

Religious Guardians of the Peaceable Kingdom: Winnipeg's Key Social-Gospel Gatekeepers of Canada West

By Richard Sanders

With the ethnic cleansing of Indigenous peoples from the prairies and the arrival of the railway in the 1880s, Winnipeg's train station was the "Gateway to the West." By the onset of WWI, over a million newcomers had been moved in to settle western Canada.

While Canadian churches maintained their blissful silence about the imperial land grab, the mass confinement of Indians on reserves, and the cultural genocide imposed by Christian residential schools, they quickly created morally indignant narratives to decry the rapid influx of nonAngloSaxons. In reaction to these immigrants, who they considered inferior, some of Winnipeg's most prestigious clergymen took it upon themselves to become the civil-society "gatekeepers" of fortress Canada. These progressives were soon locked in a battle against the gate-crashing "aliens" who had penetrated the walls of their sacred Peaceable Kingdom.

With brave and heroic tales about the progressive spread of enlightened British culture across the untamed West, mainstream Protestant churches saw themselves as the vanguard of a grand imperial project called Canada. In waging their cultural war against First Nations, these self-appointed guardians of national security created popular myths about their valiant mission to protect Canada from savage attacks by religious, political and racial inferiours. Later, when confronted by unwanted immigrants with religious beliefs and political loyalties that competed with their own, AngloProtestants changed the sights of their xenophobic narratives and worked themselves into a new, moral frenzy.

To convey their collective panic, they filled a host of traditional cultural vessels—from sermons, college lectures, missionary tracts and other, more popular religious fictions, like novels—with cautionary tales about strangers. These narratives were like church bells sounding warning of an impending peril. East Europeans—seen as spiritually backward, unassimilable and politically radical—were seen as a worrisome new threat by respected gatekeepers of Canada's Christian civilisation.

In their propaganda war against unwanted foreigners, Winnipeg gatekeepers demonised a certain class of "enemy aliens." This was soon followed by their mass captivity in WWI-era, labour camps.

Invading the Kingdom

Between 1871 and 1911, Canada's prairie population grew by 1.3 million: 375,000 in Alberta, 492,000 in Saskatchewan and 430,000 in Manitoba.¹ Most settlers came west via Winnipeg on Canada's new railroad. They were largely Anglos, especially in Manitoba where 64% were British. While Germans and Scandinavians made up 15% of the total, Francophones were only 6%. During this preWWI spurt, the dominance of northwest Europeans began to decline. For example, the prairies' British population fell from 86% in 1901 to 77% in 1911.

During that same decade, east Europeans became far more visible on the prairies. Manitoba's Slavic community of Austro-Hungarians, Russians and Poles, almost quintupled from 12,760 in 1901, to 59,230 in 1911. This increased their presence from 5% to 13% of the total population.² Most of these Slavs were Ukrainian. About 170,000 of them had entered Canada between 1891 and 1914, with a record number of 22,000 arriving in 1913,³ on the very eve of WWI.

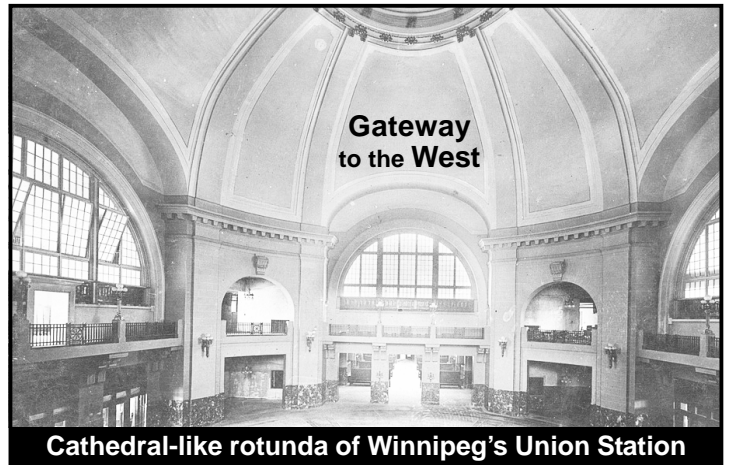
But gates are not just entry points, they are also exits for expelling the unwanted. While between 1903 and 1908 Canada deported 1,401 "undesirables," 1,748 were thrown out in 1909 alone. This followed an influx of aliens fleeing Czarist repression after the Russian revolution of 1905-1907. (See pp.36-39). This record number of deportations was not matched until 1914. During WWI, 5,943 were unceremoniously thrown from our gates.⁴

By war's end, Canada was engaged in "the deliberate and systematic deportation of agitators, activists and radicals," said historian Barbara Roberts. The "threat they posed was not to the people of Canada" but to "vested interests such as big business, exploitative employers, and a government acting on behalf of interest groups." Deportees included opponents of WWI and conscription, militant labour activists and radical socialists. The *excuse* for deporting them was often that, as indigents, they might need state assistance.⁵

Information Gateways

Winnipeg clergymen, Charles Gordon, J.S.Woodsworth and J.W.Sparling, were on the front line of a culture war to maintain the supremacy of Canada's AngloProtestant civilisation. Although they did not control the physical gates through which aliens entered and exited Canada's gates, these Social Gospellers did exert control over the flow of information about aliens.

Social Gospellers were gatekeepers in the sense invoked by Kurt Lewin, the Jewish-American father of social psychol-



ogy who fled Germany in 1933. In 1943, Lewin published his gatekeeping theory to explain how individuals controlled the flow of commodities and data within social systems. Interestingly, he was influenced by political scientist Harold Lasswell's 1920s research on the decision-making processes used to create WWI propaganda.

