

**“Building the Future in a Steady but Measured Pace”:
A Political Biography of Marjorie Cooper Hunt, 1902-1984**

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study of the public life of Marjorie Cooper, Saskatchewan's third female MLA, adds to the understanding of Canadian women's history from the 1920s through the 1960s. Cooper's biography sheds light on women's common experience during this period. The following thesis illustrates the ways in which some women balanced family life and work in the public sphere, including how they dealt with inequitable power structures.

The thesis explores the experience of middle class women in volunteer organizations in the 1930s and 1940s and on government boards in the post-1945 era. Work in these organizations gave Canadian women an opportunity to improve their communities, while simultaneously gaining skills which allowed them to function effectively in the wider public sphere. Cooper's work with volunteer organizations and government boards demonstrated that women could work capably in the public sphere without losing their ability to be "lady-like." Participation in these groups produced real opportunities for Cooper by creating a positive public profile and helping her to develop the skills necessary to pursue a career in politics.

The wider experiences of women in the CCF and Saskatchewan politics in the 1950s and 1960s are further revealed in this study. Marjorie Cooper's successful political career established that voters would support a female candidate. It also demonstrated that women could be effective and well-respected politicians. In this regard Cooper was more successful than the two women who came before her in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly in establishing a place for women.

Cooper was able to harmonize gracefully the demands of family life with the challenges of a career in public life. Cooper provides an example of the "respectable feminism" which gave many women the opportunity to serve in public office. While hesitating to define herself as a "real feminist," her feminist values are apparent in the way she lived, the way she expressed her social activism and in her politics.

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I also would like to acknowledge the assistance received from the staff of the Saskatchewan Archives Board, the Saskatchewan Legislative Library and the City of Regina Archives.

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Introduction: Biographies of Women

Marjorie Cooper's¹ contemporaries viewed her as a good wife and mother, a capable community leader and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), and an eternally maternal and "ladylike" woman. While this description of Cooper is an accurate one, it fails to paint the whole picture. Integrated with Cooper's nurturing, maternal character, and equally as important, was a woman with ambition, feminist goals and a strong commitment to socialism. As a result of her "ladylike" demeanor and diplomacy this side of Cooper was not instantly obvious.

This thesis will examine the public life of Marjorie Cooper, Saskatchewan's third female MLA. Chapter One will explore Cooper's early influences and her family life. It will discuss the path which took her to politics, particularly her extensive volunteer work first in the community and then in the wider provincial sphere. Cooper was active in various organizations including her church, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Regina Council of Women (RCW), the John Howard Society and the Saskatchewan Mental Health Association. She sat on the first provincial Labour Relations Board and the Public Service Commission. Chapter Two looks at the "political" side of Marjorie Cooper's political career; her winning of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) party nomination in 1952 and her success in subsequent election campaigns. Cooper was re-elected to the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly three times and retired undefeated in 1967. Chapter Three explores various aspects of the interplay between Cooper's gender and her political career. Chapter Four looks at other aspects of Cooper's

¹ For the sake of clarity, the name Marjorie Cooper has been used throughout the thesis. From 1902 until 1925 Cooper was Marjorie Lovering and from 1967 until her death in 1984 she was Marjorie Cooper Hunt.

accomplishments as an MLA, including her ability to effectively represent her constituents and her work in the fields of housing, education and health care. The concluding chapter deals with Cooper's retirement and the impact of her career in public life.

Throughout these five chapters several themes emerge. Cooper's life and career can shed light on women's common experience between the two waves of feminism.² Her experience as a respectable feminist illustrates how women balanced family life and work in the public sphere. It portrays the ways in which women, consciously and perhaps unconsciously, dealt with inequitable power structures in such a way as to allow them access to male-dominated spheres. Cooper's life experience can teach us a great deal about notions of acceptable gender roles in the CCF party, Saskatchewan politics and society in general.

This thesis will attempt to construct a balanced portrait of a woman who achieved a great deal of success in the male-dominated world of Saskatchewan politics in the 1950s and 1960s. In 1985 Susan Mann Trofimenkoff's article "Feminist Biography" expressed the concern that some feminists may have a concern with projects of this type: to "feminists biography appears to be a somewhat old fashioned and probably wrong-headed acceptance of male notions of importance." She went on to state that the ideals of feminism and women's history appear to collide with the idea of studying an elite woman in the male domain of politics.³

Grappling with the criticisms of biography leveled by social historians in the 1970s, Trofimenkoff concluded that feminist biography is able to accomplish numerous things. Biographies of women allow historians to portray women as

² The first wave of the feminist movement occurred in the early years of the twentieth century and culminated in the granting of the vote to women during and immediately following the First World War. The second wave of the feminist movement picked up speed during the 1960s.

³ Susan Mann Trofimenkoff, "Feminist Biography," *Atlantis*, Vol.10 No.2 (1985), pp.1-3.

actors in a culture that stressed their passivity. They also allow for individualization which can serve as a test of generalizations about a given society or social group. Trofimenkoff argues that the extensive information that is "knowable" about the subject of a biography, often women such as Cooper who excelled in a very public career, can help to shed light on the experiences of other less visible women.⁴ This political biography will attempt to accomplish all of these tasks. Now, in the 1990s, the validity of a biographical approach when studying both "ordinary" and "notable" women is well accepted by feminist scholars.⁵

The examination of Cooper's career is a useful illustration of the life cycle of many middle class Canadian women. While Cooper's career in the public sphere was unarguably extraordinary, until her election to the provincial legislature it was typical of those of many middle class Canadian women at the time. She grew up, went to school, worked briefly in a respectable profession, married, raised children and moved back into the public sphere later in life, just as her contemporaries did. By looking at the ways in which Cooper made these transitions and how she felt about them, we can infer that other women shared similar experiences.

This thesis will attempt to illuminate the life of Cooper as an extraordinary individual. In their article, "Feminism and the Writing and Teaching of History," Ruth Pierson and Alison Prentice argue that a critical task of feminism is to study structures of inequality. They go on to argue that "it is equally the task of feminism to reclaim, elucidate and reevaluate the positive aspects of women's

⁴ Ibid., p.4.

⁵ Elspeth Cameron and Janice Dicken, Great Dames, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997, pp.3-7 and Sara Alpern et al, The Challenge of Feminist Biography, Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1992, pp.4-6.

experience in the present and in the past."⁶ By revealing what Cooper accomplished aside from whatever factors may have limited her, a "positive aspect" of women's experience will be brought to light.

Particularly important in the writing of a biography of a woman is the impact of her life cycle and familial relationships on her individual development. For example, while marriage may have restricted a woman's ability to seek full time paid employment, particularly once she had children, it may also have allowed her the opportunity to do unpaid work outside the home, as was the case with Cooper.⁷ While family relationships served to restrict women in some ways, they could also provide advantages. For example, being able to illustrate their status as "good mothers" allowed many women access to politics.⁸ In Cooper's case, because it was unnecessary for her to spend her days in the paid work force, she was able to pursue important work in the community. This was the work that would ultimately lead her to politics.

