

# Single Tax, Socialism and the Independent Labour Party of Manitoba

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[See table of contents](#)

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# *Single Tax, Socialism and the Independent Labour Party of Manitoba:*

## *The Political Ideas of F.J. Dixon and S.J. Farmer*

Allen Mills

AFTER 1870 the governing classes of Manitoba were involved in constructing a new hegemonic order. Because the native traditions of the province were rejected, politics in the first half-century of Manitoba's existence was an exercise in putting in place the institutions of a new society. The immigrants from southern Ontario that laid out the design of Manitoba's new civic culture lacked neither the self-confidence nor sense of historic mission necessary to such a task. Later immigrants after 1896, although embodying a different class perspective, also contributed to this mood of ebullience and utopianism. Victorian liberals, socialists, and labourites came from Britain, and socialists, Marxists, and Bundists from the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Czarist Russia. Nor were these the only fruits of radicalism that flourished in the province. There were also social gospelers, single taxers, free traders, co-operators, feminists, and others. By 1910 Manitoba, and Winnipeg especially, was a variegated garden of exciting and sometimes extravagantly radical ideas, which in the next ten years helped turn the province into a centre of agitation unparalleled in Canada. In the early 1920s, after the dust had settled, the inheritance of pre-war urban radicalism, in its democratic aspects, had come to reside almost completely with the Independent Labour Party of Manitoba.

The Independent Labour Party of Manitoba was founded in November 1920, principally by the efforts of F.J. Dixon and S.J. Farmer.<sup>1</sup> Dixon was the party's first legislative leader in the provincial house until his retirement in 1923, and Farmer was the party's first candidate for the mayoralty of Winnipeg in 1920, an office he was successfully elected to in 1923 and 1924. Farmer was as well elected to the provincial house in 1922 and he held his seat until he retired in 1949. Dixon's and Farmer's role in the evolution of the province's

<sup>1</sup> I am grateful to Judge Roy St. George Stubbs for his recollections of Dixon and Mobius. His own biographical sketch of Dixon is to be found in his *Prairie Portraits* (Toronto 1954). I am also indebted to the late John Farmer for his description of his father's early life, and to A.R. McCormack and Duncan Irvine for their helpful comments.

and the nation's labour and socialist politics was evidently of some importance. In their early years in Winnipeg before World War I both of them were disciples of Henry George and militant anti-socialists. This paper has two purposes. It seeks to analyze the history and character of the political ideas of Dixon and Farmer; and it seeks to explore the possible influences of their Georgeite world view on the outlook of the early I.L.P.

## I

ALTHOUGH an American, Henry George owed most of his ideas to British sources. His *Progress and Poverty*, published in 1879, was mainly an extended discussion and often bad-tempered argument with the British tradition of political economy of Smith, Malthus, Ricardo, John Stuart Mill, Spencer, and Bagehot. Interlarded with George's claims was a philosophy that seemed to derive from Locke by way of Jefferson. George's main contention was that it was neither capital nor labour but land that dominated the political economy of industrial societies. With expanding population and diminishing frontiers land was in increasingly short supply and consequently the landlord was able to extract monopoly rents from capitalist and worker alike. This was why, even with technology and increased productivity, poverty continued to abound in the modern world. The solution was to be a single tax on unimproved land values, the revenue from which was to be returned to the public by way of government expenditures on education, roads, hospitals, and suchlike. George was also much exercised by the phenomenon of economic monopolies and he recommended government ownership of firms whose services could not be provided on anything other than a monopolistic basis. The overall bias of his thought was liberal in character. Politics were to be local and plebiscitary. His ethical system derived from possessive individualist postulates<sup>2</sup> and he was deeply fearful of government establishments, in spite of his preference for publicly-owned utilities. In the wider world he favoured free trade and internationalism, and he was decidedly anti-militarist.

George's message made a deep impression on his age. The reasons for his appeal were manifold. First, he exposed the evident deficiencies of industrialism and he made exemplary use of the language and imagery of exploitation and injustice. Moreover, George's holistic approach with its simple analysis and seemingly coherent solution could not but appeal to an age used to the all-encompassing systems of thought of Bentham, Comte, Darwin, Marx, and Spencer. And his emphasis on land monopoly as *the* source of social injustice seemed inherently plausible to societies exposed to the evils of landlordism and land speculation. Finally, George provided hope and optimism, necessary to any successful nineteenth-century ideology, to those who saw the future of man in terms of industrialism, technology, and urbanization. For

<sup>2</sup> For the notion of possessive individualism see C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford 1962).

while he was pessimistic about the urban-industrial order as presently constituted, unlike Ruskin and Morris, for example, George did not wish to turn the clock back and in essence he projected a future in which technology, industry, and the city would contribute to a regime of endless productivity, co-operation, liberty, and equality. For all of these reasons George was often as attractive to socialists as to liberals.

After the publication of *Progress and Poverty*, George carried his gospel far afield to Britain, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as to Canada and the United States.<sup>3</sup> In Ireland he influenced Davitt and the Land League and in England George Bernard Shaw and the early Fabians, Keir Hardie, Joseph Chamberlain, and John Morley. Among his acquaintances were H.M. Hyndman, Eleanor Marx, and Daniel De Leon.<sup>4</sup> In large public meetings and well-publicized debates George's ideas were impressed on a whole generation of radicals. If his ideas in their specific detail failed to gain wholesale acceptance, this is not to deny their "powerful formative and educative influence."<sup>5</sup>

In Canada George gained rapid, albeit localized, exposure. He had held meetings in Toronto and Montreal as early as 1881 and he visited Hamilton in 1884 to speak at the Knights of Labor annual demonstration.<sup>6</sup> By the late 1880s Georgeism was widely discussed in Canada and it was in these years that it gained its most famous Canadian converts, cartoonist J.W. Bengough and radical journalist Phillips Thompson.<sup>7</sup> The migration of Georgeite ideas to Winnipeg did not take place until the turn of the century. Reference to the principle of single tax first appeared in the local labour paper, *The Voice*, in 1897 and there were further scattered references in the next seven years, but not until 1905 is there evidence of the existence of a local group of vocal single taxers.<sup>8</sup> By 1906 the leader of Winnipeg's Georgeites was a German immigrant professor, Dr. R.M. Mobius, whose politics had apparently caused him to run afoul of the authorities in his homeland. Mobius was a polymath and possessed

<sup>3</sup> Charles Albro Barker, *Henry George* (New York 1955), 307-551; Ramsay Cook, "Henry George and the Poverty of Canadian Progress," *Historical Papers* (1977), C.H.A., 142-156.

<sup>4</sup> F. Sheehy-Skeffington, *Michael Davitt* (London 1967), 69-70, 108-109; A.M. McBriar, *Fabian Socialism and English Politics, 1884-1918* (Cambridge 1962), 29-30; Barker, *George*, 361-368, 413-414, 466, 492; Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party, 1880-1900* (Oxford 1965), 36; Chushichi Tsuzuki, *H.M. Hyndman and British Socialism* (Oxford 1961), 45-46; Yvonne Kapp, *Eleanor Marx*, II (New York 1976), 148-149; Paul Meier, *William Morris: The Marxist Dreamer*, I (Sussex 1978), 190-195.

<sup>5</sup> J.A. Hobson, "The Influence of Henry George in England," *Fortnightly Review*, 62, (1897), 844.

<sup>6</sup> Cook, "Henry George," 142-156.

<sup>7</sup> Jay Atherton, "An Introduction to T. Phillips Thompson," *The Politics of Labour* (Toronto 1975), viii-xxiv; Ramsay Cook, "'The Ragged Reformer' — J.W. Bengough: The Caricaturist as Social Critic," *A Political Art: Essays and Images in Honour of George Woodcock*, William H. New, ed. (Vancouver 1978), 53-81.

<sup>8</sup> *The Voice*, 15 May 1897 and 17 February-11 April 1905.