Lewin said that his gatekeeping model could be used to understand social organizations and newsrooms. Since then, scholars in many disciplines have developed Lewin's gatekeeping theory to analyse how data is filtered through various systems to construct social realities.⁶ As mass communications professors Pamela Shoemaker and Tim Vos have explained:

"Gatekeeping is the process of culling and crafting countless bits of information into the limited number of messages that reach people each day.... [It] determines not only which information is selected, but also what the content and nature of the messages, such as news, will be."⁷

Gatekeeping theory can explain how Social Gospellers used ethnocentric religious and political filters to select data about aliens that they then crafted into narratives to sway the minds of their parishioners, politicians and the public at large.

Rev. Charles Gordon, aka “Ralph Connor”

The leading populariser of the Social Gospel was best-selling author, Rev. Charles Gordon. His first three swashbuckling novels sold over five million copies. The “sole purpose” of his first book, he said, “was to awaken my church ... to the splendour of the mighty religious adventure being attempted by the missionary pioneers” in Canada’s west.⁸

Using the alias Ralph Connor, Gordon was “the most successful practitioner ... in the world” of a genre called “imperial adventure fiction.”⁹ His thirty novels also captured the spirit of so-called “Muscular Christianity,” a Victorian movement stressing a mix of pious athleticism with virile masculinity. It was hardcore Christian evangelism on imperial steroids.

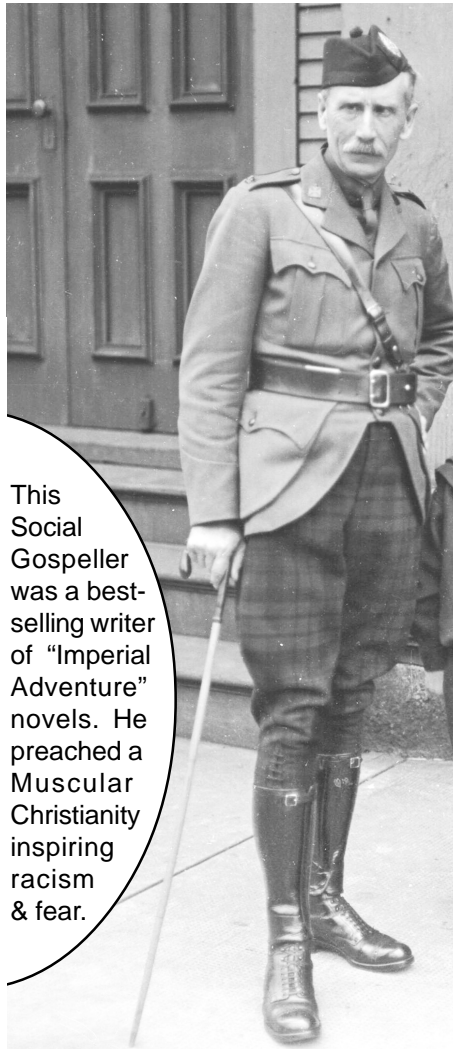
In *The Social Uplifters: Presbyterian Progressives and the Social Gospel in Canada*, Brian Fraser—a Church History professor at Vancouver’s School of Theology—praised Gordon as one of the “central figures in articulating and implementing a social Christianity.”¹⁰ What he does not explain is that Gordon used his literary pulpit to preach an ethnocentric xenophobia that spread fear and hatred.

An avid imperialist, Gordon transformed fictive Mounties—like Corporal Cameron—into graven macho images of biblical dimensions. Mounties were to be idolised for defending what Gordon called “the ‘pax Britannica’ ... of Her Majesty’s dominions in this far northwest reach of Empire.”¹¹ Gordon’s cartoonified cops, and their tough missionary helpmates, teamed up in novels about the Northwest Rebellion. In Gordon’s racist mind, the villain’s role was played by “thousands of savage Indians, utterly strange to any rule or law”¹² who were “thirsting for revenge upon the white man.” His narrative saw the “insatiable lust for glory formerly won in war” as the “fiery spirit of the red man, long subdued by those powers that represented the civilization of the white man.”¹³

Gordon’s words captured the image of the Métis as “ignorant, insignificant, half-tamed pioneers of civilization,” with their leader, that “blood-lusting,” “vain and empty-headed Riel” who stirred up

“horror unspeakable in the revival of that ancient savage spirit which had been so very materially softened and tamed by years of kindly, patient and firm control on the part of those who represented among them British law and civilization.”¹⁴

Gordon not only reflected the prevailing racism of his time, he promoted,



This Social Gospeller was a best-selling writer of “Imperial Adventure” novels. He preached a Muscular Christianity inspiring racism & fear.

shepherded and covered up the savage cruelty of those who saw themselves as being on the vanguard of a physically, culturally, morally and spiritually advanced race.

Gordon’s zeal for assimilation was channelled through a morality tale, *The Foreigner* (1908). His urgent plea for robust missionary action conjures up the dire threat of depraved Slavs who had penetrated Canada via Winnipeg’s gates. His allegory focuses on the rescue of what he calls “a poor, stupid, Galician [Ukrainian] woman with none too savoury a reputation.” Entering stage right, preparing to save the day, were the heroic churches:

“Many and generous were the philanthropies of Winnipeg, but as yet there was none that had to do with the dirt, disease and degradation that were too often found in the environment of the foreign people. There were many churches in the city rich in good work ... but there was not yet one whose special duty it was to confer and to report upon the unhappy and struggling and unsavoury foreigner within their city gate.”¹⁵

Gordon molded this book’s hero,

Brown, after himself, an AngloProtestant missionary trying to uplift aliens in Winnipeg’s North End. Gordon and Brown were both trapped by an overpowering obsession: to Canadianise and Christianise foreigners. As Brown put it, he wanted “to make them good Christians and good Canadians, which is the same thing.”¹⁶