Marjorie Cooper has received less historical attention than her life and career warrant because she was not a "first." Sarah Ramsland is recognized as Saskatchewan's first woman MLA. Beatrice Trew holds the distinction of being the first female CCF MLA. But Cooper was really the first of these three to have a lengthy career in public life. As such, she provides a greater opportunity to study how and why women came to play a more visible and active role in Saskatchewan provincial politics.

Cooper's role in Saskatchewan history and CCF politics has been examined previously. Georgina Taylor's work on women in the CCF contains some general information on Cooper and other women in the CCF. Her M.A.

⁶ Ruth Pierson and Alison Prentice, "Feminism and the Writing and Teaching of History," *Atlantis*, Vol.7 No.2 (1982), p.38.

⁷ For a discussion of the value of a focus on the female life-cycle in feminist biographies see Alpern et al, p.9.

⁸ Trofimenkoff, p.6.

thesis, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women"⁹, provides a good introduction to Cooper in the context of a discussion of the involvement of twelve women in the CCF, both as candidates and party workers. Her essay, "The Women...Shall Help Lead the Way: Saskatchewan CCF-NDP Women Candidates in Provincial and Federal Elections, 1934-1966,"¹⁰ deals more specifically with female CCF-New Democratic Party (NDP) candidates. With the exception of Taylor's work, there is nothing more than passing reference to Cooper in the secondary sources.

Literature about the role of women in the CCF and in Canadian politics in general was vital to this thesis. Various works provided a great deal of contextual and comparative information. Joan Sangster's book Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950¹¹ helps to put the experience of Saskatchewan CCF women in a broadly-based national perspective. Her article "Women in the New Era: The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933-1940"¹² focuses on why women were drawn into the CCF and the role they played in the party prior to Cooper's direct involvement with the CCF. Olenka Melnyk's Remembering the CCF: No Bankers in Heaven devotes one chapter to the careers of three prominent women in the CCF.¹³ Dan Azoulay's "Winning

⁹ Georgina Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Saskatchewan, 1983.

¹⁰ Georgina Taylor, "The Women...Shall Help Lead the Way: Saskatchewan Women Candidates in Provincial and Federal Elections, 1934-1966," in Building the Co-operative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Saskatchewan, J.W. Brennan, ed., Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1984, pp.141-160.

¹¹ Joan Sangster, Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1989.

¹² Joan Sangster, "Women in the New Era: The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933-1940," in Building the Co-operative Commonwealth: Essays on the Democratic Socialist Tradition in Saskatchewan, J.W. Brennan, ed., Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1984, pp.69-98.

¹³ Olenka Melnyk, Remembering the CCF: No Bankers in Heaven, Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1989.

Women for Socialism: The Ontario CCF and Women, 1947-1961"¹⁴ studies the Ontario CCF's approach to gender issues during a period of organizational recovery.

Even less directly related to the study of Cooper's career, yet critical to this thesis, is the work of Janine Brodie, Sylvia Bashevkin, Penny Kome and Margaret Conrad. Brodie's article "The Recruitment of Canadian Women Provincial Legislators, 1950-1975,"¹⁵ Bashevkin's Toeing the Lines: Women and Party Politics in English Canada¹⁶ and Kome's Women of Influence: Canadian Women and Politics¹⁷ allow for comparisons between the role of women in various political parties. Margaret Conrad's "'Not a Feminist But...': The Political Career of Ellen Louks Fairclough, Canada's First Female Federal Cabinet Minister"¹⁸ and the memoirs she edited for Fairclough, Saturday's Child: Memoirs of Canada's First Female Cabinet Minister,¹⁹ discuss the political career of a Progressive-Conservative federal cabinet minister. While there are a few similarities between Cooper's career and Fairclough's career, there are many differences. Franca Iacovetta's "A Respectable Feminist: The Political Career of Senator Cairine Wilson, 1921-1962"²⁰ provides another example of a political biography of a Canadian woman. Comparing the unique careers of these three women serves as a reminder that while gender plays an important role in

¹⁴ Dan Azoulay, "Winning Women for Socialism: The Ontario CCF and Women, 1947-1961," Labour/ Le Travail, Vol.36 (Fall 1995), pp.59-90.

¹⁵ Janine Brodie, "The Recruitment of Canadian Women Provincial Legislators, 1950-1975," Atlantis Vol. 2 (Spring 1977), pp.11-13.

¹⁶ Sylvia Bashevkin, Toeing the Lines: Women and Party Politics in English Canada, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985.

¹⁷ Penny Kome, Women of Influence: Canadian Women and Politics, Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1985.

¹⁸ Margaret Conrad, "'Not a Feminist But...': The Political Career of Ellen Louks Fairclough, Canada's First Female Federal Cabinet Minister," Journal of Canadian Studies, Vol.31 No. 2 (Summer 1996), pp.5-28.

¹⁹ Ellen Louks Fairclough, Saturday's Child: Memoirs of Canada's First Female Cabinet Minister, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995.

²⁰ Franca Iacovetta, "A Respectable Feminist: The Political Career of Senator Cairine Wilson, 1921-1962," in Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women in Politics, Linda Kealy and Joan Sangster eds., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989, pp.63-85.

women's political careers, it is only one of many influencing factors.

While Cooper's political career is not even mentioned in most of these works, a relatively large and varied body of primary source materials compensates for the lack of published information about Cooper. Two interviews with Cooper held by the Saskatchewan Archives Board were an invaluable source of information. They allowed Cooper, from the perspective of her retirement, to comment on her own experience. An interview conducted with June Mitchell, Cooper's daughter, was also a meaningful source of information. June Mitchell was able to fill in information concerning Cooper's family background and personal life. This information is integral to understanding Cooper's public career. Cooper's speeches in the Legislature of Saskatchewan, as recorded in the Debates and Proceedings, supplied a vast amount of information about her own thinking and views on the issues of the day. The Regina Leader-Post and the Commonwealth provided much useful background information on various aspects of her political career. These two newspapers were also helpful for gauging the reaction of the press and public to various events and issues.

If more of Cooper's private papers had survived, this would have undoubtedly enriched this thesis. Family and colleagues have made reference to the fact that Cooper interacted extensively with her constituents and with people in need from around the province. She was known to be available to field their concerns, and received and responded to many letters. Unfortunately, none of this material is known to remain in existence. While this added to the challenges of researching the career of a secondary political figure, it did not render an examination of Cooper's political life impossible as the following pages should demonstrate.

Chapter One:

From Teacher to Mother to Community Leader

Women's lifecycles and the socially constructed roles of wife and mother varied in their impact on political women; nevertheless, these were considerations that all political women had to negotiate within their respective cultural and class frameworks.¹

Marjorie Cooper's early years, her experience raising a family and her involvement in the community were typical of middle class urban women in the Saskatchewan of her era. At the same time, Cooper's extraordinary achievement in politics can be seen as a logical continuation of her community work and personal background. Cooper came from a strong Methodist, Liberal family where discussions around the table often focused on the issues of the day. She was living in Regina at the time of the Regina Riot and was heavily influenced by this and other experiences during the Depression. Following the Depression, Cooper went on to become a prominent community leader and was active in a variety of social causes. It is not surprising that by the early 1950s, with years of experience in the public sphere behind her and a grown family, she decided to run for a seat in the provincial legislature.

