

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.

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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.

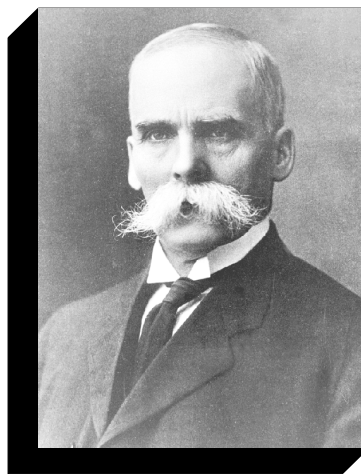
Goldman had already visited Winnipeg twice. Her 1907 lectures included "The Curse of Religion" and "Trades Unionism and the General Strike."⁶⁶ Wanting to abort a repeat performance, Ashdown wrote to Liberal Interior Minister Frank Oliver. (See below.) Ashdown explained:

"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

References

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