Through Brown, Gordon articulated the common Canadian phobia that east Europeans could not be absorbed quickly enough into the vastly superior AngloProtestant culture. This process of moral and social absorption required “uplifting” inferior races and cultures with what are now commonly called “Canadian values.” As Brown saw it, east Europeans “here exist as an undigested foreign mass. They must be digested and absorbed into the body politic. They must be taught our ways of thinking and living, or it will be a mighty bad thing for us in Western Canada.”¹⁷

But the novel’s secondary hero—French—expressed the public doubt that Slavs could ever be instilled with the values of Canada’s advanced civilisation. Calling them “a score of dirty little Galicians,” he says “You go in and give them some of our Canadian ideas of living..., and before you know they are striking for higher wages and giving no end of trouble.”¹⁸

But Gordon was no mere novelising missionary, he was also a powerful mediator in “industrial disputes... on behalf of the Dominion government.” While working for the government to bridge conflicts between huge corporations and radical unions, he exchanged many cordial letters with the Liberal’s Labour Minister, MacKenzie King.¹⁹ Gordon also “counted national leaders such as Sir Wilfrid Laurier, Theodore Roosevelt, and Woodrow Wilson among his readers and friends.”²⁰

To Gordon, Canada was not only a faithful servant of British imperialism, it was also part of a divine empire of White nations led by God that was marching towards a glorious, global conquest. As he told thousands gathered at the national missionary congress in 1909, Canada was:

“part of a Greater Empire... that knows no boundary all round this great world, ... an Empire led on to the conquest of the world not by any human mind or by any human hand, but ... by the great God Himself. For this conquest Canada must gird herself now; and if ... Canada is not able to maintain those high traditions for godliness... Canada [will] fail of her destiny... [to] keep pace with the greater Anglo-Saxon nations who are marching on to evangelize the world.”²¹

Rev. James Shaver (J.S.) Woodsworth

Winnipeg was the setting for an activist minister named James Shaver (J.S.) Woodsworth (1874-1942). This Methodist Social Gopeller became the MP for Winnipeg North Centre (1921-1942), initially for the Independent Labour Party and then later for the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF). Woodsworth was a key founder and first leader of the CCF (1932-1942), which joined with the Canadian Labour Congress in 1961 to form the the NDP.

Many who still revere Woodsworth have no idea that before WWI, he led the way in fearmongering attacks against unwanted foreigners. In 1909, one year after Charles Gordon's novel, *The Foreigner*, Woodsworth released an utterly racist tome called *Strangers Within Our Gates*. Published by the Methodist Church's Missionary Society, it was one of Canada's most influential Social Gospel tracts. Rev. Charles Gordon loved it. "If you want to know something about Canada and the perils of Canada," Gordon told the huge crowd at Canada's 1909 Missionary Congress, "get that very excellent little book of Mr. Woodsworth's, *Strangers Within our Gates*,... and you will find it is full of instructive information."²²

Woodsworth opened his text with two Old Testament quotations that reveal a grave contradiction in the Social Gospel's approach to "strangers." The first passage exhorts people to treat the "stranger that sojourneth with you" as if he was a "homeborn" and to "love him as thyself" (much as Jesus is said to have urged "love thine enemy"). Woodsworth's second verse however is a rallying cry to absorb "strangers" and their children, into one's religion:

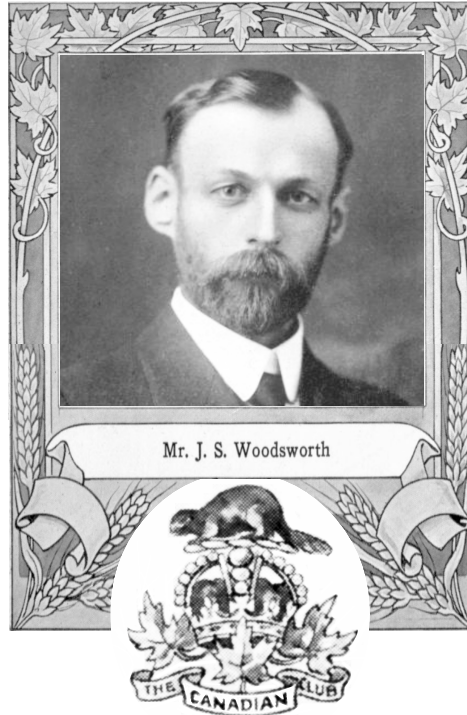
"Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God."²³

This schema of loving indoctrination was an ideological framework within which Woodsworth and other Social Gopellers saw their sacred mission to civilise nonbelievers. Bound by this holier-than-thou attitude, Canadian "gatekeepers" felt a pious duty to impose their religious belief systems on the aliens in their midst.

The preface to Woodsworth's treatise on assimilation, introduces the "problem" of foreigners by humbly stating that "this little book is an attempt to introduce the motley crowd of immigrants

to our Canadian people and bring before our young people some of the problems of population..."²⁴

The very title of Woodsworth's "little book" conjures up the image of Canada as a gated community threatened by troublesome outsiders. His virulence in expressing this phobia may surprise many progressives who still idolise Woodsworth as the ground-breaking leader of progres-



The Canadian elite's favourite socialist

In 1914, Rev. J.S. Woodsworth spoke on the "Immigrant Invasion" to Winnipeg's imperialist Canadian Club. Other speakers that year included Prime Minister Sir Robert Borden, Solicitor General Meighen, Minister of the Militia Maj. Gen. Hughes, wealthy businessmen and media tycoons.

sive Canadian politics. Despite all his achievements as activist, organiser, politician and architect of Canada's social democratic movement, Woodsworth held the same sort of racist and patronising attitudes of religious and cultural superiority that plagued those on Canada's extreme right.