*MLA Winnipeg. From the Frederick John Dixon Collection, Manitoba Archives.*

an intensely curious mind. He was a physical culturalist, free thinker, and pacifist. In meetings in his book shop he introduced the ideas of Henry George to two young immigrants, F.J. Dixon and S.J. Farmer.

Dixon had been born in 1881 in Berkshire, England, the son of a coachman on a landed estate. He left the local National school when he was 13 and worked for a while as an apprentice gardener. In later years Dixon recalled having once been unemployed for a five month period before his coming to Winnipeg in 1903. His first years in Canada were occupied with a number of jobs until he was employed as a designer-engraver with the Beamish Bag Company in 1905. There he remained until 1910 when he began in earnest his full-time career as a political organizer and politician.

Farmer was three years older and came from more privileged circumstances. Born in Cardiff of English parents, his father was a Baptist minister who had earlier been a successful commercial tailor. Farmer studied engineering at university and in 1900 emigrated to Manitoba. His first job was as a station-master's assistant in the south-west of the province and later he ran a book shop in Brandon. In 1909 he came to Winnipeg where he quickly formed the friendship of such single taxers as Mobius, Dixon, Lewis St. George Stubbs, J.W. Ward, and D.W. Buchanan. For a while he held a number of clerical positions until in 1913 he became an accountant with the International Elevator Company, where he stayed until 1927. When Dixon first ran for the provincial legislature in 1910, Farmer was his official agent. When he ran in 1914 and 1915, Farmer was again his main campaign organizer. They were very close friends and lived on the same street only two doors apart.

Dixon and Farmer in their respective ways brought more than average abilities to their would-be political careers. Both were highly intelligent men with a well-developed grasp of the theoretical aspects of politics. But they also evinced a strong sense of practicality. Both were idealists and utopians, but each demonstrated a strong sense of the necessity to fit theoretical principles to contingent circumstances. For them politics represented an opportunity for the secure and gradual implementation of principle.<sup>9</sup>

Farmer was a small, dapper man. His gifts were not those of an especially brilliant orator, but his speeches show evidence of careful forethought and attention to detail. He always showed himself to be diligent and hard-working, and he possessed great patience for the particulars of political organization. He was, in sum, an excellent committee man and party manager. Also, his public reputation had it that he was dependable and moderate. Dixon's political gifts were more complete. In an age when the sole means of political communication were public meetings and the printed page, Dixon's abilities made him a highly effective politician. Physically imposing and with an attractive debating voice, his manner of expression, oral and written, was simple, vivid, and didactic. Frequently he employed Christian symbolism and Victorian sentimentality.<sup>10</sup> Always thorough in his presentation of a position, Dixon also possessed a seemingly illimitable enthusiasm for political speculation and organization. Above all he was capable of exceptional integrity, courage, and persistence. (Dixon, as much as anybody, was later to be instrumental in exposing the corruption of the Roblin government.<sup>11</sup> Most notably he was to prove his courage in his stand against World War I.)<sup>12</sup>

Why such talents should have been dedicated to the cause of single tax or to any cause at all is not easy to explain. Both were young, single immigrants from Britain, part of the great wave of immigration that transformed Winnipeg after 1896. As far as can be ascertained neither brought with them to Canada any clearly identifiable political beliefs. Farmer's upbringing was rooted in religious non-conformity and Dixon's origins were not altogether advantaged. Both displayed a deep need for a coherent, systematic world view. As well they were probably imbued with many of the assumptions and expectations of Victorian Britain — utopianism, evangelicalism, and liberalism. Evidently as sensitive young men they could not but notice the dislocation and injustices of Winnipeg with its slums, alcoholism, poverty, prostitution, and land monopolists and speculators.<sup>13</sup> But with similar socio-economic backgrounds

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 March 1909; 17 June 1910; 14 February 1913; 9 July 1915.

<sup>10</sup> A deficiency of Dixon was that he could be ruthless in debate, did not suffer fools gladly, and sometimes his interest in winning an argument caused him to overlook other considerations. He was also capable of rhetorical excess and tactlessness.

<sup>11</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 June 1914; 11 February 1915.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 17-26 January 1917; *Winnipeg Telegram*, 19, 23 January 1917. There was as well the famous attempt by petition to unseat him later in 1917.

<sup>13</sup> For an account of social and economic conditions in Winnipeg and the West before

and exposed to the same experiences two of their contemporaries, Fred Tipping and John Queen, became socialists and not single taxers, and there were many other immigrants who noticed the riddle of social justice but who passed by on the other side. Of course nomological explanations of human behaviour cannot make sense of the particularity and uniqueness of human experience. Dixon and Farmer were children of their age, but this does not explain their passion for single tax. All that can be said is that they were sensitive men of an independent, non-conformist mind who saw in single tax a holistic account of the causes and cures for the evident injustices of a frontier society in the throes of rapid, radical, industrial transformation.

When Dixon began his political career in 1905 radical politics in Manitoba was a coat of many colours. Political ideas were then taken seriously and many were the competing views. In the city radical politics were especially diverse and potentially very acrimonious. In the last years of the nineteenth century a tradition of reformist, British labourism had been established by A.W. Puttee and William Small and after 1902 this had had to contend with the 'impossibilist' socialism of the local branch of the Marxist Socialist Party of Canada led by J.D. Houston and W.H. Stebbings.<sup>14</sup> The arrival on the scene of Mobius, Dixon, and the single taxers in 1906 heralded two years of rivalry between them and the socialists over the degree to which the Winnipeg labour movement would espouse the public ownership of the means of production.<sup>15</sup> The issue came to a head in June 1908 when the Manitoba Labour Party declared itself in favour of complete socialism.<sup>16</sup> Dixon and Farmer withdrew from the M.L.P. and threw themselves into the work of the newly-formed Direct Legislation League (D.L.L.) and the League for the Taxation of Land Values (L.T.L.V.).

Early in 1910, with a provincial election in the offing, the M.L.P. was reconstituted. To accommodate the single taxers its platform omitted reference to complete public ownership, confining it to public utilities, and in its final plank called for the abolition of taxes on industry and the raising of revenues by the taxation of land values.<sup>17</sup> Dixon ran as a candidate of the M.L.P. but he did not campaign simply as a single taxer. He emphasized several other issues: direct legislation, public ownership of utilities, compulsory education, and the abolition of injunctions. None of these were inconsistent with Georgeism but

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the war see Alan F.J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874-1914* (Montreal 1975); David Jay Bercuson, "Labour Radicalism and the Western Industrial Frontier: 1897-1919," *Canadian Historical Review*, 58 (1977), 154-175; and H.C. Pentland, "The Western Canadian Labour Movement, 1897-1919," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 3 (1979), 77-97.

<sup>14</sup> For the origins of labourism and socialism in Winnipeg see A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto 1978), 77-97.

<sup>15</sup> *The Voice*, 5 October 1906-26 June 1908.

<sup>16</sup> McCormack, *Reformers*, 89.

<sup>17</sup> *The Voice*, 20 May 1910.

Dixon's presentation of them pre-supposed a non-doctrinaire approach to reform. He was prepared to support progressive measures even in the absence of a solution to the land question. Land-value taxation was for him the most important issue but improvements in other policy areas would be very worthy of his support. In the end Dixon was narrowly defeated although he polled over 47 per cent of the vote. Dixon's anti-Marxism was no doubt deepened by the fact that his margin of defeat was less than the number of votes cast for S.P.C. candidate Cummings, who finished a distant third.<sup>18</sup>

The aftermath of the election with the moderates in the labour community incensed at the spoiling tactics of the S.P.C. brought the final demise of the M.L.P.<sup>19</sup> Dixon and Farmer now once again gave themselves more completely to the work of the D.L.L. and the L.T.L.V. It was in this period that they broadened their constituency and established particularly close contacts with the farmers' movement. Dixon became a friend of George Chipman, the editor of the *Grain Growers' Guide*, and beginning in 1909 he contributed many articles and letters to the *Guide*. Also, Dixon owned some land in the Rosser area.<sup>20</sup> He belonged to the local branch of the Manitoba Grain Growers' Association as early as 1912 and was a delegate and speaker at the annual conventions of the M.G.O.A.<sup>21</sup> Farmer as well wrote articles for the *Guide*. In 1912-13 he lived for a while in Moose Jaw and worked as a lecturer for the Saskatchewan Direct Legislation League. In the four years after 1910 Dixon and Farmer spoke to literally hundreds of meetings of farmers, workers, and middle-class reformers. When Dixon again ran for the provincial house in 1914 as an Independent, he did so with the support of farmers, labourites, and reformist Liberals.<sup>22</sup> Dixon emphasized the same sorts of issues as in 1910, but also campaigned strongly for votes for women. This time he won election handily in spite of the intervention again of the S.P.C., proving that his mixture of inclusivist tactics and piecemeal Georgeism had large acceptance among the working class of central Winnipeg.