Marjorie Cooper was born Marjorie Lovering in Winnipeg in 1902, the second of three children. Both of her parents were raised in Ontario and were of British descent. They were also both strong Liberals and would remain sympathetic to the party throughout their lives. When Cooper ran for the CCF in Regina she knew that her mother voted for her, but she was never sure of how her father voted. In spite of her support for her daughter, at the 1952 opening of the legislature Cooper's mother called out "keep up the good work" as she

¹ Linda Kealy and Joan Sangster, "Introduction," in Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989, p.9.

passed an old acquaintance from the Liberal women's club.²

Cooper's mother, Annie Lovering (1867-1963), worked to raise her three children and, like Cooper herself, did a great deal of community work. Annie was viewed as "intelligent, well-read and confident that she was as capable as any man."³ But as Cooper stated, "of course she didn't take a job where she got paid."⁴ Annie Lovering was active in the Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) and the RCW; she was president of the latter organization from 1927 to 1929. Her granddaughter describes her as "a very independent woman...she knew who she was, and I suspect her mother before was like that."⁵ Prior to the enfranchisement of women, Annie Lovering often expressed her anger that women were unable to vote. Her belief in gender equality is evident in her relationship with her husband. She once went so far as to purchase a house without his knowledge while he was out of town.

Cooper's father, Henry Lovering (1867-1954), pursued a variety of careers. He worked as a missionary in British Columbia for a number of years and planned to become a Methodist minister. Ultimately he decided against ordination due to theological differences with the church, an act his granddaughter describes as "rather typical of our family."⁶ Over the course of his life, Lovering went on to homestead, run a tree nursery and a market garden, write for the Regina Leader-Post and work for the Saskatchewan Department of

² Interview with Marjorie Cooper by Georgina Taylor in Co-operative Commonwealth Women Collection (hereafter cited as Oral History Tapes), 20 August 1980, Saskatchewan Archives Board (hereafter cited as SAB). The SAB signed a contract with Georgina Taylor to conduct interviews with 35 men and women from the CCF-NDP. The completed interviews and accompanying documentation were deposited in the archives and used by Taylor for her unpublished M.A. thesis, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women."

³ June Mitchell, "Marjorie," unpublished essay, June Mitchell Private Papers (hereafter cited as Mitchell Papers), in the possession of June Mitchell.

⁴ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁵ Interview with June Mitchell by C. Marie Fenwick (hereafter cited as June Mitchell Interview), 24 March 1997, in the possession of C. Marie Fenwick.

⁶ Ibid..

Municipal Affairs. Lovering was known as an austere, firmly-principled man and an avid reader. "He expected a lot of his children, but his severity was lightened by an infectious sense of humour, and a willingness to allow for individuality."⁷

Cooper was five when she and her family moved to Regina. She stayed in Regina until the age of 17, when she took a teaching position in McCord, Saskatchewan. Marjorie Cooper's sister, Luella Lovering, also became a teacher. Luella never married and taught in Regina until she retired. Their brother Ted worked as a reporter in Regina for the Leader-Post and in Chicago.

Marjorie Cooper, like many other middle class girls in the inter-war years, expected to spend part of her life in the paid labour force working in a stable and respectable profession such as teaching.⁸ Such women were able to acquire a fair degree of independence by living away from home and working prior to marriage. In 1919 and 1920 Cooper taught in McCord for a little over a year, at which time she returned to Regina to attend Normal School. This is where Cooper met her future husband Ed Cooper, a fellow teacher. After completing her teacher training, Cooper returned to teaching at a small, rural school in 1922. In Estlin she taught 31 students in nine grades in a one-room school house.

In her detailed study of women in the CCF, Joan Sangster states that there were several motivating factors that drew women into the party.⁹ While each individual circumstance is unique, the following factors are ones that Cooper shared with other women in the CCF: witness to social inequalities, the experience of the Depression and adherence to the social gospel.

Cooper's first significant exposure to social inequality came while teaching in rural Saskatchewan during her late teens and early twenties. While Cooper loved teaching, she was struck by the lack of money spent on education, the

⁷ Mitchell, "Marjorie," Mitchell Papers.

⁸ Veronica Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled: The Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1929, Toronto: Copp Clark Pittman Ltd., 1988, p.42.

⁹ Sangster, Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950, pp.93-98.

poor facilities and the fact that some children had to walk very long distances to attend school. She also was very much affected by the poverty she saw amongst her students; "I saw too much poverty where I didn't think it was necessary," she later recalled.¹⁰ Cooper's experiences with these poor children, many of whom were recent immigrants from Eastern Europe who often spoke no English, was the first step on her path to socialism.

Cooper returned to Regina in 1923 and taught at Lakeview School for two more years. Then in 1925, at the age of 23, she married Ed Cooper and her teaching career ended. This was typical in the 1920s and 1930s when marriage or the birth of their first child caused most women to leave the workforce.¹¹ In an interview conducted by Georgina Taylor in 1980, Cooper stated that she stopped working because "at that time married women had to." Cooper went on to relate her experience of speaking to the school superintendent in Brandon, where she and her husband had moved shortly following their marriage. The superintendent told Cooper that the school board never hired married women, not even to substitute. When asked if she believed this to be fair, Cooper responded: "No, I was as angry as could be."¹²

Cooper and her husband had two daughters: June in 1926 and Elaine in 1928. As a result of difficulties during the birth of their second child, the Coopers had no more children. In 1930 the Coopers returned to Regina where Ed continued his teaching career at Central Collegiate. During these early years of marriage Marjorie's husband had a strong impact on her developing ideology. Ed came from what Cooper described as a "radical family" which had been made even more radical by the First World War. Ed himself was a committed pacifist and had refused to bear arms in the war. Instead, he had volunteered for

¹⁰ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

¹¹ Strong-Boag, p.41.

¹² Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

service as a stretcher-bearer in a medical unit. Ed's experience in the war was so disturbing that upon returning to Canada he burned his uniform and medals and refused to talk about his experiences in Europe.

Ed Cooper returned to Winnipeg after the war and happened to be there at the time of the 1919 general strike. Not surprisingly, he found himself very much in sympathy with the plight of the strikers. The horror which he had seen during the war combined with the injustice he witnessed in Winnipeg helped to cement Ed's belief that social change was necessary. From this point on he vowed always to be on the side of the underdog.

Marjorie Cooper was initially shocked by what she considered the radical nature of Ed's political philosophy. She then found that with a little time and some reading she came to share the political views of her husband. While Cooper read relatively little left-wing literature, she later recalled the work of J.S. Woodsworth and M.J. Coldwell as having had a large influence on her political views. Cooper cited Nellie McClung, Agnes McPhail and any other "woman who would stick her neck out and try to do something to make the world a little better"¹³ as inspirations as well.