For instance, Woodsworth's book *Strangers Within Our Gates*, included vile stereotypes of Indians. Whatever his reasoning, Indigenous peoples should never have been forced into the confines of his book on immigrants. The strange idea that Aboriginals are "foreign" to Canada was accepted within Woodsworth's church. In 1906, Canada's Methodist Church divided its Missionary Society into two departments: "home" and "foreign." The work

of Christianising, civilising and Canadianising native people was placed in the Methodist's *foreign-mission* department.²⁵

Woodsworth lumped "Indians" and "Negroes" into one chapter of his book because, he said, "they are so entirely different from the ordinary white population."²⁶ And, he segregated them from other "races" because of their "savagery."²⁷

One crucial fact that *does* tie these two peoples together, but which Woodsworth blindly left unmentioned, is that both endured centuries of state-sanctioned *slavery* at the hands of Canada's supposedly-civilised west European Christians. By forcing them into his book on alien strangers, and crudely black-listing them as "savages," Woodsworth added insult to a long-ignored historic injury.

In contrast to his disdain for Indians and Blacks, Woodsworth had the highest regard for Anglos. He considered the first English in North America to be "pilgrims" and colonists, *not* immigrants. "They came to an unexplored wilderness inhabited only by savages," he explained. "They had to create a civilization."²⁸

After hurling a variety of racist slurs at Blacks, Woodsworth happily noted that "We may be thankful that we have no 'negro problem' in Canada." He concluded with this hopeful note: "Many negroes are members of various Protestant churches, and are consistent Christians."²⁹

Woodsworth's hateful view of the so-called "Oriental Problem," revealed his dogged fixation on religion as a filter for judging aliens. Woodsworth's section on "Chinamen" relied on a 15-page excerpt from what he called "a splendid little book" by Rev. J.C. Speer, a missionary and Methodist Minister like himself. Speer's racist screed on "the heathenized nature of the Chinaman," declared that even "the baldest kind of congregational service in a Christian church" is "far above and beyond" Chinese "heathen worship." Speer decried "the Chinaman" as a "darkened heathen" and a "dark-minded heathen" who "bows down to demons."³⁰

Woodsworth also hurled vile insults at newcomers from the Middle East, calling them "one of the least desirable classes of our immigrants." The worst among them, he said, were Syrians who came mostly from "Mount Lebanon...which the Christian powers protect against the 'unspeakable Turk.'" As evidence, Woodsworth turned to J.D. Whelpley's *The Problem of the Immigrant* (1905) which calls Armenians and Syrians "a most undesirable

ble class” whose “intellectual level is low.” Woodsworth also cites another American, Dr. Allan McLaughlin, who wrote in 1905 that “these parasites from the near East” are a “distinct menace” who “lie most naturally and by preference.”³¹ (In 1908, McLaughlin was an US “colonial bureaucrat” in the Philippines but by 1918 he was the US Assistant Surgeon General.³²)

Perhaps the most slandered immigrants in Woodsworth’s overtly racist book, *Strangers Within Our Gates*, were east Europeans. He saw them as so politically inferior that he urged the Canadian government to “reform” matters by removing their right to vote. In his chapter on “Assimilation,” Woodsworth insulted Ukrainians by saying “the vote of one of these foreigners ‘kills’ the vote of the most intelligent Canadian!”³³ Continuing his anti-democratic polemic, Canada’s social-democrat crusader sermonised that:

“Peoples emerging from serfdom, accustomed to despotism, untrained in the principals of representative government, without patriotism...are utterly unfit to be trusted with the ballot... It is as absurd as it is dangerous to grant to every newly arrived immigrant the full privilege of citizenship.... The next reform should look to restriction rather than the extension of the franchise.”³⁴

Woodsworth’s policy proposal was ahead of its time. It was not until nine years later that the Wartime Elections Act “effectively disenfranchised most Ukrainians in Canada.”³⁵ Prime Minister Borden’s government was concerned that conscription, introduced in May 1917, would prove so unpopular that the Conservatives might lose the next election. So, all “enemy-aliens” naturalised after March 31, 1902, lost their right to vote, unless they had a close relative on active duty. Although the Act also disenfranchised pacifists and conscientious objectors, it extended the vote to women in the military, and to those with enlisted sons, husbands or brothers.³⁶ This was a victory for those “progressive” suffragettes who had long argued

“that they needed the vote...to help offset the detrimental effect which they claimed immigrants were having on prairie society. Women’s groups pushing for the vote argued that certainly they deserved the vote if ‘ignorant for-

eigners’ had it.”³⁷

Woodsworth excelled at propagating this image of “ignorant” east Europeans. Polish immigrants, he said, were “far from the best class. They are poor, illiterate, and with a code of morals none too high.”³⁸ As for Austrians (who were mostly Ukrainians) and Russians, he said the:

“majority [are] illiterate and superstitious; some of them bigoted fanatics, some of them poor, dumb, driven cattle, some intensely patriotic,...some anarchists—the sworn enemies alike of Church and State.”³⁹

Woodsworth’s section on Ukrainians was penned by journalist Arthur R. Ford of the *Winnipeg Telegram*. Ford, the son of Methodist Minister James Ford, described “how difficult the problem of



J.S. Woodsworth advocated political and religious assimilation.

Canada’s hero of social democracy and the Social Gospel said Ukrainians were “utterly unfit to be trusted with the ballot,” and urged “restriction rather than the extension of the franchise.”

Canadianizing” them could be. Warning that Ukrainians were “crowding to our shores,” he revealed “the cold fact” that 125,000 had already arrived, and that 40,000 were within Manitoba’s gates. He then remarked that Canadians had “so low an estimation” of them “that the word Galician is almost a term of reproach.” He also associated Ukrainians with violence and criminality by saying that their “unpronounceable names appear so often in police court news, [and] they figure so frequently in crimes of violence that they have created anything but a favourable impression.”⁴⁰

Calling Ukrainians “illiterate and ignorant,”⁴¹ he opined that “Centuries of poverty and oppression have, to some extent, animalized him. Drunk, he is quarrelsome and dangerous.”⁴²

In his book’s preface, Woodsworth said he “was glad to have had the co-operation of Mr. A.R. Ford.” The fact that Woodsworth thought it was appropriate to include Ford’s extremely bigoted slurs speaks volumes about his own beliefs.