All in all Dixon and Farmer showed a marked degree of pragmatism and latitudinarianism in their pre-war political careers. Seemingly the only absolute in their conception of political action was rejection of the impossibility of the S.P.C. Dixon's and Farmer's flexibility (their opponents no doubt deemed it opportunism) might seem inconsistent with their role as prophets of the pure milk of Georgeism, but Henry George himself in his own campaigns for public office in New York in the 1880s and 1890s had interestingly enough exhibited a similar tactical flexibility.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 10, 17 June and 1, 15 July 1910.

<sup>19</sup> McCormack, *Reformers*, 91-92.

<sup>20</sup> *Grain Growers' Guide*, 1 July 1914.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 17 January 1912; 22 January 1913; 20 January 1915.

<sup>22</sup> *The Voice*, 10, 24 April 1914; *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 April 1914; 17 June-9 July 1914.

<sup>23</sup> Barker, *George*, 453-619.



## II

DIXON AND Farmer were a part of that war-time generation that was nurtured in what Paul Fussell calls an atmosphere of "unparalleled literariness."<sup>24</sup> In their speeches and writings in the pre-1914 period, Dixon especially gave evidence of a wide interest in theoretical questions and a broad knowledge of the tradition of English literature. The extent of his literary quotations and allusions was encyclopedic. A reference to Dickens' *Little Dorrit* came as readily to his mind as mention of Lecky, Carlyle, or Tennyson, or the character of the socialism of Bellamy, Blatchford, Gronlund, and the Webbs. Yet, while his literary education was very broad, the bedrock of his early world view, as of Farmer's, derived almost entirely from the writings of Henry George.

Other intellectual influences at this time are much more difficult to establish. However, given the general liberalism of Dixon's and Farmer's early philosophy and from references scattered here and there, it is fair to speculate that they were influenced by the likes of Henry Thomas Buckle, Herbert Spencer, Winwood Reade, John Morley, Richard Cobden, and Edward Porritt.<sup>25</sup> All were mid-nineteenth or early twentieth-century English liberals who in their various ways believed in science, free thought, progress, evolution, laissez faire, and democracy. They all tended to emphasize the paramount role of intellectuals in the growth of civilization and there was a common disposition among them to believe that society was moving in the direction of greater and greater interdependence and co-operation. In all of these beliefs they in fact differed little from George.

Completely paraphrasing the most fundamental axioms of Henry George, Dixon and Farmer claimed that mankind was subject to two basic natural laws.<sup>26</sup> All men had an equal right to appropriate the product of their labour, and all men had an equal right to the use of the earth, the means of labour.<sup>27</sup> These laws were absolute and inviolable with a moral compulsion that was equivalent to the physical necessity of the law of gravity. While of course men's natural rights could be abrogated in practice, this would inevitably produce misery and disharmony. The private monopolization of land, they claimed, had been particularly productive of grief: land speculation, low wages, urban concentration, economic depression, unemployment, public debts, standing armies, militarism, and war.<sup>28</sup> The complete solution to all this

<sup>24</sup> Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York 1975), 156-157.

<sup>25</sup> *The Voice*, 3 April 1908; 6 May 1910; *Grain Growers' Guide*, 7 December 1910; 7 April 1915; 1 September 1915.

<sup>26</sup> *The Voice*, 25 March 1910; 10 March 1911. F.J. Dixon, Notes for a speech on the land question, n.d., *Dixon Papers*, Public Archives of Manitoba.

<sup>27</sup> Such rights presupposed a simple producer-craftsman society in which men did not sell their labour power in the market place, and all men somehow had a right of ownership over the means of labour. This is a far cry from the complicated, interdependent industrial capitalist economy of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

<sup>28</sup> *The Voice*, 15 May 1908; 4 June, 10 September, 5 November 1909; 10 March, 20 April 1911; *Manitoba Free Press*, 17 September 1914.

was the single tax. By removing other taxes, especially on production and the necessities of life, and by raising monies by a single tax on unearned land values, the state would at once eradicate unfair taxes and would acquire economic values that the community itself had created. The ever increasing revenues so collected were to be used to meet a number of basic social needs. And with the brake on production represented by land monopoly and unwise taxes removed, the endless productivity of man and nature would guarantee a cornucopia for all.<sup>29</sup> The single-mindedness of Dixon's and Farmer's faith in single tax cannot be exaggerated. Both were dogmatic that other measures of reform were incomplete in the absence of single tax. Free trade, co-operativism, trade unionism, publicly-owned utilities, movements for individual improvement, all must be supplemented by single tax.<sup>30</sup>

Part of the confusing character of single tax derived from its apparent similarity to socialism. Often its vocabulary and sentiments, as already noticed, ran parallel to those of socialism. Dixon and Farmer, however, chose to emphasize the anti-socialist aspects of single tax as George himself had done in his last years:

Socialists would abolish competition; they might just as well try to abolish gravitation. Socialism is at present competing with all other "isms" and the present system, and if it succeeds it will be by virtue of this great natural law, which its adherents affect to despise, the law of competition, the survival of the fittest. . . . Socialists may ignore but they cannot destroy it. Competition is a beautiful arrangement, which, when free from monopolistic obstruction, registers as faithfully through variations in value the alterations of demand and supply, as the thermometer reports the variations of the atmospheric temperature. . . .<sup>31</sup>

A perusal of socialistic literature will convince any unbiased person that socialism necessarily involves bureaucratic government and complete subjugation of the individual to the state.<sup>32</sup>

For Dixon and Farmer the source of exploitation in industrial society was not the capitalist as such, but the monopolist and especially the monopolist of land. This gave to their world view a decidedly un-Marxist complexion.

Dixon's and Farmer's commitment to equality seemed to establish a continuity with other kinds of socialism, but on closer examination this will be found to be only in part real. Socialism usually holds that the fundamental equality of all should be sought by a policy of public ownership, planning, and redistribution that would give to every citizen a rough parity of life circumstances and material conditions. Farmer and Dixon certainly held that in the matter of the distribution of revenues from land values taxation, the operative principle was to be one of equal enjoyment, since all had equally helped create

<sup>29</sup> Needless to say Dixon and Farmer were, like George, complete anti-Malthusians. See *The Voice*, 3 December 1909; 5, 19 January 1912.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 4 June 1901; 4, 25 March, 3 June 1910; *Grain Growers' Guide*, 20 September 1911.

<sup>31</sup> *The Voice*, 3 April 1908.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 8 May 1908.

both the demand for land and its increasing value. But in the free market sector the principle of competitive individualism was to prevail. If inequalities resulted as unequal natural abilities established competitive advantages and differential returns of wealth and status, Dixon and Farmer would have been obliged to accede to such an outcome, such was their belief in the primacy of individualism over equality. In fact they believed, as George did, in the happy possibility that a free economy would in practice be roughly egalitarian.<sup>33</sup> As they frequently pointed out it was only by obtaining monopoly privileges from government that individuals grew rich and inequality developed. In Canada in the early twentieth century, according to Farmer and Dixon, a classic instance of government-initiated private monopoly privilege and inequality was the policy of protection of eastern industrialists and manufacturers. The antidote to the monopolist and his political accomplices was to be the purification of the state by means of direct legislation and an end to partyism, and the liberalizing of the market through *laissez faire*.