Events during the Depression and the On-to-Ottawa trekker's stop in Regina acted as a catalyst in the transformation of Cooper's political views, as they did with many others who would later join the CCF. "I really got interested [in politics] during the depression when I saw how terrible it was for so many people."¹⁴ Although Ed's salary was cut in half during the Depression and the family was forced to sell its car, the Coopers always emphasized to their children that they were among the lucky ones. Marjorie and Ed Cooper also emphasized that those who did not have jobs were their equals and were not poor through

¹³ Ibid..

¹⁴ Interview with Marjorie Cooper by Jean Larmour (hereafter cited as Larmour Interview), SAB.

any fault of their own.

In spite of their own financial difficulties, Cooper and her husband did what they could to help the needy during the Depression. Along with her work in the church and community organizations, Cooper often put together packages of clothing and other necessities to help local families in need. The work of preparing these packages with her children was accompanied by explicit instructions that the girls were never to make it known which local families were receiving assistance.

The Coopers lived close to the Canadian Pacific Railway tracks and often saw trains loaded down with men looking for work. As a result of their proximity to the tracks, it was not uncommon for some of these people to show up on their doorstep asking for food. The Coopers never turned people away empty-handed. They even told their young daughters that if people asked for food while they were away from the house that, while the girls should not invite them inside, they should always bring them something to eat on the porch. June recalled her mother saying "never turn someone away from the door without food." The Coopers believed that "God's law about feeding the hungry was superior to any law passed by R.B. Bennett."¹⁵

In 1935 at the time of the Regina Riot the Coopers were living on the corner of 13th Avenue and Cameron Street, close enough to downtown to hear shots fired. The Coopers took food to the trekkers, and provided refuge to four of them following the riot. Ed Cooper went so far as to help them get safely out of the city the following day. Cooper recalled the riot as "a devastating experience," and stated that she thought the trekkers "were being most unjustly treated and very badly misunderstood."¹⁶ At the time of the riot, Cooper still had

¹⁵ June Mitchell, "Junie's World," unpublished essay, Mitchell Papers.

¹⁶ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

little interest in left wing politics, but the riot served as the most important catalyst leading her to the CCF.

Along with the influence of her husband and the social injustices she witnessed, Cooper stated that her "religious ideals greatly influenced [her] decision to join the CCF." Cooper saw socialist politics as an extension of her Christian beliefs and firmly believed that the way to display religion was to help others. She stated: "My belief in the social gospel of Christ, not in the Old Testament, but in the social gospel of Christ, led me to believe that the ideal was in the ideas of the CCF."¹⁷ Cooper was very active in Metropolitan United Church in downtown Regina. Her activities with the church included singing in the choir and working with young people in Canadian Girls in Training.

From this initial activity in the church, Cooper's community involvement expanded into other areas. As Veronica Strong-Boag states in her study of the lives of girls and women in the inter-war years: "age and material circumstances granted some women important opportunities to test their measure in public life."¹⁸ Cooper was certainly among these women. She was able to pursue her community work for several reasons. Most importantly, she had much help from her husband who was an avid supporter of her work. In addition, the Coopers lived in a duplex with Marjorie's parents. Mrs. Lovering spent a great deal of time helping to care for her grandchildren. The Coopers also had a young woman from rural Saskatchewan living with them while attending high school in Regina. These students would help with household responsibilities in exchange for room and board. These three factors gave Cooper more free time to pursue her work outside of the home. These same factors, in addition to the maturing of her children, would enable Cooper to pursue a career in politics one day. Although

¹⁷ Ibid..

¹⁸ Strong-Boag, p.220.

Cooper was active in community organizations from the time her children were young, she was always careful to make certain that her outside interests did not interfere with her family life. Her daughter recalled that while her mother was always busy outside the home, she was there to greet her children when they got home from school.

Cooper was involved with a variety of organizations in Regina including the Community Chest, the Saskatchewan Mental Health Association and the John Howard Society. By far, the two organizations with which Cooper became most involved, and the ones that had the most profound impact on her, were the YWCA and the RCW. Some writers in the period following the Second World War were critical of these organizations for being preoccupied with planning teas and passing resolutions rather than dealing with many important social issues. During this period women's groups, including the YWCA and the National Council of Women (NCW), did pursue many of these traditional activities. At the same time, they were focusing more attention on the changing status of women and many other important social and economic issues. More recent historical scholarship argues that rooted "in the first women's movement, the established women's groups formed the bridge to the resurgent feminism of the late 1960's."¹⁹

The Regina Council of Women was the organization in which Cooper was most active. Her knowledge of and involvement with the RCW dated back to the 1920s when her mother had been an active member. Cooper herself was active in the organization from 1934 until 1949; she served as president from 1946 to 1948. During this period Cooper started to become more aware of women's inequality in the public sphere and began to consider a career in politics.

¹⁹ Alison Prentice et al, Canadian Women: A History, 2nd ed., Toronto: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1991, p.411.

In order to gain a greater understanding of Cooper's world view and feminist philosophy, it is useful to understand those of the RCW as a whole. Cooper was undoubtedly attracted to the organization because she sympathized with its mission. The women who were involved in the RCW in the 1930s and 1940s differed little from those in the NCW or from the original membership of the RCW. The typical executive member of the RCW was 40 to 60 years of age with grown children, married to a civil servant, professional or a businessman and of British descent. They were generally women with some status in the community.²⁰

Cooper summarized her views concerning the importance of the National Council of Women in her first annual President's Report in 1946. She stated that the Council was a large force in

shaping policies for the Canadian people; in educating the public towards maintaining better standards of living; in educating women to take a more active interest in public life and in developing a more tolerant internationally minded people.²¹

During the Depression and the Second World War the RCW continued its reform work with the same moderation and caution as it had in the past. Although more progressive voices were beginning to emerge in the RCW, it remained a strong guardian of maternal feminism. During this period the Council continued to look for ways to improve the lives of women but still rarely questioned the existing order and women's primary role as housewives and mothers.

Cooper and her fellow RCW members were reformers first and feminists second. They did not challenge the traditional roles of men and women in society, but rather believed that in times of trouble, when reform was necessary,

²⁰ Janet Harvey, "The Regina Council of Women, 1895-1929," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Regina, 1991, p.59.

²¹ Regina Council of Women Papers (hereafter cited as RCW Papers), President's Report, 1946, SAB.

it was the duty of women to apply their talents to the public sphere. This was the rationalization that was applied to their work outside of the home.

Prior to the Second World War, the work of the RCW can be divided into three categories: community service, reform activities and international affairs. Some of the projects in the area of community service included the founding of Regina's first hospital, the opening of a home for unwed mothers, managing Babies' Welfare (a temporary home for infants), assisting with city-operated playgrounds and the creation of a milk fund. The Council was interested in various types of reform work, including the censorship of films and literature, the sale of tobacco to young boys, the employment of white women by Orientals, the rights of working women, mothers' pensions, women's legal rights within the family and the promotion of women as candidates for elected office. The RCW also saw it as part of its duty to be concerned with international issues and felt that, as mothers, women had an important role to play in promoting peace.

