

Foreword

There is significant historical precedent for the excellent work Wayne Northey has done and is doing with regard to justice in Canada. Describing some of that past briefly may be helpful in recognizing the long history in Saskatchewan/Canada of examining justice in its many forms.¹

The deep depression and the devastating drought in Saskatchewan and Alberta in the 1930s were events that mobilized the populace to explore ways of addressing the problems that undermined the wellbeing of all. In 1937, 66% of the population of Saskatchewan was on “relief” (now called “social assistance.”)

One initiative was in the area of agriculture. Marketing of wheat and other grains had in fact been a problem long before the 1930s. In 1926, the Farmers’ Union of Canada and the Saskatchewan Grain Growers’ Association merged and gained great influence in the late 1930s. The Saskatchewan Wheat Pool was formed in 1923.

Another movement was the Social Gospel² movement. The Social Gospel was an initiative to apply Christian principles to the collective ills of an industrializing society, and was a major force in Canadian religious, social and political life from the 1890s through the 1930s.

The third movement was in labour. The Canadian Labour Union, established in 1873 on the initiative of the Toronto Trades Assembly was major.

The agencies mentioned were important in the three main movements, but were not the only initiatives.

The CCF (Cooperative Commonwealth Federation) was founded in 1932 in Calgary by a number of socialist, agrarian, cooperative and labour groups (such as the above), and the League of Social Reconstruction. The CCF was the political movement that emerged. Tommy Douglas,³ a Baptist minister with a congregation in Weyburn, had been involved in the socialist movements since the early 1930s. In 1944 he became the Premier of Saskatchewan as leader of the CCF.

Its platform addressed the whole range of justice matters, including financial, health, social, and criminal. Douglas is most prominently known across Canada for his initiatives in health, but they included the whole range of issues related to the wellbeing of Saskatchewan — and beyond.

His government reformed the criminal justice system to the extent possible under the federal criminal code. Administration of “justice” was a provincial matter, so he could — and did — do a lot.

His government moved as well the perception of the criminal justice system as one based on retribution, to one of addressing issues of offending as social problems needing rehabilitation. As a result, the CCF shifted incarceration away from being run by the criminal justice system, to one led by the Department of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation.

When Florence and I first began our careers in social services, we joined the Department of Social Welfare and Rehabilitation, with positions in Saskatoon in 1954. The Department was

¹ In the “Introduction,” Ron Dart as well presents a brief, Western wide-angle historical perspective on justice.

² See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Gospel.

³ His government also introduced the continent’s first single-payer, universal health care program. (See: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommy_Douglas, accessed September 11, 2024.) That has perished.

In a national TV contest, conducted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) in 2004, Tommy Douglas was crowned “Greatest Canadian” by viewers in an online vote.

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involved in family and child welfare, social assistance (which was based on a cost-of-living assessment), and Corrections. The first probation officers, one in Saskatoon and one in Regina, were established at that time. In the prisons, now called "Correctional Centres," the objective was to assist the offenders in changing their behaviours, and living crime-free in the community.

As a result, social group workers were engaged to assist the offenders in developing healthy pro-social relationships. Other social workers sought to assist the offenders in their psycho-social life through therapeutic interventions. The custodial staff were separate from the above initiatives, but did have training to assist them in reformulating their attitudes in the direction of embracing rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders back into the community.

The Directors of the prisons were professional social workers with Masters degrees. The Central office staff included a forensic psychiatrist as well as professionals in the human services.

When I became Director of Corrections in Saskatchewan in 1967 (among other responsibilities), the above was the context in which we operated.

This era in Saskatchewan needs to be recognized as successful precursor to what is now seen as restorative/transformational justice.

In 1972, I moved on to the University of Regina to develop degrees in social work with Harvey Stalwick, and we developed the Human Justice degree program in 1975.

Tragically, in the 1980s, Grant Divine was elected Premier, and promptly shifted enlightened criminal justice initiatives back to a traditionally punitive model. When the New Democratic Party (NDP) — heir of the CCF — again regained power in the 1990s, it was not possible to recover such earlier non-punitive, transformational initiatives.

Many of the developments referred to above, actually have a profound history of their own.

The very extensive work now reflected in Northey's four tomes thus far, is deeply encouraging. It points to a restorative/transformational vision for society in criminal justice.

Ideally, one of today's political parties might again adopt a similar vision as part of their platform, and once more provide political leadership towards reformation/transformation of society's response to crime, as Tommy Douglas and the CCF did in the 1940s.

This at minimum is what Northey is calling for — *and more!* — in these following pages.

— Otto Driedger,⁴ Professor emeritus of Social Work and Human Justice, University of Saskatchewan

Reference

Schulz, Donna. "Making the best of a bad situation (<https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/making-best-bad-situation>), accessed September 11, 2024)," | Volume 25 Issue 22, October 20, 2021.

⁴ Please see: Schulz, "Making the best."