Where there was a similarity, even if limited, between single tax theory and socialism was in their mutual advocacy of public utilities. Dixon and Farmer, like George, recognized the impossibility of competition in matters governed by technical monopoly: for example, lighting, water supply, and postal and telephone service. Private entrepreneurs providing such services raised the spectre of monopoly exploitation. To guard against this, the public itself, through its government, should provide them at cost. Moreover, Dixon and Farmer, again reiterating classical Georgeism, held that the land that was given by God to all men to enjoy equally included not just farm land but the minerals that were under it and the trees that grew out of it, thus justifying the public ownership of natural resources. However, for the state to assume such weighty economic powers and not exploit the public it was imperative that government be truly democratic.

Dixon's and Farmer's view of the necessity of democracy flowed naturally from their notion of human rights.<sup>34</sup> Because the right to the fruit of one's labour and the right of access to the means of labour were to be enjoyed equally by everyone, all men had an interest in securing these rights. Government as a coercive force was necessary to ensure respect for these rights, but government could develop a sectional interest of its own that neither party competition nor the vaunted moral superiority of parliamentary representatives could altogether prevent. The central paradox of liberalism that government was at once a necessity but a constant threat to individual rights would, in the view of Dixon

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 11 February 1910; 19 January 1912. There was a Kropotkin-like, anarchist faith in the benevolence of natural society in the thinking of Farmer and Dixon. Henry George once wrote: "All that is necessary to social regeneration is included in the motto of those Russian patriots sometimes called Nihilists — 'Land and Liberty!'" *Progress and Poverty* (New York 1935), 321.

<sup>34</sup> *The Voice*, 27 January 1911; 13, 27 September 1912; *Grain Growers' Guide*, 6 December 1911; 24 March, 7 April 1915.

and Farmer, be solved by direct legislation. Only if all men had an equal power to determine the law would the law be perfectly symmetrical with the people's desire to protect their rights.

Their assumptions, then, about society and government were on the whole liberal and contractarian. In the good society all individuals *qua* individuals would equally will the legitimacy of the regime. What one willed for oneself, namely the protection of one's rights, could not be denied to others. Civil society was nothing more than a grand voluntary association in the public affairs of which people participated out of a sense of individual self-interest. Sociality and co-operation among such individuals were simply exchange relations of mutual convenience.<sup>35</sup> Government's powers were fiduciary and recallable at a moment's notice on any change in the popular will. Government was like the management of a joint stock company, constantly beholden to the shareholders:

Here are the cardinal business principles which are also cardinal democratic principles. They are essential to democratic control of public business.

- 1) The owners of any private business reserve to themselves the right to instruct their managers to institute any desired improvements.
- 2) The owners of any private business reserve to themselves the right to examine any proposed action of their managers and to veto it if necessary.
- 3) The owners of any private business reserve to themselves the right to discharge before the ordinary termination of his engagement any manager who betrays his trust. . . .

The submission of an Initiative, Referendum or Recall petition is analogous to the moving and seconding of a motion at a meeting of shareholders of a private business.<sup>36</sup>

Direct legislation principally would destroy the plutocrat's hold on the leadership of the established parties, and eradicate the sham two-party competition that characterized supposedly representative systems. The dark interiors of the lobby and the caucus room were to be exposed to the democratic light. Direct legislation would bring a number of other benefits: it would diminish party partisanship and separate candidates' personalities from policies; it would have a profound educational effect on the electorate; it would simplify the laws; and it would open the gateway to other reforms. The rule of the people would be splendid in every way. It could be cautious and prudent; mostly it would be progressive, benevolent, and right:

The one outstanding demonstration of history is this — that whenever the masses have come into conflict with the ruling "classes" (aristocratic, plutocratic or delegated) the masses have been right ninety-nine times out of a hundred.<sup>37</sup>

A review of the legislation passed by direct legislation will effectively refute any

<sup>35</sup> *The Voice*, 3, 24 April 1908; 14 April 1911; *Grain Growers' Guide*, 1 September 1915.

<sup>36</sup> *The Voice*, 13 September 1912.

<sup>37</sup> *Grain Growers' Guide*, 6 December 1911.

#### 44 LABOUR/LE TRAVAILLEUR

charge of crank legislation. Switzerland has established government ownership of railways, a system of parcel posts, a pure food law, a law to prohibit the manufacture and sale of absinthe, a workman's insurance act and similar measures.<sup>38</sup>

It can be observed from the above that Dixon's and Farmer's conception of civil society was not altogether consistent with classical nineteenth century *laissez faire*. Government had an obligation to own the utilities and natural resources as well as to provide measures to secure the health and welfare of workers. Always Dixon and Farmer emphasized that a sort of economic democracy would flow from direct legislation. Even so, for them the essence of good government was still seen mainly to lie in its self-limiting role. The purpose of government was to clear away the detritus of privilege and interference that existed from an earlier, pre-liberal age:

Before we can live high and not count the cost it will be necessary for our legislators to *undo much of the work they and their predecessors have done. Repeal! Repeal!* should be the slogan of the people. Repeal the tariff, Repeal the railway franchises, Repeal banking privileges, and above all Repeal the laws which enable the speculators to hold 100,000,000 acres of land idle in these prairie provinces.<sup>39</sup>

Although Dixon and Farmer sometimes implied that direct legislation was an intrinsically valuable arrangement that fulfilled man's natural purpose as a social, co-operative, and self-determining creature, the predominant emphasis of their conception of democracy was that it was not to be a constant, ever active agency of self-government.<sup>40</sup> Rather it was to exist as a disciplinary threat to recalcitrant public officials. In their scheme of things elected politicians and political parties would continue to exist. But under direct legislation they would be subject to constant, *potential* direct control and chastisement. Should the elected politician prove capable of governing in the public interest, there was no necessity for the application of direct legislation.

Dixon's and Farmer's theory of political change was a type of rationalism. Dixon particularly was very fond of the notion that the progress of humanity derived from the initiative and sacrifice of men of intellect and principle. To act aright and make an impact on history one must first have correct ideas.<sup>41</sup> The progress of history was incomprehensible without the contributions of men such as Galileo, Milton, Newton, and Mazzini. But intellectual virtue was not confined to great individuals. The cause of liberty was broad and drew its followers from all ranks and classes. To join one needed a belief in the autonomy of ideas and reason, and a temperament opposed to prejudice and in favour

<sup>38</sup> F.J. Dixon, Speech on direct legislation, October 1915, *Dixon Papers*, Public Archives of Manitoba.

<sup>39</sup> *Grain Growers' Guide*, 31 May 1916.

<sup>40</sup> *The Voice*, 1 December 1911; *Grain Growers' Guide*, 7 August 1912; 24 March 1915.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 1 September 1915. This general concept Dixon expressed most completely in two later speeches, "The Power of Ideals" in 1918 and his speech to the jury in February 1920.

of liberal change. There was a classlessness about the constituency of freedom. What held it together were not the contingencies of organic social interests, but loyalty to abstract principles.<sup>42</sup>

How, then, can one characterize the early political ideas of Dixon and Farmer? In the main they were liberal.<sup>43</sup> Civil society, in their view, existed to secure individual rights and sustain economic competition. Co-operation and sociality were prudential relations of individual self-interest and convenience. Society, even at its best, would not necessarily possess any real affective community, and, far from realizing man's essentially communitarian nature, even democratic politics were to be an intermittent, instrumentalist activity that admittedly secured individual freedom and elementary individual welfare, but that was all. However, it is misleading to claim that this liberalism was of a "middle class" kind.<sup>44</sup> Certainly Dixon and Farmer had connections at this time with such local middle class liberals as Norris, Crerar, Ashdown, and Dafoc, but, as Dixon observed, all men were capable of seeing the light, and perception of the political truth did not depend on one's socio-economic class.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Dixon's and Farmer's object of concern was consistently with the common man, as they would have put it. Whether their politics were misplaced is not the point. They both believed that they were, in working to end privilege and poverty, seeking the best interests of the industrial worker.