All of the activities pursued by the RCW from its creation through the Second World War reflect its maternal feminism. Women on the Council strongly believed that they had a role to play in the public sphere, even if that role was closely tied to women's traditional role as homemaker and mother.²² Cooper was attracted to the Regina Council of Women for the same reasons as many other women were. For her, as for others, it would be an opportunity to express her altruism, patriotism and commitment to the family, and to extend her mothering to the community.²³ It also served as a rewarding substitute career in lieu of a profession in the paid workforce.

Cooper sat on the Cinema and Printed Matter Committee from 1935 to 1942 and acted as its Convenor for most of these years. Cooper was motivated

²² Harvey, p.225.

²³ Veronica Strong-Boag, "The Roots of Modern Feminism," Canada: An Historical Magazine, Vol.3 No.2 (December 1975), p.24.

to work for this Committee by her belief as a respectable feminist that "a community can set a moral tone, ideals and standards."²⁴ Throughout the 1930s and 1940s Cinema and Printed Matter was one of the most active committees in the RCW. The Committee was concerned with the monitoring of books, magazines, radio programs and films for "objectionable content." Its primary goal was to protect children from exposure to unsuitable films. In 1936, Cooper's report on behalf of the Committee dealt solely with cinema because "the cinema plays a much greater part in the lives of our young people than magazines do."²⁵

The Committee hoped to accomplish its goal through the promotion of acceptable films rather than criticizing the bad ones. It created publicity for "good films" in several ways. A representative from the Committee gave bi-weekly radio broadcasts listing the five best pictures that were being shown in the city and their age suitability. During her tenure as Convenor of the Cinema and Printed Matter Committee Cooper was responsible for these broadcasts. The Committee also advised schools and clubs on the suitability of films and urged parents to monitor the films their children viewed. This information, printed in a bulletin, was also available at the public library. Cooper and the other members of the committee were acting as respectable guardians of morality.

The work of this RCW Committee supplemented the work being performed by the one-man provincial Board of Censors. In 1911 an Order-in-Council was enacted setting out detailed regulations concerning film censorship. These included provisions for the appointment of a Board of Censors to examine all films entering the province. Only films the Board deemed suitable could be shown. The first Board was appointed in 1913 and its aim was to "eliminate all objectionable features of an immoral or criminal character."²⁶ The types of

²⁴ Leader-Post, 18 January 1955.

²⁵ RCW Papers, Cinema and Printed Matter Committee Minutes, 1936, SAB.

²⁶ Doug Bocking, "The Saskatchewan Board of Film Censors, 1910-1935," Saskatchewan History, Vol.XXIV No.2 (Spring 1971), p.53.

things that were considered to be objectionable included portrayals of crime, violence, infidelity and the consumption of alcohol. While there were provisions for the censor to rate films as adult or general, the rating was sometimes incorrect or absent all together. The RCW responded by writing letters to the provincial government in order to draw attention to these oversights. The Cinema and Printed Matter Committee offered various suggestions to the province, including moving responsibility for censorship to the Department of Education.

Cooper was Convenor of the Trades and Professions Committee in 1945 and 1946. This was the only committee in the RCW which dealt with the fate of Regina's working women. The attitude expressed in the deliberations of this committee reflect the expansion of more progressive ideas within the RCW and the growing acceptance of working women in Canadian society. The RCW recognized that although the overwhelming majority of its membership did not work, many other women in the community had little choice but to seek paid employment outside of the home. The RCW argued that because more women would be spending their lives working, efforts should be made through legislation and the molding of public opinion to ensure better opportunities and fair pay for working women. The focus of the committee during and immediately following the Second World War was female unemployment, the activities of the Minimum Wage Board, the improvement of educational opportunities for women and girls, pay equity and the preservation of the gains women had made during the war.

When Cooper took over as Convenor of the Trades and Professions Committee in 1945 it "concentrated on the study of conditions of employment particularly related to women."²⁷ This included the continued monitoring of the Minimum Wage Board and training courses for girls. Prior to the Second World

²⁷ RCW Papers, Annual Reports, 1945, SAB.

War the RCW viewed domestic service as the best possible solution for female unemployment, but by 1946 it was beginning to see that this alone was not an adequate solution to the problem.

This emphasis on channeling girls and women into domestic service had a long history. As a result of chronic shortages of domestic labour dating from the late 19th century, women's groups, including the National Council of Women and the YWCA, had pressed governments to alleviate the problem through education and immigration policies.²⁸ During the 1920s and 1930s domestic service remained the largest occupational category for Canadian women, and the lowest in status.²⁹ Domestic service, particularly "living-in," was considered a last resort. Those who had alternatives avoided this work due to the low wages, long hours, lack of privacy and freedom, and the threat of sexual harassment.³⁰ The women who did seek this type of work were those with no alternatives. They included the very young or elderly, those with little education or few language skills, and women with children who were unable to find (or pay for) child-care. Prior to the Second World War all attempts to modernize the profession and improve working conditions had failed.

By the end of the war women in the RCW were becoming aware that simply elevating the status of domestic service and channeling women towards this work would not solve the problem of female unemployment. In 1945 Cooper reported on behalf of the Trades and Professions Committee that "our major study for this year has been the question of household employment." The report, prepared by Cooper, illustrates a growing understanding of the issues surrounding female employment after the war. The Committee found that many

²⁸ Ruth Roach Pierson, They're Still Women After All: The Second World War and Canadian Womanhood, Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Inc., 1986, p.61.

²⁹ Strong-Boag, The New Day Recalled: The Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada. 1919-1929, p.54.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p.55.

of the women employed in the armed services and war industries had been employed as domestics prior to the war. They also found that "out of the hundreds of girls interviewed by personnel workers, only 3 or 4 stated they would be willing to go back to household work."³¹

While Cooper recognized this to be a problem, she continued to view improving conditions for domestic workers as the best solution to female unemployment. Cooper believed that if women refused to return to household service after leaving the armed forces and war industries, unemployment would become aggravated and housewives who really needed their services would suffer. Cooper went on to state that "it is generally conceded" that before they returned to this type of work, domestics must have minimum wage protection, access to unemployment insurance, workers' compensation, sick leave and holiday pay. To Cooper this was "the ideal solution" but she saw it as "very difficult to achieve."³²

The work of the Trades and Professions Committee changed slightly during 1945, the year that Cooper was Convenor. While it continued to focus on employment issues related to women, the Committee expanded its work to include issues related to collective bargaining and the growth of trade unionism. On these issues Cooper stated: "I believe that women are too little concerned with the real issues involved in spite of the fact that they affect the lives of women as well as those of men."³³

The Committee urged the RCW to push the Dominion government to create a women's section of the Department of Labour "remembering that the right to gainful employment is a basic right for women as well as men."³⁴ Cooper espoused many of the ideas that have been attributed to maternal feminists but

³¹ RCW Papers, Annual Report, 1945, SAB.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

in the 1940s she also began to express ideas that have been categorized as those of equal rights feminists. However, early in her public life and later in her career as a politician the defining feature of her feminism was its emphasis on respectability. Her respectable feminism was one of a "plurality of feminisms."³⁵ Cooper argued that restrictions on the ability of married women to work were nothing short of a denial of certain rights of citizenship.