A decade later, in 1919, Ford was writing anti-Red diatribes for *The Times*, a Toronto daily. Historian Michael Dupuis, in studying distorted news coverage of the Winnipeg General Strike, said Ford’s stories prove that “fact was often replaced by half-truths and false accusation.”⁴³

Interestingly, Ford, who became an Ottawa alderman and then the longtime editor of the *London Free Press*, fathered Robert Ford, the Liberal government’s longstanding ambassador to the USSR (1964-1980) and later, it’s Special Advisor on East-West Relations (1980-1984).⁴⁴

Woodsworth’s solutions to the immigration “problem” included:

- (1) Further restricting the immigration of non-white, non-English-speaking aliens,
- (2) Opening the gates to white Christians from the UK, Germany and Scandinavia,
- (3) Implementing better church- and state-run assimilation programs for nonAnglos who were already “within our gates,” and
- (4) Curtailing the civil and political rights, such as the right to vote, of certain immigrants who could not be trusted.

Woodsworth chose a mixture of metaphors used by eugenicists, militarists and empire loyalists to describe the most desirable filters for selecting immigrants:

“We need more of our own blood to assist us to maintain in Canada our British traditions and to mould the incoming armies of foreigners into loyal British subjects.”⁴⁵

Woodsworth’s choice of sources is instructive. All thirteen of his recommended books, which he said “proved helpful” in writing *Strangers Within Our Gates*, were by US authors. Most were of west European heritage and from a highly-privileged class. The first seven books promoted overtly racist stereotypes, praised eugenics, advocated Anglo-Saxon superiority, pushed US imperialism, and/or saluted the work of Protestant missionaries.⁴⁶

Five years later, just after the outbreak of WWI, Woodsworth addressed Winnipeg’s prestigious Canadian Club on “The Immigrant Invasion after the War: Are We Ready for it?” This was one of 16 lectures in 1914 that were attended, on average, by 430 of the city’s most powerful men. His talk came between speeches by

Solicitor General Arthur Meighen on WWI, and Prime Minister Borden on “Canada and the Empire.” Other speakers that year included the top brass from Canada’s ultraconservative military, banking and press establishments.⁴⁷ The fact that Woodsworth was warmly welcomed by this powerful circle, reveals his role as the Canadian elite’s favourite “socialist.”

No longer leading Winnipeg’s Methodist Mission, Woodsworth was then secretary of the Canadian Welfare League (1913-1916). The self-described purpose of this national, Winnipeg-based organisation was to confront “emergent social problems caused,” in part, by Canada’s “large and heterogeneous immigration.”⁴⁸

The Canadian Club introduced Woodsworth’s speech by saying that “the war had clearly revealed to us... [t]hat we had in our midst large numbers of undigested aliens who might cause a serious disturbance within our body politic.”⁴⁹

This phraseology, plagiarised Charles Gordon’s 1908 novel which had warned of “an undigested foreign mass” in “the body politic” that must be “absorbed...or it will be a mighty bad.”⁵⁰ (When Woodsworth gave his 1914 speech to the Canadian Club, Gordon—who had cofounded the club in 1904 and been its president, 1909-1910—was in Europe building a new career as Canada’s leading military chaplain.)

“The danger now to be guarded against,” began Woodsworth in his speech, “is that a sudden panic may lead us to take extreme positions and thus intensify and perpetuate racial bitterness and animosities.”⁵¹ Woodsworth must have known that just four months earlier, Canada had taken an “extreme position” by interning thousands of civilians in 12 slave-labour camps. Manitoba had two internment facilities, with one in downtown Winnipeg. Was this not “extreme” enough for Woodsworth?

Woodsworth then presented what he saw as extremely disturbing set of statistics. In 1901, he said, 57% of Canada’s 5.4 million inhabitants were British but of the 2.9 million that had been admitted since then only 38% were British. Of those allowed in since 1901, 27% were non-English speakers. Of these, two thirds were from south and eastern Europe. British immigration had decreased by 10% over the previous two years and the percent of non-English newcomers was rising. After listing 24 non-English nationalities pouring into Canada’s gates, Woodsworth asked:

“Mix these peoples together, and what

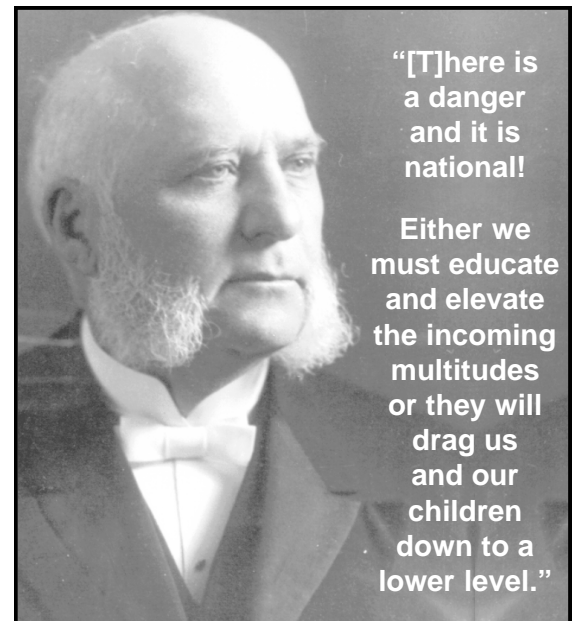
is the outcome? From the racial standpoint it is evident that we will not longer be British, probably no longer Anglo-Saxon. *From the standpoint of eugenics it is not at all clear that the highest results are to be obtained through the indiscriminate mixing of all sorts and conditions....* From the religious standpoint, what will be the outcome? For...most of our foreign immigrants do not belong to the churches which are... dominant in Canada. From the political standpoint it is evident that there will be very great changes and very serious dangers.”⁵² (Emphasis added.)