### III

ON 7 AUGUST 1915, when Dixon, together with Nellie McClung and three Liberal cabinet ministers, addressed a jubilant crowd of Liberal supporters from the balcony of the *Free Press* building,<sup>46</sup> his and Farmer's sails seemed set fair for political success. In the election that had just taken place Roblinism had been thoroughly vanquished and Dixon was now the rising star of provincial politics. If he had been personally ambitious, he might easily have obtained a portfolio in Norris' cabinet and Farmer could probably have shared in his confrère's political success. But both were too independent-minded and circumstances were in any event unpropitious. Premier Norris was soon to be revealed to them as an incomplete radical and there was a horrid war raging.

Farmer's and Dixon's pacifism was long-standing. They were too convinced of its truth to stay silent for long. At an anti-registration meeting in

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 26 May 1915.

<sup>43</sup> The liberal account of the nature of community as nothing more than prudential relations of self-interest arises with Thomas Hobbes. The opposing socialist account is to be found in Rousseau and Marx. A recent, lucid explanation of the divergencies between liberal and socialist views on society, community and politics is to be found in Robert Paul Wolff, *The Poverty of Liberalism* (Boston 1968), 162-195.

<sup>44</sup> McCormack, *Reformers*, 89, 95-97. See also David Jay Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg* (Montreal 1974), 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Grain Growers' Guide*, 1 September 1915.

<sup>46</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 August 1915.

December 1916 both came out categorically against the war.<sup>47</sup> The apotheosis of Dixon's personal stand against the war was his opposition with Rigg in March 1917 to the so-called "patriotic" resolution which was personally moved in the Manitoba Legislature by Premier Norris. The resolution called for total support of the Canadian war effort.<sup>48</sup> Although Dixon and Farmer customarily sought a balance between the claims of utopianism and practicality, curiously their criticism of World War I was one instance where practicality seemed to be decidedly absent. Perhaps this was because the matter was in their view one of life and death.

The primary ethical postulates of Dixon's and Farmer's social philosophy were an inheritance from the Anglo-American liberal tradition of natural rights, a tradition that in contrast to nineteenth-century English utilitarianism emphasized the inalienability of rights, especially an individual's right to life. The compulsion of the Canadian government's policy of registration and conscription palpably contravened such absolute principles and had to be completely resisted.<sup>49</sup> Their analysis of the war rested on other foundations as well. War, they claimed, was horrible; it maimed and destroyed the lives and bodies of the common people and it fixed upon them extravagant public debts that might take decades to retire. Dixon and Farmer saw war as a form of elite manipulation whereby privileged interests master-minded an opportunity to debilitate and destroy movements of social reform. Amidst the distractions of war, land-owners, monopolists, and armament-makers fastened more tightly their hold on the state and exploited society to an even greater extent. For Dixon and Farmer the causes of war were various: selfishness, ignorance, religion, pride, the caprice of kings. But mainly it was the acquisitiveness of the armaments manufacturer and the monopolist that conspired to set nation against nation.<sup>50</sup> World peace therefore ultimately required domestic social justice as well as schemes of international co-operation. The single tax, direct legislation, and free trade were the first steps to universal peace and harmony.<sup>51</sup> It was a Georgeite view of war, and its causes and cures. For Canada, the implication of their analysis was that she should stay clear of all foreign involvements, disarm completely, and support all moves towards freer trade and the creation of a League of Nations.<sup>52</sup>

Another argument buttressed Dixon's and Farmer's opposition to the war.

<sup>47</sup> *The Voice*, 29 December 1916.

<sup>48</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 9 March 1917.

<sup>49</sup> F.J. Dixon, "Peace," c. 1912, in possession of Judge Roy St. George Stubbs. *The Voice*, 7 September 1917; *Manitoba Free Press*, 25 December 1916; 19 January 1917.

<sup>50</sup> Dixon, "Peace." *The Voice*, 13 September 1912; 4 May, 7 September 1917; *Manitoba Free Press*, 25 December 1916.

<sup>51</sup> Dixon, "Peace." *Winnipeg Telegram*, 3 December 1916; *The Voice*, 10 September 1909; 14 February 1913; 8 March, 24 May 1918; *Manitoba Free Press*, 13 September 1916; 18 January 1917; *The Single Taxer*, May 1916.

<sup>52</sup> F.J. Dixon to Hon. R.L. Borden, 27 December 1912, *Dixon Papers*, Public Archives of Manitoba. *The Voice*, 15 April 1910; 13 September 1912; *Manitoba Free Press*, 13

As early as 1917 they both held that responsibility for the outbreak of the war could not be laid completely at the door of the central powers. On both sides, they claimed, secret treaties and complicated alliances had created a vicious circle of manoeuvres and obligations that made a mockery of the notion that Germany alone had started the war.<sup>53</sup> Principally, however, their resistance to Canadian and allied war policy derived from their strong sense of economic justice. Conscription was utterly unjustifiable as long as the "capitalists," "the greedy grafters," "the exploiters," and the "land grabbers" piled up gargantuan profits from human suffering.<sup>54</sup> In the last analysis, for them, the internal economic enemy was always more insidious than the foreign one.

The combined effects of the war were in Winnipeg sufficiently unsettling to precipitate the general strike in May 1919. The strike in turn brought deep divisions in the local labour movement. A more personal consequence of the war for Dixon and Farmer was the irrevocable rupture it caused in their relations with the provincial Liberal party. Premier Norris' whole-hearted support of the war policy of the Union government made impossible any coalition between him, and Dixon and Farmer, and it made certain that whatever popular following lay at the back of Dixon's and Farmer's leadership would express itself after the war outside of the established two-party system. In March 1918 Dixon and Farmer moved back into close contact with the local third-party tradition of labourist politics when they participated in the founding of a Manitoba branch of the Dominion Labor Party. Two years later Farmer was its vice-president and Dixon its chairman. In the general strike itself neither of them played any important part in its planning or co-ordination. Farmer was mainly a sympathetic bystander, but Dixon did act as a reporter and writer for the *Western Labor News* and took over its publication after the arrest of Ivens and Woodsworth, the previous editors. Dixon spoke on several occasions to public meetings of strikers, at which he emphasized the rightness of their cause, namely, collective bargaining, and exhorted them to persist and stick together.<sup>55</sup> Dixon was subsequently arrested and charged with seditious libel. In January 1920 he went on trial. He pleaded his own case and argued that he had had no part in any conspiracy, nor had he been associated with the One Big Union or the Socialist Party of Canada. Principally he claimed that his published and spoken opinions were properly within the British tradition of free speech and he was eventually acquitted.<sup>56</sup>

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September 1916; 18 January 1919; 13 December 1920; *Winnipeg Telegram*, 18 January 1917.

<sup>53</sup> *Winnipeg Telegram*, 18 January 1917; *The Voice*, 7 September 1917; 8 March 1918; *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 January 1919.

<sup>54</sup> *Winnipeg Telegram*, 3 December 1916; 18 January 1917; *The Voice*, 29 December 1916; *Manitoba Free Press*, 8 January 1917; *The Single Taxer*, August 1917.

<sup>55</sup> *Western Labour News* (Special Strike Edition), 27 May, 19, 23 June 1919; *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 June 1919. F.J. Dixon, *Address to the Jury* (Winnipeg 1920), *passim*.

<sup>56</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 14-16 February 1920. Dixon, *Address*, *passim*. Dixon's address to the jury is the *locus classicus* of his whiggish view of history.



