indicated its willingness to support bold steps to overcome it.”³⁰ The community forum evidence supported the claim that the public worried about road planning and construction, but very few proposals involved destroying the municipal system. Through the direct democracy segment of the RCARL, participants recommended increased public involvement in municipal affairs as well as altered policies of taxation to enhance provincial and federal funding of municipalities. The public wanted to improve the road network, but because the RCARL’s high modern development perspective emphasized the importance of major changes, they did not seriously consider the fact that the public’s suggestions for moderate reforms were valid, and believed that improvement was impossible without complete municipal reorganization.

³⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 4*, 250.

4: EPILOGUE/CONCLUSION

4.1 Epilogue: A Program of Improvement

The previous chapters have examined the tension between direct democracy and high modernism that permeated the RCARL's process of gathering information from public participants. While the long-term impacts of the RCARL are beyond the scope of this thesis, I will conclude my analysis by examining the future role that the commissioners designed for various groups within rural society in the fourteenth and final report that they released. In *Report No. 14: A Program of Improvement*, the commissioners outlined a series of guides for rural improvement that they believed would transform the farm economy and enhance community development.¹ By enacting planning policies that would transform communities across the province at a similar pace, the commissioners believed that rural people would gain an appreciation for standardized social structures and become active in developing Saskatchewan in a so-called "rational" manner. The commissioners saw a place for rural people in their program of improvement, but only after specialists and government officials had educated them about the importance of development in a local and provincial context.² The future role that the commissioners envisioned for rural people was similar to their position within the RCARL, in which their participation was limited to discussing categories of improvement previously determined by specialists and government officials.

¹ "Guides for rural improvement" refers to the other thirteen final reports. The commissioners began using this term in Report No. 14.

² RCARL, *Report No. 14: A Program of Improvement* (hereafter referred to as Report No. 14), 73.

The most significant part of the final report was the section entitled “Rural Planning and Development”. Here the RCARL proposed methods for reorganizing society that would involve the public.³ As they had throughout the proceedings, the commissioners assumed that rural people had a limited understanding of conditions beyond their own communities. Before the public could participate in developing Saskatchewan, experts had to design an educational campaign about rural improvement and the connection between social and economic issues. Focusing on this section of the report allows me to demonstrate how the commissioners extended their attempts to control the involvement of the public in rural development beyond the RCARL.

Much of “Rural Planning and Development” focused on correcting what the commissioners considered a lack of cohesion among rural communities and groups across the province. The commissioners believed that one of the major reasons that agriculture was in a state of crisis was because rural people had failed to align local practices with broad trends toward modernization. They stated that instability in farming had occurred because “the agricultural industry is made up of thousands of individual farmers working without central direction.”⁴ The commissioners cited commentary from community forums as evidence that rural people had maintained too much of an inward focus:

The Commission has been impressed by the number of times that appreciation [from rural people] has been expressed for the opportunity to have someone give them the “big picture.” People have remarked that

³ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 63.

⁴ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 15-16.

they knew these changes were going on but they had “never tried to put them all together”.⁵

Rural municipalities and officials also maintained too narrow a focus, the report stated, and they failed to provide direction

primarily because their structure is not adapted to changed conditions. ...Unable to afford adequate staff and often addicted to divisional apportionment of funds, municipalities frequently suffer from ineffective administration. All in all, general ineffectiveness is destroying the rural municipality as the stronghold of democracy.⁶

The RCARL believed that they needed to introduce new methods of educating rural people and new democratic structures in order to enact the changes that they envisioned.

The commissioners were dissatisfied with the work of official bodies in educating the public. They believed that the federal government had failed rural people by not providing statistics for local analysis, focusing instead on regional analysis.⁷ The provincial government had also failed to inform rural people of overall social and economic trends.⁸ Similarly, the RCARL was very concerned with the limited role that the University of Saskatchewan had played in rural planning:

The university, as the primary agency of training and disinterested research, gives little evidence of serious interest in any great expansion of social science personnel and facilities. Under these circumstances it is little wonder that there should be failure on the part of the general public to recognize how social and economic analysis is related to the process of making decisions.⁹

⁵ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 76.

⁶ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 37.

⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 68.

⁸ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 67.

⁹ Ibid.

The commissioners believed that the university should take the lead in rural planning through research on social patterns and interactions in the rural community, though they downplayed the usefulness of the personal experiences of rural people in contributing to that analysis. The commissioners also worried that voluntary organizations representing rural people lacked the technical knowledge that similar organizations that represented industry and labour had to gather information necessary to make informed, objective funding and bargaining proposals. Instead, such organizations relied upon the federal government for information about the people whom they represented, which kept them from autonomously representing rural interests.¹⁰ Given these deficiencies, the RCARL urged government to take seriously its role in educating the people about the needs of rural society and the benefits of modernization.