Besides basing his rabid xenophobia on ethnicity, politics and religion, Woodsworth’s racism was also tied to “eugenics.” This phobic pseudo-science sought to improve humankind—physically, culturally and morally—through selective breeding, sterilisation and segregation. In 1916, Woodsworth was promoting eugenics through his work as Director of the Bureau of Social Research (BSR). This government agency “actively campaigned for the segregation and sterilization of defectives.”⁵³ Although this arm of the Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba governments was created to deal with “mental defectives,” Woodsworth expanded its scope to target other so-called “community problems,” such as “Our Immigrants.”⁵⁴

The immigrants that most worried Woodsworth, and Canada’s prairie governments, were the Ukrainians. Woodsworth’s BSR report, *Ukrainian Rural Communities* (1917), contained some of the usual slurs against this ethnic group:

“[T]he immigrant is invariably laboring under the hypertrophy of racial, social, religious and mental traditions brought from the old country. This is only natural, but it does not facilitate social evolution. His marked racial physiognomy, temperament, habits and customs hinder him...from merging into the Canadian society....”⁵⁵

This section of Woodsworth’s report, although rife with assimilationist views, was not penned by an Anglo-Protestant. The author chosen by Woodsworth was Ivan Petrushevich, editor of the *Canadian Ruthenian*,⁵⁶ the official organ of Canada’s Ukrainian Catholic Church. Between 1911 and 1927, this paper was financed by Canada’s Catholic Bishops who were “solidly behind the Ukrainian eparch” in Canada, and supported its leader Bishop Nykyta Budka.⁵⁷ (See pp.41-42.)



“[T]here is a danger and it is national!

Either we must educate and elevate the incoming multitudes or they will drag us and our children down to a lower level.”

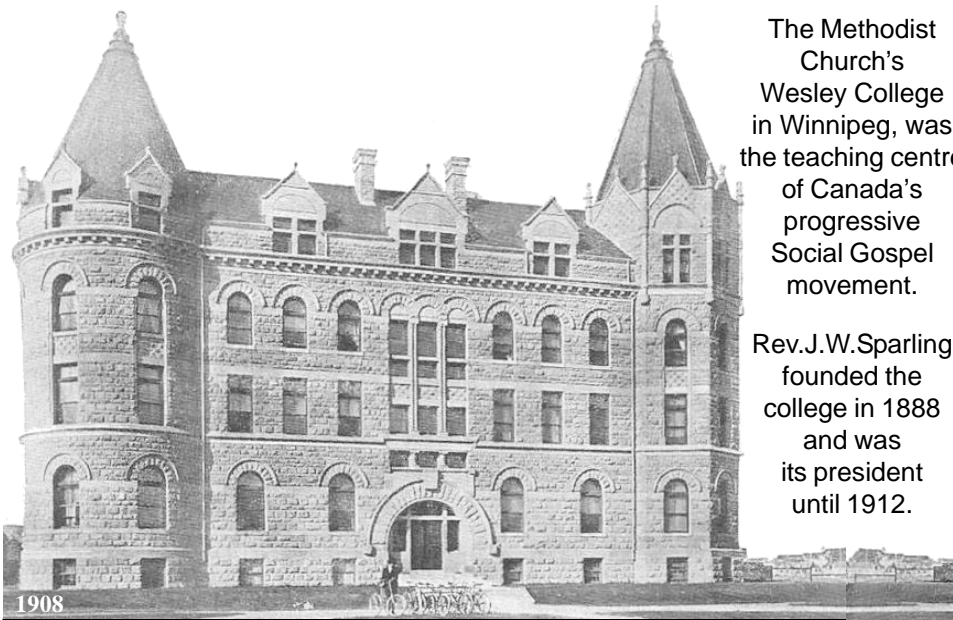
Rev. Joseph Sparling and Wesley College

The introduction to Woodsworth’s *Strangers Within Our Gates* was written by another prominent Social Gospel leader, Rev. Joseph W. Sparling. Like Woodsworth, Gordon, and *The Foreigner*’s hero, Sparling was also a clergyman. Best known as the founder of Winnipeg’s Wesley College, Sparling was its first principal from 1888 until his death in 1912.

This prestigious Methodist college, said Paul Phillips, a historian at St. Francis Xavier University, was “established as a major training centre for Social Gospelers.”⁵⁸ Richard Allen, a leading historian of Christian socialism, explained that “by the first decade of the new century,” Wesley College was, “if not the only, then the most vigorous source of the social gospel in Canada.”⁵⁹ Among Wesley’s famous graduates was J.S. Woodsworth, who received its bronze metal in “Mental and Moral Science” and was its “senior stick” (student president) when he graduated in 1896.⁶⁰

Wesley’s faculty included Canada’s pre-eminent Social Gospel leader, Rev. Salem Bland, who Sparling recruited in 1903. Bland taught at Wesley until 1917,⁶¹ when he was fired thanks to College chair and Winnipeg mayor, James Ashdown, who saw him as a fundraising liability.

Sparling’s introduction to *Strangers Within Our Gates*, is the entry point through which to understand its key message. Calling Winnipeg “the storm centre” of Canada’s immigration “problem,” Sparling framed Woodsworth’s book by saying: “Perhaps the largest and most important problem” is how “incoming tides of immigrants of various nationalities and dif-



The Methodist Church's Wesley College in Winnipeg, was the teaching centre of Canada's progressive Social Gospel movement.

Rev. J.W. Sparling founded the college in 1888 and was its president until 1912.