The post-war divisions within the Winnipeg labour movement between the O.B.U. and the T.L.C. were a constant source of frustration to Dixon and Farmer. In the end these divisions induced them to found their own political party. Always Dixon and Farmer desired to bring diverse political groups together.<sup>57</sup> They disagreed with the predominantly industrial strategy of the O.B.U. and they were decidedly resentful of the sectionalism and conservatism of the T.L.C. leadership provided after 1919 by Winning, Robinson, Rigg, and Hoop.<sup>58</sup> But they nonetheless sought co-operation among them all as long as it was obtainable. In the end it was not.

These conflicts were at least sufficiently attenuated in 1920 to permit some measure of harmony during the provincial election in June. The various labour and socialist parties together elected 11 members. In Winnipeg, labour-socialist candidates gained 43 per cent of the vote and elected four M.L.A.s: Dixon, Ivens, Armstrong, and Queen. Dixon led the city-wide poll by a clear 7,000 votes and he polled well over 50 per cent of the first preference ballots cast for the labour-socialist candidates. Dixon now became the official house leader of the D.L.P. caucus as well as the informal leader of the labour-socialist group in general.

However, the tensions between the O.B.U., the T.L.C., and the moderate centrist labourism that Dixon and Farmer supported were in fact irresolvable and soon destroyed the D.L.P. What was by now a natural condition of suspicion and recrimination was brought to a head in August 1920 when there occurred the famous O.B.U.-T.L.C. debate in Winnipeg. Appropriately, it was chaired by Dixon. Hoop put the T.L.C. case and claimed that the general strike had been an O.B.U. conspiracy to found a Soviet system.<sup>59</sup> Those like Dixon and Farmer who saw it as a democratic struggle for collective bargaining were by implication either fools or dupes. Frustrated by the subsequent importation of this conflict into the D.L.P., and no doubt personally affronted as well, Dixon and Farmer resigned from the party in November 1920 after a local ward organization of the party had nominated Hoop to run for alderman.<sup>60</sup> At the time Dixon

<sup>57</sup> *Western Labor News*, 27 December 1918; 7 November 1919; 20 February 1920. *Manitoba Free Press*, 10 July 1919; 1 September 1919; 3 May 1920; 16 August 1920. F.J. Dixon, "Labor and Reconstruction," 1918, *Dixon Papers*, Public Archives of Manitoba. F.J. Dixon, "Notes on 'The Cause of Labor,'" 1920, *ibid*. There is a sense in which Dixon believed that theoretical differences between conflicting political points of view could be resolved by rational discussion. Thus continued conflict was a sign not of the irresolvability of competing theoretical perspectives but of moral obtuseness; for example, an absence of tolerance, sympathy or understanding. On one occasion he argued that the differences between Marxism and Georgeism could possibly be rationally resolved. See *The Voice*, 24 May 1918 and "Notes on 'The Cause of Labor,'" 1920, *Dixon Papers*, Public Archives of Manitoba.

<sup>58</sup> *Western Labor News*, 2 May, 25 July, 22 August, 19 September 1919; *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 July, 8, 9, 22 September, 28 October, 19 November 1920; 16 May 1921.

<sup>59</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 7 August 1920.

<sup>60</sup> Dominion Labor Party, "Minutes of Winnipeg and District Branch," *Russell Papers*,

and Farmer were the foremost leaders in the D.L.P. and both possessed immense popularity within the party and among the electorate at large.<sup>61</sup> Other natural leaders of the local labour movement such as Queen, Russell, and Ivens were serving prison sentences, or as with Woodsworth were out of the province. Thus Dixon and Farmer had the power to determine the fate of the D.L.P. and with it the future of the centrist alternative in labour politics in the province. If they had chosen to remain, the D.L.P. would have survived. Their leaving precipitated its extinction. The stature of Dixon and Farmer was sufficient to guarantee the electoral viability of the new party they now proceeded to found. Thus was formed in November 1920 the Independent Labour Party of Manitoba.<sup>62</sup> Farmer was the party's first candidate for mayor and Dixon its first provincial house leader.

#### IV

WARS frequently accelerate social change and exacerbate public discontents. Winnipeg in 1920 was a very different place from what it had been in 1914. Yet change is never wholeheartedly accepted, even by the deepest dyed radical, and Dixon's and Farmer's political world view in 1920 showed many continuities with their earlier beliefs. This was particularly true of their conception of politics and party organization, but also of their economic philosophy.

Before the war Dixon and Farmer had demonstrated a remarkable capacity to co-operate with other political parties and points-of-view. Although thoroughgoing single taxers they worked with a multitude of different groups whose common currency was that they were independent-minded and progressive: labourists, farmers, feminists, social gospellers, reform-minded Liberals, and sometimes even "impossibilist" socialists.<sup>63</sup> This latitudinarian outlook seemed to derive from a perspective on politics best described as rationalist or idealist. Political change, they claimed, was pre-eminently the work of men of

Public Archives of Manitoba, August-November 1920. *Manitoba Free Press*, 9, 22 September, 19 November 1920.

<sup>61</sup> As well as Dixon's phenomenal popularity in the 1920 election, Farmer showed in his 1919 campaign for mayor that he was also a popular individual, certainly more so than his party. See *Western Labor News*, 5 December 1919.

<sup>62</sup> Independent Labor Party of Manitoba, "Minute Book of the Center Branch," Public Archives of Manitoba, 16-30 December 1920.

<sup>63</sup> Dixon's and Farmer's attitude to the extreme socialists was sometimes ambiguous. Before the war Dixon and Farmer were determinedly anti-socialist and yet they still publicly co-operated with socialists on limited, single-issue campaigns. After the war this co-operation continued but they went out of their way to ensure that the I.L.P. would not include the extreme socialists. This exclusion was mainly ideologically motivated since Dixon and Farmer were anti-revolutionary and probably it was also partly personal, the residue of a decade of insults and diatribes levelled at them by the S.P.C. More temperate socialists did find a home in the early I.L.P., for example Tipping and Queen.

ideas and not of impersonal forces of class.<sup>64</sup> It occurred when men became intellectually convinced that it was necessary, and no man was blinded by class or status from apprehending the truth. Such a view made political education the essence of politics and required that a political party should be broad, inclusive, and non-sectarian.<sup>65</sup> Moreover, Dixon and Farmer held that a belief in democracy made necessary a theory of politics that emphasized that change was to be gradual, evolutionary and practical.<sup>66</sup> This overall conception of politics they carried intact into the Independent Labour Party.

What is being argued here is that Dixon and Farmer and the early I.L.P. partook of much of the progressive theory of the evils of partyism and the advantages of co-operative government.<sup>67</sup> Two incidents in the provincial legislature from 1920 to 1922 corroborate this interpretation. The 1920 provincial election in Manitoba resulted in a confusing party situation. The Liberals under Norris were still the single largest party, followed by a bloc of independent Farmers candidates, some of whom intended to support the government and others to oppose it. The socialist-labour group accounted for eleven members and the Conservatives six. Given the amorphous nature of the farmers'

<sup>64</sup> Clearly Dixon and Farmer did not hold to any historicist, Marxist notion of class struggle. They did, of course, believe that the electoral response to the sort of politics they espoused would likely be class-based. It was farmers and workers (i.e., all those who putatively laboured) who would be most likely to heed their appeal. But the emphasis of their conception of politics was rationalist and voluntarist; through the electoral process farmers and workers *qua* individuals, would, they hoped, apprehend the truth and vote accordingly. Frequently, Dixon and Farmer denied that they led class-based parties, since they appealed, they said, to abstract standards of the common good. See *Western Labor News*, 28 November 1919; *Manitoba Free Press*, 2 December 1920; 25 January 1923.

<sup>65</sup> *Western Labor News*, 5 September, 7 November 1919; *Manitoba Free Press*, 29 July 1920; 12 September 1921. F.J. Dixon, "Notes on 'The Cause of Labor,'" 1920, *Dixon Papers*, Public Archives of Manitoba. F.J. Dixon, "Labour and Reconstruction," 1918, *ibid.* Kenneth McNaught has argued that Dixon and Farmer, like Woodsworth, were influenced in 1920-21 by the theory and tactics of the British Labour Party. ("J.S. Woodsworth and a political party for Labour, 1896-1921," in Donald Swainson, ed. *Historical Essays on the Prairie Provinces*, [Toronto 1970], 251-253.) Dixon and Farmer were well informed of British politics after 1918. However, Dixon's and Farmer's post-war conception of politics was already prefigured before the war when British Labour influences were not crucial to their thought, and certainly there was a significant difference of perspective between their post-war theoretical outlook and that contained, for example, in *Labour and the New Social Order*.