The commissioners argued that “the most serious deficiency of rural planning and development is the lack of public understanding and direct participation”.¹¹ The RCARL emphasized that in the previous decades, provincial officials had not carried out planning democratically, and rural people had not had the opportunity to determine how their resources and communities would develop. The commissioners believed that rural planning had not been a “vertical process”, in which ideas originated with the public, then travelled upwards through “way stations” such as local government and regional agencies, eventually reaching the provincial and national levels, where experts would translate it from an idea into a policy. The existing model, which worried the commissioners, featured broad plans designed by government officials that were out of touch with the needs of rural people, and ideas conceived and implemented at the local

¹⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 68-69.

¹¹ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 69.

level that did not take into consideration the community's position within the province. Government agencies and the public were not cooperating, and as a result, democracy was absent from rural planning. Democracy and interdependence between the people and government agencies was a major theme only when the commissioners reviewed the public's role in rural planning. When analyzing other institutions, the commissioners focused only on the need for data and statistics, and made no mention of a lack of cooperation between institutions or deficient efforts to solicit input from the public.

As the key to their planning vision, the commissioners wanted government officials to educate people about the benefits of modernization and standardization so that they would no longer view society from a local perspective. Through education, rural people would gain the ability to participate in planning that would integrate the province, rather than perpetuate the disconnectedness that had previously characterized rural society. Only through education could direct democracy create a new society for rural Saskatchewan that embraced the ideals of high modernism. The commissioners identified several steps that they thought would improve rural planning, including tasks for the provincial government, local government, and University of Saskatchewan.

The main task that the RCARL assigned the provincial government was to establish a bureau of statistics. The bureau would study Saskatchewan's economy and society, and pass data on to provincial agencies, local governments, and community organizations.¹² More specifically, the RCARL recommended that the provincial government organize a "Provincial Conference on Rural Planning and Development." The conference was to bring together the "rural gatekeepers" of the province – leaders of

¹² RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 81.

voluntary organizations along with university representatives and provincial and local government officials. The structure would allow the invitees to hear about the RCARL's recommendations so that they could relay them to their membership or constituents.

The commissioners' recommendations for local government revolved entirely around reorganizing rural municipalities into a county system, which would centralize administration over infrastructure, education, and healthcare. The RCARL made no recommendations about how local government could better engage rural people or cooperate with provincial officials. They stated that "until the present confusion in the relationship between units of local government is clarified through the establishment of...a county system, a serious obstacle to integrated rural planning and development will persist".¹³ Rather than provide practical suggestions as to how municipal officials could work within the existing system, the commissioners considered it beyond repair.

In contrast to the limited role envisioned for local government, the commissioners had great plans for the University of Saskatchewan, which would serve a major development purpose through the establishment of a Department of Social Science (DSS) and a Centre for Community Studies (CCS). The DSS would include programs in sociology, social anthropology, social psychology, political science, and economics, which, combined, would solve "the most perplexing problems facing modern society".¹⁴ The RCARL emphasized the role that social sciences could play in improving rural democracy and creating a happy, prosperous society, while warning readers of the consequences if they ignored social sciences: "It would not be too far-fetched to state that the key to the survival of our democratic institutions might well rest on rapid advances in

¹³ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 82.

¹⁴ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 79.

social sciences”.¹⁵ The commissioners recognized the need to create a diverse, well-educated workforce, and that in addition to creating new social and political philosophies in Saskatchewan, more social science programs would produce adults who understood society and were capable of assuming leadership positions in the province.¹⁶

While the DSS would train individuals to make sense of society, the CCS would provide the space and funding for social scientists to study rural communities. The CCS would use the process of data gathering and analysis usually applied to economic and technological trends to learn about and standardize community development.¹⁷ The CCS was the strongest example of the commissioners’ efforts to combine high modernism with direct democracy. It was to focus on developing extensive knowledge on community structure as well as sociological research focusing on interactions between rural people. The RCARL believed that by helping individuals “find themselves” and their role in their community and province, the CCS would encourage rural people to “reassess their human and physical resources” and learn to “take positive action in rebuilding their communities”.¹⁸ They argued that it was vital that they “have more reliable facts on social and economic change [and] more reliable insights into the processes whereby people on their own initiative undertake to control and direct that change in the community laboratory”.¹⁹ Only by studying communities and understanding how they functioned could social scientists help to create an educated, involved rural populace.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 80.