"We must see to it that the civilization and ideals of South Eastern Europe are not transplanted to and perpetuated on our virgin soil."

J.W. Sparling, Introduction to J.S. Woodsworth's *Strangers Within Our Gates* (1909)

ferent degrees of civilization may be assimilated and made worthy citizens."⁶²

In crying out his alarm, Sparling exclaimed: "[T]here is a danger and it is national! Either we must educate and elevate the incoming multitudes or they will drag us and our children down to a lower level." He made it clear which aliens posed the biggest threat to progress: "We must see to it that the civilization and ideals of South Eastern Europe are not transplanted to and perpetuated on our virgin soil."⁶³

Sparling concluded his fearmongering, warning knell about dangerous aliens by saying: "I fear that the Canadian churches have not yet been seized of the magnitude and import of this ever-growing problem." Having the principal of Wesley College ring out religious alarm bells from the ivory tower of Canada's Social Gospel movement was like shouting "Reds!" in a crowded church.

But Sparling was not all doom and gloom. His panicstricken entrée to Woodsworth's textbook urged "all our young people" to "read and ponder" its subject matter. "I can with confidence commend this pioneer Canadian work," said Sparling, "to the careful consideration of those who are desirous of understanding and grappling with this great national danger."⁶⁴

In his otherwise darkly ominous and foreboding opening to Woodsworth's primer, Sparling saw only one other positive light at the end of the tunnel. That light was a wealthy capitalist and Winnipeg's then-Mayor, J.H. Ashdown. (Ironically, five years after Sparling's death, Ashdown was

responsible for firing Wesley's most famed Social Gospeller, Salem Bland.) In what reads like a paid political ad, Sparling praised Mayor Ashdown for believing that the problem of assimilating foreigners was "vital and fundamental." He also lauded Ashdown as a "resident [of] the West for over forty years" who had "perhaps given more time, attention, and money to the working out of a solution of this question than any other layman in the West."⁶⁵

Although Sparling did not describe

Ashdown's "solution" to the immigration problem, he must have known that the millionaire mayor was rabidly averse to political radicals. This was public knowledge. Ashdown's "solution" included barring outspoken undesirables. In April 1908, just two months before Woodsworth wrote the preface to his book, Ashdown—the acclaimed "Merchant Prince of Winnipeg"—tried to stop "Red Emma" Goldman from speaking in their city. Born to a Jewish family in Russia, Goldman was a prolific US writer, lecturer and activist. She was also a philosopher, feminist, anarchist, unionist, atheist and an advocate for peace, civil rights, free speech and birth control.

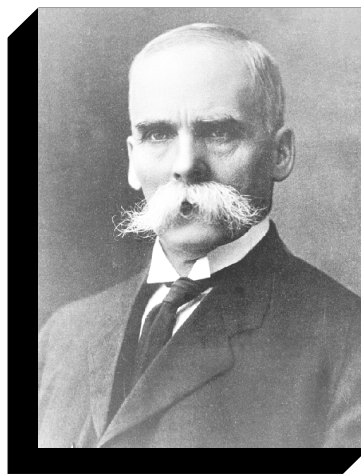
Goldman had already visited Winnipeg twice. Her 1907 lectures included "The Curse of Religion" and "Trades Unionism and the General Strike."⁶⁶ Wanting to abort a repeat performance, Ashdown wrote to Liberal Interior Minister Frank Oliver. (See below.) Ashdown explained:

"we have a very large foreign population in this City, it consists approximately of 15,000 Galicians, 11,000 Germans, 10,000 Jews, 2,000 Hungarians and 5,000 Russians and other Slavs and Bohemians. Many...have had trouble in their own country with their Governments and come to the new land to get away from it but have all the undesirable elements in their character that created the trouble for them before. They are just the right crowd for Emma Goldman or persons of her character to sow

Liberal Advances in Canada's Racist Gatekeeping

In 1911, Interior Minister Minister Frank Oliver bragged in Parliament that "The immigration policy of Canada"—for which he was responsible—was more "restricted, exclusive, and selective" than during any prior Conservative government.¹ Under Oliver's leadership, Canada restricted immigration from eastern Europe and barred almost all Asians and Blacks from entering the country's gates. His 1910 Immigration Act allowed authorities to stop "the landing in Canada of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada, or of immigrants of any specified class, occupation or character."²

Oliver's blatant racism also made him a good choice to serve as the Liberal government's Superintendent-General of



Indian Affairs (1905-1911). In the 1880s, Oliver had used his influence as founder, editor and owner of the daily *Edmonton Bulletin*, to force the starving Papaschase First Nation off their reserve in what is now south Edmonton.³ Oliver argued that "the land was needed for better men." The Papaschase Nation are still trying to get a fair settlement from Canada to repair this injustice.⁴

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seeds which are bound to cause most undesirable growths in the future.”⁶⁷

Some Winnipeg “NGOs” agreed. The Christian Women’s Temperance Union for instance, was fearful that Goldman would further radicalise immigrants.