<sup>66</sup> *The Voice*, 24 May 1918; *Western Labor News*, 2 May 1919; *Manitoba Free Press*, 13 September 1921; 19 January 1922. Dixon and Farmer continued to espouse their contractualist and instrumentalist view of democracy after the war. This was especially true of Farmer. A recurring theme in Farmer's several campaigns for the mayoralty of Winnipeg in the 1920s was the need to complete the procedures of democracy in municipal politics. He also frequently recommended the use of referenda to decide matters of public policy, particularly hydro development.

<sup>67</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 22 February, 23 March, 13, 29 April 1921; 21 April 1922.

group, Dixon had every right to claim for himself the position of leader of the opposition and with it the special procedural advantages such a status brought. His anti-partyism seemingly prevented him from doing this and the opposition leader in the new house was J.T. Haig of the Conservatives.

The second example occurred in 1922.<sup>68</sup> In March Norris' government was defeated on a motion of censure. Haig and elements within Dixon's own caucus wanted an immediate election. Supply had not yet been voted and several major items of legislation were still on the order paper. In the end Dixon agreed to sustain the government until these matters could be attended to in return for an undertaking that an election would be held immediately thereafter. To ensure that the government was not defeated in the interim, Dixon, and Robson, the farmers' leader, promised not to introduce or support contentious legislation. This meant that Dixon agreed to the dropping of John Queen's Sunday Trains Bill, a matter very close to Queen's heart. Naturally Queen resisted this, supported by George Armstrong, and finally the bill was defeated by a vote of 26 to 15, with Dixon, Bayley, and Smith from the labour group voting with the government and Queen and the other labour-socialist members voting in opposition with the Conservatives and a few independent Farmers. For Dixon the claims of co-operative government took precedence over those of party unity and sectionalism.

Before the war, I have argued, Dixon and Farmer expounded an economic philosophy that was in all essentials derived from Henry George. George's world view, as J.A. Hobson once observed, contained the paradoxical and mixed elements of organicism and individualism.<sup>69</sup> Dixon's and Farmer's early indebtedness to George meant that they too conceived of economics in terms that were both liberal and near-socialist. By the time they established the I.L.P., Dixon's and Farmer's economics sounded less liberal and more socialist, but whether they were so in fact is a problematical question.

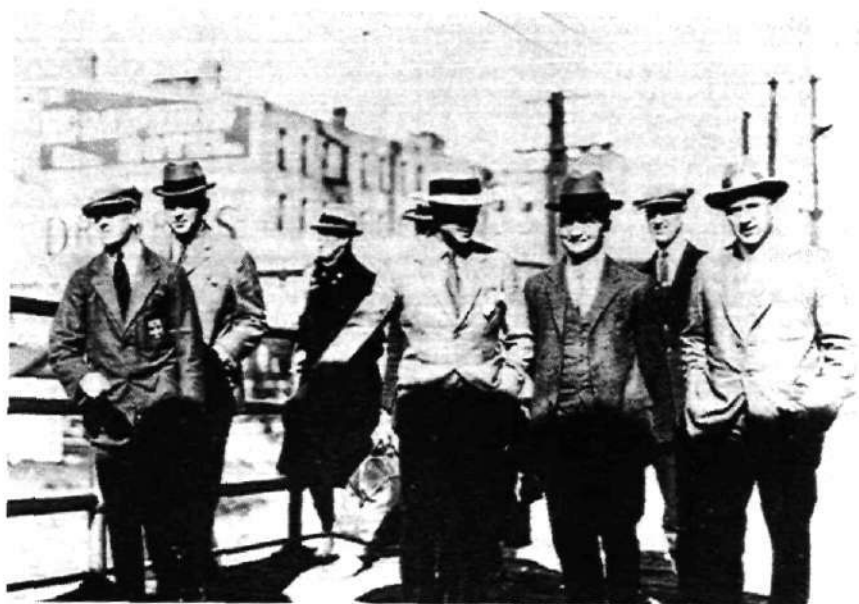
Tracing the development of their post-war economic views is a much easier task with Dixon than with Farmer. After the war Farmer became a man of prosaic practicality and his speeches were almost devoid of any explicit reference to general principles. However, one feature Farmer definitely did share with Dixon at that time and this was the absence of any explicit reference to their earlier-held view which emphasized the benefits of competitive individualism and *laissez faire*<sup>70</sup> and the correlative evils of socialism. At least at the level of public debate their post-war economics appeared to be less liberal and sounded more socialist.

This development was particularly evidenced in Dixon's use after 1918 of the terminology of co-operation and communalism. The early Dixon, it was argued earlier, held to an essentially liberal, market understanding of society. According to this view co-operation for example was an instrumentalist mode

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 28, 29 March 1922.

<sup>69</sup> Hobson, "Henry George in England," 842.

<sup>70</sup> They of course always believed in the benefits of free trade.



*S.J. Farmer, third from right with the Prince of Wales on a visit to Winnipeg, 1923. Farmer was then the mayor of Winnipeg. Picture in possession of the Farmer family.*

of human association for the purposes of individual self-interest. The later Dixon, in contrast, seems to employ the terminology of co-operation and communalism in a more apparently socialist sense, as denoting a human community based on relations of mutuality, equality and brotherly interdependence:

There [is] . . . a growing feeling rightly or wrongly among those who worked for a living, that the day was coming when they would not have to work for another man, but work together and share in common for the common benefit. . . .<sup>71</sup>

He claimed . . . that there must be some progressive form which would give the workers a greater voice in the management of industry, a greater share of the wealth they produced and the establishment of the principle of co-operation in industry. "We are out to establish co-operation in industry to the uttermost limit — co-operation in distribution and co-operation in production," [Dixon] declared.<sup>72</sup>

[Dixon] said he was in favour of industrial peace, but he denied that the Council of Industry, or any similar body could bring it about. Only when industry was co-operatively owned by the workers could there be industrial peace, he said.<sup>73</sup>

The falling away of references to individualism and laissez faire and the simultaneous appearance of the vocabulary of the co-operative commonwealth

<sup>71</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 8 March 1919.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 22 February 1921.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 April 1922. Co-operation meant many things to Dixon. It was synonymous with mutual aid, trade unionism, government ownership, collective bargaining, and greater access by workers to the wealth they produced. Co-operation was opposite to the survival of the fittest view and antithetical to competition. All of these meanings are reconcilable with Henry George's philosophy.

appear to indicate that Dixon was moving more in the orbit of socialist theory and less in that of Georgeism and liberalism.<sup>74</sup> Yet the very same effect could have been achieved simply by emphasizing the anti-monopolism and organicism that existed as integral parts of George's philosophy.<sup>75</sup> After 1918 Dixon still saw the core of exploitation and injustice as parasitic monopoly privilege appropriating the labour of farmers and workers, and this of course was the Georgeite view. As well, insofar as Dixon advocated public ownership it was the public ownership of natural resources and utilities that he had in mind, and a single tax on land still remained an integral part of his prescriptions for society up until his resignation from the Legislature in 1923.<sup>76</sup> On those occasions when his rhetoric was pricked and he was challenged to define what social or co-operative ownership entailed he gave an essentially Georgeite reply.