In 1948 as President of the RCW Cooper was asked by the province to comment on the issue of calling women for jury duty. When announcing that the Laws Committee would conduct a study, Cooper stated: "I believe jury duty would be an excellent education for women, many of whom lead a very protected life."³⁶ In 1949, on behalf of the Laws Committee, Cooper reported that women should indeed serve as jurors. What is most significant are the reasons she gave for this opinion. The primary one was that acting as a juror was a woman's right and privilege as a citizen. While other reasons were given, including the difficulty in finding enough available male jurors, the one most emphasized was that women must assume both the rights and duties of citizenship. She reported: "People who are not willing to assume the duties of free people will lose their franchise sooner or later."³⁷

In 1950 the CCF government revised the Jury Act to allow women to sit as jurors. All citizens of Saskatchewan between the ages of 21 and 65 could now be called for jury duty. A special clause was included which allowed women to opt out of service by claiming exemption within three days of being called. This clause which allowed women the option of refusing jury duty was not removed until 1973.

³⁵ Rosalind Delmar, "What is Feminism?" in *What is Feminism?*, Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley eds., New York: Pantheon Books, 1986, pp.9 and 21 cited in Georgina Taylor, "Ground for Common Action: Violet McNaughton's Agrarian Feminism and the Origin of the Farm Women's Movement in Canada," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, Carleton University, Ottawa, 1997, p. 9.

³⁶ RCW Papers, Annual Report, 1949.

³⁷ Ibid., Report of Laws Committee, 1949, SAB.

Following years of extensive involvement with various committees in the RCW, Cooper was selected as President in 1946. While Cooper did not radically alter the course of the RCW during her presidency, she provided strong and effective leadership for the organization. Cooper's move toward politics was becoming more evident. In her President's Report in 1946 she addressed the issue of health care with a potentially controversial statement:

I personally look forward to the day when all medical services will be provided through our taxes, as a co-operative effort, as I sincerely believe that the right to health is a basic right for every individual regardless of their ability to pay for necessary medical services.³⁸

Cooper's involvement in the RCW overlapped with the time she spent working for the YWCA. Cooper first became active on a YWCA committee in 1934. Like the RCW, the YWCA was involved in community service and reform activities which were typical of maternal feminist organizations at the time. The women of the YWCA were concerned with providing "constructive activities" for girls through the Girls' Work and Health Education Committee.³⁹ The types of activities that were considered to be constructive included ice carnivals, hobby fairs, Valentine teas and posture classes.

The YWCA Board of Directors was also concerned with more serious issues such as the problem of finding adequate housing for unemployed 'girls.' The Board wrote to the RCW asking it to use its influence to press for a woman investigator to look into the problems which women on relief faced. By 1936 the YWCA was beginning to take more direct action to aid "destitute girls,"⁴⁰ such as taking in unemployed young women and attempting to find jobs for them. Cooper was involved with the YWCA on a variety of committees. In 1934 she

³⁸ Ibid., President's Report, 1946, SAB.

³⁹ Young Women's Christian Association of Regina Papers (hereafter cited as YWCA Papers), Board of Directors' Minutes, 1934, SAB.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 1936.

was on the Travelers' Aid Committee and the Press Committee. By 1936 she was active on the Travelers' Aid, Health Education and Finance Committees in addition to being Treasurer. Cooper was acting President of the YWCA Board of Directors in 1937.

During 1937 Cooper further expanded her work in the area of women's employment when she was selected to represent the YWCA on a committee organized to plan training courses for 'girls' under the National Employment Commission. Like the RCW, the YWCA had an attitude toward women's employment that was typical of the time. It saw the training of women as domestics as the solution to post-war unemployment problems. In 1940 the Board wrote to City Council to offer its "building and help in organizing classes for domestics."⁴¹ Cooper appears to have shared this view. In 1940 she reported to the Board that there was "no point in carrying on training for domestics at present," because there were currently no eligible single 'girls' on relief who might attend.⁴² Her opinion that the course should not be held was based only on the lack of 'girls' to fill the spaces, not on the larger issue of whether being trained as domestics would be of benefit to young women.

Cooper was selected as President of the YWCA in 1941 and held the position for two years. During this period Cooper's influence brought changes to the organization. New issues and areas of concern were discussed at board meetings; some were a reflection of her interests, including housing and labour issues. Due to housing shortages in Regina during Cooper's term as president, the primary focus of the YWCA became its rooms registry. The rooms registry was created as a result of a national YWCA initiative designed to alleviate the problem of housing shortages during the war.

⁴¹ Ibid., 1940.

⁴² Ibid..

Local YWCAs kept a list of vacant rental accommodation, particularly rooms to rent in homes, and matched them with people in need of housing. Virtually every month the War Services Committee of the YWCA reported that its chief problem was finding accommodation for those who needed it.⁴³ It was difficult to cope with the large number of incoming calls and there were never enough rooms to meet Regina's needs. Cooper was part of the YWCA committee which submitted a brief on housing to the Saskatchewan Reconstruction Council. Undoubtedly, Cooper's first-hand experience in attempting to find suitable housing contributed to her view that there was a real need for a publicly-funded housing program.

During her term as president Cooper expanded the scope of the YWCA Board's discussions of labour issues beyond female unemployment. In 1941 she read a long letter from the United Garment Workers of Winnipeg concerning one of its members who had been arrested and detained for nine months without cause. Although Cooper herself stated that "this hardly comes under our jurisdiction," the fact that she believed this to be of importance and relevant to the interests of the YWCA is reflected by her taking time to relate the incident at length to the Board.⁴⁴ After relating the contents of the letter to the YWCA she passed it on to the Laws Committee of the RCW for its consideration.

The YWCA Board also had a growing interest in the idea of state medicine, a subject which was more controversial than many the YWCA had dealt with in the past. In the spring of 1941 Cooper read a letter from the State Hospital and Medicine League and suggested that the YWCA study socialized medicine further. It was also during Cooper's term as President that a Prisoners' Welfare Committee was created.

⁴³ Ibid., 1942.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1941.

Cooper's experiences with the Liberal governments of James Gardiner and William Patterson during her time on the RCW and the YWCA further convinced her that political change was necessary. Cooper later recalled: "I learned that they [the government] would listen politely [to women] but that...they forgot all about you. They didn't think you were important." In her capacity as President of the YWCA Board of Directors, Cooper went to see the Liberal cabinet to ask for funds for repairs to the YWCA building. One member of the cabinet responded that the request could not be granted because if women were responsible for the money it would just fly out the window.⁴⁵ This incident had a strong impact on Cooper's view that there needed to be more women in politics.