¹⁷ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 76.

¹⁸ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 77.

¹⁹ RCARL, *Report No. 14*, 78.

In recommending approaches that would improve planning, the commissioners did not dedicate a section of their report to public input. Despite the commissioners' focus on learning about rural communities in order to better plan society and improve rural democracy, they did not envision a role that the public would play, aside from receiving education from specialists and eventually becoming more informed, active citizens. Much like the RCARL as a whole, the commissioners' vision for the future of Saskatchewan emphasized direct democracy and aimed to make Saskatchewan a better place for its residents. However, in both the RCARL and the guide for future improvement, the public was only peripherally involved, as the group where ideas began. In order for those ideas to become policy, specialists and government officials had to approve them. If a "rural gatekeeper" or specialist decided that a local idea was not beneficial to the province, they could modify or discard it. By studying rural society, the commissioners hoped that social scientists would be able to standardize community development so that an idea that worked for one community would work for all communities, therefore making the RCARL's vision of a vertical path for ideas a reality. The consequence of studying and standardizing communities, however, was that it removed diversity from the rural landscape and autonomy from rural people. The commissioners envisioned community study and standardization as a step towards public participation, but if the limited influence that ideas from community forums and briefs had on many of the RCARL's recommendations was any indication, the commissioners' efforts may have ultimately limited direct democracy.

In summary, *Report No. 14* reiterated the tension that existed throughout the RCARL. The commissioners reorganized their original recommendations for

improvement into categories that more accurately reflected the interconnectedness of many different areas of rural society. They believed that by doing so, problems that rural people proposed in one community would be applicable to many communities, therefore expanding the influence of rural people and encouraging democracy in rural areas. When designing ways to involve rural people in planning, the commissioners focused on standardizing development across the province so that people would be able to understand their place within the larger context and eventually contribute to the society envisioned by government officials and specialists.

4.2 Conclusion: A People's Commission?

In the 1950s, Saskatchewan was a province in transition. Mechanization was becoming a necessity in order to farm efficiently and profitably, and as a result, farmers needed to expand their holdings in order to produce sufficient crops to afford new equipment. The trend towards larger, mechanized farms meant that those with the money for additional land and equipment became more prosperous, while those with small farms often had little choice but to leave agriculture because they could not afford to expand. As a result, the rural population in Saskatchewan dropped considerably between the 1930s and 1951 (see Table 9). Rural municipal governments found themselves in an increasingly difficult situation, as tax revenues dropped and rural people relied on roads and social services to combat the increasing isolation that depopulation brought about.

Table 10- Rural Population in Saskatchewan: 1936, 1941, 1946, 1951

Year	Rural Population
1936	651 274
1941	600 846
1946	515 928
1951	461 047

In order to understand these problems in detail and improve rural society, Saskatchewan Premier T.C. Douglas appointed the Royal Commission on Agriculture and Rural Life (RCARL) on 31 October 1952. The RCARL's main purpose was to "investigate and make recommendations regarding the requirements for the maintenance of a sound farm economy and the improvement of social conditions and amenities in rural Saskatchewan".²⁰ In order to gather the information that they needed, the RCARL believed that they would have to utilize both practical knowledge, supplied by the people of rural Saskatchewan, and technical knowledge, provided by government officials, experts, and leaders of voluntary organizations. Using both sources served two purposes. Firstly, the commissioners believed that combining these perspectives would enhance the RCARL's ability to recommend state-of-the-art solutions to rural problems that would be practical and easy to implement. Secondly, involving both the public and experts would maximize non-government involvement in the RCARL and result in "the development of policies and programs which will be more likely to win democratic agreement".²¹ If the people were involved in determining the problems and thinking of the solutions, then, the RCARL opined, they were more likely to approve of the recommendations that flowed from such a process.

²⁰ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, v.

²¹ RCARL, *Report No. 1*, 13.

The RCARL contained several stages, some of which involved the public, some of which involved only leaders of government and voluntary organizations (which the commissioners called “rural gatekeepers”), and some of which did not include any public participation. At “Provincial Problems” conferences, “rural gatekeepers” worked closely with RCARL officials to define problem areas, an opportunity that the rest of the rural public did not receive. Ordinary rural people participated through community forums and briefs, in which they discussed how problems previously determined by the commissioners affected their lives, and proposed solutions. The commissioners placed limitations upon community level events, particularly around what problems participants discussed and how much detail they could provide. These limitations were absent in provincial briefs, where voluntary organizations and government agencies were able to discuss any problems that they believed affected their interests. Upon the conclusion of public participation, the commissioners spent several years researching statistical data, reviewing scholarly work on rural development in other areas, and consulting with specialists from across North America to translate the ideas proposed by the public into guidelines for rural improvement. While certain public recommendations appeared in the RCARL’s final guides, many of the ideas proposed in community forums and briefs for counteracting rural depopulation without restructuring rural society were absent.