After the 1920 provincial election Dixon was technically in a position to lead a coalition government of labour-socialist members, independent Farmers and Conservatives, subject of course to their obtaining agreement among themselves. This possibility so appalled J.W. Daffoe, the *éminence grise* of Manitoba Liberalism, that frequent editorials on the subject appeared in the *Manitoba Free Press*. These claimed that Dixon and the D.L.P. were communists and land nationalizers because the first clause of the party's constitution called for "the transformation of capitalist property into social property, with production for use instead of for profit." Daffoe's main intention was of course to drive a wedge between the D.L.P. and the farmers. In a speech in Brandon in September 1920 Dixon sought to explain his party's position on social property. The Labour party, he said, took in all workers by hand or by brain, farmers as well as industrial workers. He explained the meaning of social property by giving examples of its use in the past:

[Dixon] pointed out that the old toll roads, a capitalist affair had to give way to public highways, the post office system for the benefit of the whole people grew out of private means of communication. The farmers found they must have their own elevators because of the exactions of those who took toll of them. Labor, he said, declared for a principle, the application of which should come as fast as the people are ready for it.

Cold storage and public abattoirs were advocated to reduce the spread that makes for the high cost of living. The Labor party stands for state banks, the extension of the application of the principle which the Norris government has adopted in its provincial savings bank.<sup>77</sup>

Dixon concluded by reiterating the need for the land values taxation of unoc-

<sup>74</sup> Dixon once said the ideal he believed in was summed up in "the co-operative commonwealth." Unfortunately he did not specify what this meant.

<sup>75</sup> George also employed the terminology of 'co-operation.' See *Progress and Poverty* (New York 1935), 454-472.

<sup>76</sup> *Western Labor News*, 15 November 1918; *Manitoba Free Press*, 25 January 1918; 19 January, 11 February, 3 March 1922. F.J. Dixon, "True Democracy," July 1917, *Dixon Papers*, Public Archives of Manitoba.

<sup>77</sup> *Western Labor News*, 10 September 1920.

cupied land and the public ownership of natural resources. In essence it is a Georgite view of political economy emphasizing public utilities, land taxation, and the public ownership of natural resources. It falls short of the traditional socialist emphasis on the public ownership of all of the means of production, distribution, and exchange. This is how Dafoe saw Dixon's speech.<sup>78</sup> Dixon, he said, had interpreted clause one of his party's constitution to mean the socialization of community utilities as fast as the people were ready for it. If this was its meaning Dafoe argued, there was nothing distinctive about the D.L.P., for other parties advocated the same. He suggested another interpretation. Dixon was misrepresenting the D.L.P. position and clause one meant the socialization of all capital including land.

What Dixon's economic philosophy lacked in 1920, and Farmer's too, was the presence of a principle that would justify the public ownership and control of all forms of economic enterprise governed by private profit. Other leaders of the I.L.P., like Woodsworth, held to the view that there was an inevitable technological necessity to the growth of trusts, combines, and monopolies. Thus all business and industry either had reached or would soon reach a condition of monopoly or near monopoly, and under such an economic regime, Woodsworth argued, justice would require that they be owned and controlled by the people through a democratic state.<sup>79</sup> In contrast Dixon's and Farmer's advocacy of socialization stopped short at public utilities. Implicitly Dixon and Farmer, in spite of their rhetoric of anti-capitalism, still believed in some kind of competitive, market economy. They did not believe that the domination of the modern corporate economy by monopolies was inevitable but rather that it was an instance of "adventitious" exploitation that would be rectified by the election of a progressive government.<sup>80</sup> After this previously privileged monopolistic enterprises would lose their special relationship to the state and would compete like everyone else amidst the rigours and uncertainties of a free marketplace. The exception to this general rule were technical monopolies which would be owned and operated by the government.

In the main, Farmer's post-war economic world view corresponded very closely with Dixon's. On one point, however, there was a subtle difference of perspective and this was with regard to single tax. Like any term single tax can be used either broadly or narrowly. At least two senses of the term can be distinguished. First, there is the conception of single tax as a total system of ideas. According to this view all the economic, social, and political discontents of man are seen mainly to derive from land monopoly, so that the key to the good society will be a single tax on land values which will destroy the power of the land monopolist. I have argued that Dixon and Farmer held to this view of single tax in their early years. A second sense of single tax abbreviates its

<sup>78</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 8 September 1920.

<sup>79</sup> Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics* (Toronto 1959), 184-192.

<sup>80</sup> The notion of "adventitious" exploitation is Charles Taylor's. See his *The Pattern of Politics* (Toronto 1970), 12.

meaning to denote simply a concern to see land values properly taxed. After the war Dixon continued to be a single taxer in both senses, but Farmer restricted himself simply to advocating land values taxation.<sup>81</sup> Farmer's post-war usage of the term became an integral part of the public policy of the I.L.P., so that Dixon's all-inclusive conception of single tax and his belief that the last word on social reform was contained within the covers of *Progress and Poverty* made him out of step even with his own party. But clearly his influence, as well as Farmer's, helped give the I.L.P. an abiding concern for land monopoly throughout the 1920s.<sup>82</sup>

## V

GEORGEISM, in one form or another, greatly influenced the political ideas of Dixon and Farmer. Their early beliefs were almost quintessentially Georgeite, while after the war they became less individualist and anti-socialist. Even so, the foundations of their politics in the early 1920s may still be seen to derive from Georgeism: welfarism, free trade, land values taxation, public ownership of utilities and natural resources, and, in the wider world, pacifism and internationalism. It is not that there were no other sources of such ideas in Dixon's and Farmer's environment. It is rather that the special quality with which they espoused and combined such ideas seemed to derive from George. Certainly their conception of natural rights was almost pure Georgeism and it gave to their politics and those of the I.L.P. a strong libertarian tradition.

Although Dixon and Farmer cast off much of their early rhetoric of individualism, after the war they still implicitly accepted the voluntarism and anti-monopolism of a market society. Partly as a consequence, the I.L.P. in the 1920s was much less statist, technocratic, and centralist in outlook than other contemporary Canadian traditions of left-wing radicalism, for example, that associated after 1925 with *The Canadian Forum* and later the League for Social Reconstruction.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, there is a sense in which Dixon and Farmer, like much of the Canadian left, never completely transcended the liberal account of civil society. Early on Dixon and Farmer saw human association and co-operation in terms of instrumental relations of personal advantage and not in terms of inter-subjective sociality and brotherhood. During and after the war, Dixon in particular employed the terminology of the co-operative commonwealth, but it is not clear that he did so in any systematic or socialist sense. Nor did Dixon and Farmer acknowledge sufficiently the importance of

<sup>81</sup> *Manitoba Free Press*, 3 April 1917; 12 April 1920; 16 February 1923; *Weekly News*, 26 February 1926. Dixon maintained his association with the local single tax community after the war but Farmer did not.

<sup>82</sup> *The Independent*, 24 February, 10 March 1922; *Weekly News*, 27 March, 15 May 1925; 12 March 1926; 25 February 1927.

<sup>83</sup> See Allen Mills, "The Forum and Canadian Socialism, 1920-1934," *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 13 (1978) 11-27.





*Ramsay MacDonald with his 3 daughters, F.J. Tipping, S.J. Farmer and wife, and Arthur Puttee and wife, Winnipeg, August 1928. Original photograph in possession of Farmer family.*

regarding political activity itself as an essential part of the good society and something more therefore than simply a means to provide other desirable ends. What caused them to hold such views cannot be determined with certainty, but George's philosophy was probably responsible.

Dixon's and Farmer's world views were not the only elements in the ideological make-up of the early I.L.P. No doubt this was how Dixon and Farmer wished it. Their conception of politics was always inclusivist, non-sectarian, practical, anti-partyist, and co-operative, and this helped ensure that the early I.L.P. would be a coalition of views. In the early 1920s the I.L.P. encompassed neo-Georgeites, simple labourites, social gossellers, progressive farmers, democratic socialists, and even some O.B.U.'ers. All of them by then believed in an evolutionary approach to politics and unity of action around limited, practical purposes. It was, it would seem, an effective model of politics because the Independent Labour Party of Manitoba quickly emerged from the welter of competing post-war labour and socialist parties and organizations in Manitoba to establish itself as an integral part of the province's political system.