The Interior Ministry also tried to stop the so-called “Apostle of Anarchy,” and her kind, from entering Canada’s gates. A 1908 memo to Minister Oliver from Superintendent of Immigration W.D.Scott, said Ashdown’s letter had asked “whether the law could not be amended in such a way as to keep such persons out.” Scott then suggested they “debar her on the ground of insanity.” Oliver however replied: “I am afraid that this is not sufficient warrant.” Goldman’s lectures in late 1908 attracted over 1,500 Winnipeggers.⁶⁸

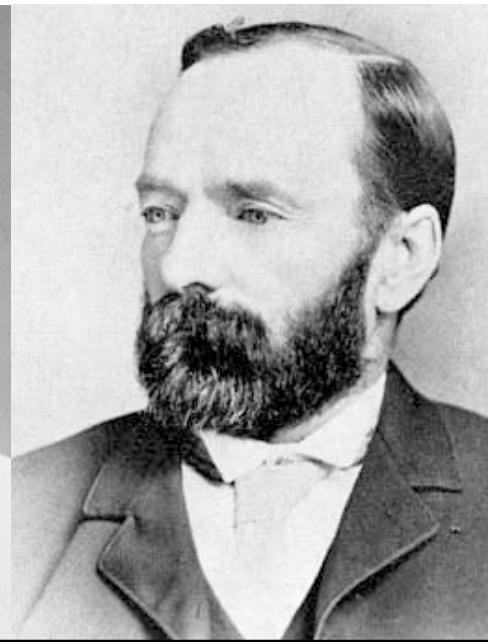
Allowing US anarchists, like Goldman, to enter Canada’s gates was also deplored by Boer-War veteran, Sir Sam Hughes. This bigoted imperialist, Methodist and Conservative MP (1892-1921) was the WWI Minister of Militia and Defence (1911-1916). “I would prefer a Hindu who has served the Empire in the armies of Great Britain,” he said in July 1908, to a “Yankee who has been an anarchist[and] crosses over to Canada, ...to disrupt the established laws.” Calling anarchists “a class of animals,” he said many were “not worthy the name of human beings.”⁶⁹ Although the government did not ban the entry of anarchists until 1910, many were deported using such pretexts as poverty.

Besides their deeply shared aversion to certain aliens, Sparling and Ashdown were both central to the Methodist Church’s Wesley College, Canada’s Social Gospel training centre. As its founding president, Sparling had known Ashdown from Wesley’s board of directors since its creation in 1888. Ashdown was the College’s bursar (1888-1890), vice-chairman (1890-1908) and chair (1908-1924).⁷⁰

Interestingly, during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919, said Norman Penner, “Ashdown’s hardware store... supplied ‘thousands’ of wagon spokes for clubs for the specials.”⁷¹ (The “specials” were an 1,800-man force of ruthless, paramilitary thugs hired by the city to attack strikers and protesters.) Later that year, Ashdown represented western Canadian wholesalers at the government’s National Industrial Conference in Ottawa. It brought together handpicked government-friendly representatives from large corporations, virulently antiCommunist labour unions and other captive, civil-society organisations.



“Red Emma” Goldman, an outspoken US anarcho-feminist atheist of Jewish heritage born in Russia, spoke five times in Winnipeg between 1907 and 1939.



“Merchant Prince of Winnipeg” Mayor J.H.Ashdown, who tried to prevent Emma from speaking there in 1908, was on the Board of Wesley College for 36 years.

Culpability: Stirring the Pot

It is worth chewing on Gordon’s trope that east Europeans were “an undigested foreign mass” to “be digested and absorbed into the body politic.” In the Social Gospel’s heyday (1880-1920), Canada’s national dish was a banal daily fare of ethnocentric pottage that was as bland and tasteless as it was racist. Spices were considered foreign and indigestible. The garlic of east European cookery was particularly unpalatable, and communists were the Red-hot chili peppers of politics, likely to provoke a revolting upheaval from within.

When Ottawa chefs added so many immigrants to the prairie’s simmering nativist pot, the result was a profound social dyspepsia. In their frenzy to dissolve these new ingredients into the Canadian stock, AngloProtestants stirred the cultural stew into a hateful froth of social frenzy. The mass phobia of mainstream culture saw east Europeans as distasteful rabble-rousers who, unless contained and absorbed, would spoil the tastefully civilised purity of Canada’s “Christian values.”

It was no wonder then that when the draconian War Measures Act of 1914 passed unanimously through Parliament, thousands of east Europeans were either deported without trial or sent into internal exile as slaves in Canada’s remote gulag of WWI “concentration camps.” This huge injustice occurred without any noticeable protest from AngloProtestant society.

Social Gospel leaders were not about to protest WWI internment. They had long been among Canada’s most outspoken xenophobes, conjuring up fear-mongeringly-hateful stereotypes of east Europeans. Woodsworth, Gordon, Sparling and other leading Social Gospel progressives, had long been ringing loud bells of warning to frame these unwanted aliens as a special threat to Canada. When WWI provided the pretext to remove “enemy aliens” from Canadian society, many Social Gospellers likely saw this as a religious, economic and political godsend, not an injustice. Similarly, the churches were not only key supporters of the genocidal program to concentrate Aboriginals on reserves, they worked as faithful agents of the state to administer residential schools.

Canadian chauvinism became a national prisonhouse—if not a mental asylum—whose inmates were truly committed to their national cult. Although trapped by the seductive allure of elitist AngloProtestant institutions, and shackled by their collective narcissism, prisoners of the Canada Syndrome were committed to spreading the mass delusion that they were free. Dedicating themselves to building the very institutions and narratives that had *metaphorically* captured them, those faithful to the official myth of Canadian exceptionalism were duty bound to accept if not run national programs that *literally* imprisoned the enemies of both church and state.

Social Gospellers not only reflected the religious and political bigotries that panicked Canada's civil society, they were influential social gatekeepers whose narratives greatly influenced the mass psychosis of fear and loathing that spread throughout the AngloProtestant mainstream.

By selecting, filtering and interpreting stories about unwanted "strangers," from a variety of intolerant sources, Social Gospel gatekeepers created convincing narratives to rationalise, promote, shape and prolong the chauvinism that dominated Canadian society. By shepherding mainstream suspicions of foreigners into a virulent xenophobia, Canada's Social Gospellers went far beyond serving as wardens and guardians fixated on watching the nation's gates. These well-meaning, progressives became hardened cultural warriors whose powerfully eloquent narratives aided and abetted the mass physical captivity of aliens, as well as the ideological captivity of the Peaceable Kingdom's dominant AngloProtestant society.

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