In this thesis, I have argued that a tension existed between high modernism and direct democracy throughout the RCARL. High modernism is “a particularly sweeping vision of how the benefits of scientific and technical progress might be applied – usually through the state – in every field of human activity”.²² Direct democracy emphasizes the

²² Scott, 89-90.

participation of all citizens in determining government policy and planning. In many ways, the two philosophies were contradictory, as high modernism usually dismissed local views as sentimental and subjective, while direct democracy emphasized the participation of non-experts and the use of practical knowledge. The RCARL, however, attempted to combine the two philosophies because Douglas and the CCF believed that rural people needed to be involved in determining the direction of the province, but also that rural society was so out of touch with broad social and economic realities that a full-scale reorganization was necessary. As such, the RCARL included many opportunities for participation from both ordinary rural people, and leaders of government and voluntary organizations. However, the RCARL prioritized such participation; invitees to provincial level events had a role in defining rural problems, while community level participants worked within the limits previously set by RCARL officials and provincial level participants. Once they collected information from the public, the commissioners worked with technical specialists to determine the value of public input and decide if it would fit into their vision for rural improvement. The commissioners did include rural people in the information-gathering process, but their desire to create a broad plan of improvement resulted in a tension between their effort to include local perspectives and the need to create policies that were applicable to the entire province.

I have also examined the tension between high modernism and direct democracy in the RCARL from several angles. The previous experiences of the RCARL commissioners in Saskatchewan's agricultural community endeared them to the public as people familiar with the practical challenges of living and farming in rural Saskatchewan. However, with the exception of T.H. Bourassa, all of the commissioners were high-

ranking members of provincial voluntary organizations, which placed them in a position to see the province from a broad perspective that they believed many rural people lacked. The RCARL's structure allowed rural people the opportunity to participate in community level events, but provided greater freedom to "rural gatekeepers," who defined rural problems. Examining different groups within rural society – farmers, farmwomen, and individuals who disagreed with the RCARL and its mandate to improve rural society – showed how direct democracy varied across and within different groups of rural people. A detailed examination of *Report No. 4: Rural Roads and Local Government* illuminated the separation of the report into two distinct issues: problems with rural roads and the need for the restructuring of Saskatchewan's municipalities into a county system. The public, through community level events, contributed their opinions and recommendations for improving rural roads, most of which included increased financial and technical assistance from the provincial government to municipal officials. The commissioners, however, did not ask rural people about the need to reorganize the rural municipal structure, instead translating the public's concerns about roads into their broad argument that the present municipal system was broken beyond repair. *Report No. 4* provided the best example of the tension that existed between the public's ideas and the process through which they became official policy recommendations. In *Report No. 14: A Program of Improvement*, the commissioners extended the recommendations that they had made in the other reports into broad guide that would enhance democracy by creating a standardized society in which provincial leaders could apply local ideas and concerns throughout the province. The commissioners planned to have rural people play a major role in their ideal society, but when planning how they would transform Saskatchewan,

rural people did not have an active role. The RCARL considered them especially ignorant of the fact that society was a series of interconnected communities. At the time of the RCARL, the commissioners believed that rural people did not look beyond the borders of their towns. Although rural people could eventually play a role in planning Saskatchewan, specialists first had to educate them and standardize their communities so that connections were clearer and society was more cohesive

The RCARL's vision of a rural society that was both productive and democratic was present throughout the five-year process. Unfortunately, the broadly restructured economy and social structure that the RCARL believed was best for rural society did not fully match the public's recommendations, which they usually tailored towards moderate reforms within the existing social structure. Whether or not the RCARL was ultimately a successful exercise in direct democracy is debatable. The commissioners did structure the Commission so that rural people could discuss local problems with one another, which spurred an increased sense of self-determination in some rural communities. On the other hand, individual concerns and suggestions made in community forums and briefs were often absent from recommendations for future development. Including all suggestions was impractical, but the degree to which local opinions were either condensed, modified, or altogether discarded in the years between public participation and the RCARL's final report showed that although rural people did have a voice, the commissioners had the final say in planning Saskatchewan's future.

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