Negative experiences such as this did not disillusion Cooper with politics, in fact they had the opposite effect. It was during this time, when she was presenting briefs to MLAs and the cabinet on behalf of the YMCA and the RCW, that she began to take a serious interest in politics. "It seemed so ridiculous that there was no woman there so that when our requests were to be dealt with there was nobody there to speak for women." Cooper felt that because the government caucus heard so many requests from various organizations it was easy for it to pass over those women made. Cooper believed that this problem could be alleviated by the presence of more women in politics. "I thought it was time and was advocating all the time that there should be women in politics."⁴⁶ In her 1948 RCW President's Report Cooper noted: "It is disheartening that no women were elected in the recent provincial elections and that our one woman member, Mrs. Beatrice Trew, was not returned to the legislature."⁴⁷

Cooper found that her extensive involvement in community groups shaped her views and led her increasingly toward a career in politics. This

⁴⁵ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁴⁶ Marjorie Cooper, Larmour Interview, SAB.

⁴⁷ RCW Papers, President's Report, 1948, SAB.

involvement gave her skills that would serve her well in her future political career. Through this community activity Cooper developed public speaking skills, organizational abilities and the capacity to be a strong and capable leader. She also became a very well-known person in the community.

By the mid-1940s Cooper had made a gradual transition from housewife and mother to prominent community leader. Her next transition, from community leader to politician, was also a gradual one. Cooper's progression to politics was facilitated by her appointment to the Labour Relations Board in 1945 and to the Public Service Commission in 1951.

In 1945 the recently-elected CCF government enacted the Trade Union Act, which guaranteed employees the right to join unions and bargain collectively. At the same time as the Trade Union Act came into effect, the Labour Relations Board was established to administer it. The powers of the Board were sweeping. It could "determine the unit of employees which is appropriate for the purposes of collective bargaining and determine the union, if any, which represents the majority of employees in an appropriate unit."⁴⁸ The Board was able to order individuals and companies to refrain from engaging in labour practices in violation of the Act. It could order employers to bargain collectively, reinstate persons discharged contrary to the Act and dismantle labour unions which were created under the domination of (or with interference from) the employer. Labour disputes could also be referred to the Board for conciliation.

All decisions of the Board were final and binding; as the Department of Labour Annual Report for 1945 put it, "there is no appeal from an order or decision of the Board."⁴⁹ Its orders were enforceable by the courts with possible

⁴⁸ Department of Labour, Annual Report, Regina: Queen's Printer, 1945, p.67.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p.69.

sentences ranging from small fines to imprisonment. Employers who willfully disobeyed an order of the Board could have their business taken over by the government until they demonstrated that they would comply.

The first Labour Relations Board was appointed by Order-in-Council in late January 1945. The members of the Board were selected to balance the interests of employers, employees and the general public. The seven-member board consisted of two representatives from each of these three groups and a Department of Labour representative who acted as chair. Cooper and Elsie Hart, of the United Farmers of Canada, were the two representatives of the general public, and the only women on the Board.

Cooper was chosen to sit on the Labour Relations Board for several reasons. One was her experience with various organizations, especially her role as chair of the Trades and Professions Committee for the RCW; another was her prominence within the community. She was also able to represent women and urban Saskatchewan. When discussing the appointments Minister of Labour C.C. Williams commented that Cooper was appointed because she was familiar with the viewpoint of the urban public, while Elsie Hart was familiar with that of the farm public.⁵⁰

The first two years following the creation of the Labour Relations Board was a period of great activity. In 1945 the bulk of the work was in the area of union recognition. In that year, 174 applications were made to the Board to form unions. Of these 108 were granted, resulting in the unionization of 6623 employees. The 1945 Department of Labour Annual Report boasted:

It is estimated that as a result of the applications granted by the Board, the number of employees in the province covered by collective bargaining increased by upwards of 40 per cent during the year.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Leader-Post, 23 January 1945.

⁵¹ Department of Labour, Annual Report, 1945, p.71.

The Board also dealt with numerous applications concerning unfair labour practices.

The Labour Relations Board was even busier in 1946. It received over 400 applications concerning collective bargaining rights, unfair labour practices and wrongful dismissals. That year the Board approved 149 union applications affecting 3557 employees. While the Labour Relations Board remained very active it received fewer applications in 1947. The department was not surprised by this decline in activity from the peak that inevitably followed the implementation of the Trade Union Act.

Cooper found her experience with the Labour Relations Board to be both a challenge and an education. She learned more about the law and legal procedures. She was shocked by the "devious methods" employers utilized to stop unionization. Cooper viewed herself as a moderate, objective member of the Board. She felt that many of the other members, particularly Elsie Hart, were far more "union oriented."⁵²

In January 1951 Cooper was appointed to fill a seat left vacant by the departure of the sole female member of the Public Service Commission. During her six-month term Cooper's duties included appointing employees to the civil service, representing the public in improving the civil service and reporting to cabinet. In announcing Cooper's appointment Premier T.C. Douglas stated that the

appointment of Mrs. Cooper to the Public Service Commission is in keeping with the policy of having a women's representative on that body. It is felt that because there is such a high percentage of women in the civil service there should be someone on the committee to speak for them.⁵³

Cooper remained on the Public Service Commission until she decided to run for

⁵² Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁵³ Moose Jaw Times-Herald, 29 January 1951.

office.

Cooper believed that a woman's perspective was needed on a wide variety of political issues and that she was capable of providing this perspective. Her work for community groups, especially the RCW and the YWCA, gave her the skills and exposure necessary for her to be appointed to two prominent government boards. Her experience with the Labour Relations Board and the Public Service Commission brought her another step closer to the political world of which she would soon become a part. In the years between Cooper's forced "retirement" from her teaching career and her election to the Saskatchewan Legislature, she developed a successful career as a volunteer. Cooper's unpaid work in the community and her experience in working closely with the government were vital factors which contributed to her decision to seek a CCF nomination, and to her success in winning that nomination and a seat in the Saskatchewan Legislature.

Chapter Two: The Candidate

Marjorie Cooper was the third female MLA elected in Saskatchewan. Of these first three women to sit in the legislature, Cooper had by far the most successful political career. Cooper won four nominations from the CCF, four election campaigns and retired undefeated. This chapter will examine the factors that contributed to Cooper's success in winning CCF party nominations and a seat in the legislature.

While the political careers of Cooper's two female predecessors, Sarah Ramsland and Beatrice Trew, were in many ways dissimilar to her own, they did set a precedent. Ramsland, and even more so Trew, illustrated that voters would in fact cast their ballots for female candidates and that women could be respected and competent legislators.

Sarah Ramsland, a Liberal, was the first woman to sit in the Saskatchewan legislature. She was elected in a 1919 by-election in Pelly constituency. Ramsland filled a seat left vacant by the sudden death of her husband. At the time of his death, Ramsland had three small children whom she needed to support. Returning to the paid workforce in some capacity was a necessity, given her difficult financial circumstances. Ramsland first considered returning to teaching, which she had done for several years prior to her marriage. Instead she was encouraged by local Liberals to run for the seat left vacant by her husband. Max Ramsland's death "presented Pelly Liberals with two difficulties. They needed a candidate, and felt obligated to provide a decent living for the young widow and her family." While Sarah Ramsland shared her husband's interest in public issues, there is no evidence that she considered a career in politics prior to his death. Ramsland won by 300 votes, a smaller

margin of victory than her husband had received.¹

Despite some major differences in the lives and careers of Ramsland and Cooper, they did have several things in common. Both were educated and spent some time teaching prior to marriage. Ramsland was described as "modest, dignified and ladylike,"² a description which could also be applied to Cooper. Neither was an outspoken feminist and both had a special interest in education, temperance and the welfare of women.

In 1944 Saskatchewan's second female legislator, Beatrice Trew, was elected to represent Maple Creek. While Cooper had spent some time as President of the Davin CCF Club and program director for the Regina CCF women's club, Trew had been a very active member of the CCF for over ten years prior to her nomination. She had come to the party through her work in the United Farmers of Canada and the Saskatchewan Farmers' Union. Cooper and Trew had several things in common, including backgrounds in teaching, as well as supportive husbands and extended families. They shared an interest in the condition of domestics, health, education and women's issues. Their children were older by the time they were elected to the Legislature, and both had extra help at home. But their most significant similarity was the tone of their feminism. Neither challenged traditional gender roles and both dealt with sexism in a non-confrontational manner. They shared the view that women should not ask for any special consideration on the basis of their gender.

Like Trew and many other women with an interest in politics, Cooper's most difficult political battle was winning her first party nomination. After her retirement from politics, Cooper stated: "To get a nomination in an unwinnable constituency is very easy...but it is very difficult to win the nomination in a strong

¹ Elizabeth Kalmakoff, "Naturally Divided: Women in Saskatchewan Politics, 1916-1919", Saskatchewan History, Vol.46 No.2 (Fall 1994), pp.13-14.

² Candace Savage, Foremothers: Personalities and Issues From the History of Women in Saskatchewan, Saskatoon: n.p., 1975, p.43.

seat."³ In spite of CCF promises for full equality for women within the party, this had not yet materialized by the 1950s. This was a disappointment to many within the party who sincerely believed that the CCF's democratic structure would automatically lead to a full power sharing. In the period from 1938 to 1964, only 3.1% of CCF candidates were women and most of these nominations were in unwinnable constituencies. This was slightly more than both the Liberals (1.9%) and the Conservatives (1.6%) could claim during this same period (see Appendix A, Table 1).

Cooper's decision to seek the nomination in 1952 was based on a number of factors, not the least of which was timing. Since 1944 Clarence Fines and C.C. Williams, two prominent CCF cabinet ministers, had represented Regina. In 1952 a third seat was added to the multi-member constituency, creating a vacancy for a new candidate. This allowed Cooper to seek the nomination without running against the two popular incumbents.

An integral factor in Cooper's decision to run for office was her view that politics would be the most effective way to contribute to the community. For her, a career in public office was a logical next step in her volunteer work. In many ways, Cooper had really begun her political work years before with her community activities. Cooper was an activist who joined organizations primarily because she believed that she could do something to make things better for people. Her decision to seek the nomination was based on the same motivation. She viewed politics as the most effective way of getting things done.

While Cooper did have an interest in politics and was anxious to see more women legislators, her entry into politics did not come without encouragement. An ad hoc delegation of men and women, including her husband Ed Cooper, Ed Whelan and Gertrude Telford, approached Marjorie Cooper on the eve of the

³ Leader-Post, 12 June 1982.

1952 provincial elections. They told Cooper that it was time to do something about her frequent talk concerning the lack of women in the legislature, and Cooper agreed. After further discussion with her husband, Marjorie Cooper made the decision to seek the nomination.⁴

The nominating convention held in Regina on 22 April 1952 broke a record for attendance: 908 delegates were present. Cooper sought the nomination against five men, including incumbents C.C. Williams and Clarence Fines. The two cabinet ministers were both successful on the first ballot. Levi Luther and Clarence Lyons, both union representatives, dropped out of the running after the second ballot. Cooper's real challenge was in defeating Henry Baker, who was considered to be a "strong contender".⁵ Although Baker would go on to become Mayor of Regina and an MLA, in the spring of 1952 he lost the CCF party nomination to Cooper on the third ballot. In 1968, at Cooper's retirement party, Baker joked that although he was happy with the way things worked out he might "have been elected to the legislature 12 years earlier" if Marjorie Cooper had not run.⁶

Cooper's nominator and seconder highlighted both the need for women in the legislature and Cooper's background and abilities which would allow her to do the job. Her nominator, Tom Atkinson, said that the legislature needed "a woman or two to give it dignity in view of the fact that there had been such undignified scenes in the last session." Her seconder added: "she would make one of the most able and popular members Regina has ever had."⁷

In her appeal for support during the convention Cooper highlighted her

⁴ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁵ Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women", p.156.

⁶ Henry Baker, 1968 Retirement Dinner for Marjorie Cooper Audio Tape (hereafter cited as Retirement Tape), Cooper Papers.

⁷ Commonwealth, 23 April 1952.

"aggressive" involvement in community affairs and the need for more female legislators. She argued that women made up half the population, and that there could not be true democracy until this half was represented in the legislature. She went on to state that women were equally interested in good homes, financial issues and education and that they were key workers in the CCF organization. "In conclusion, Mrs. Cooper said that she was not asking for a privilege, but for equality for the opposite sex."⁸

Cooper later revealed that at the time she felt the local party executive would have preferred her husband to run. She stated: "not that they had anything against me but because I think they were just a little bit nervous, when we had not run a woman before [in Regina], that a woman might lose the seat." Cooper also said: "that was just in my own mind, nobody ever suggested that to me."⁹

In fact, Cooper was likely very accurate in sensing that many people within the party were nervous about, if not absolutely opposed to, running a female candidate in Regina. A fellow CCFer and a friend of Cooper recalled a woman commenting on the suggestion that Cooper be nominated: "no...we want a man in there."¹⁰ After she won the nomination Cooper overheard a man at the convention complain that "women are getting in everywhere...[soon] there will be no place left for men."¹¹ She found this to be more amusing than offensive.

Cooper often dealt with gender bias in this manner. Her daughter correctly stated that such an approach reflected Cooper's conviction that she was in the right. She was never "really angry at men for their chauvinist ways. She always could take it with a grain of salt. She had enough strength in herself

⁸ Ibid., 30 April 1952.

⁹ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

¹⁰ Tommy Atkinson, Retirement Tape, Cooper Papers.

¹¹ Marjorie Cooper, Larmour Interview, SAB.

that she didn't get put down."¹² In an interview with the Commonwealth following her first election, Cooper was asked what the "funniest incident" had been during the campaign. She replied that it was receiving a booklet entitled "Bobbed Hair, Bossy Wives and Women Preachers." She found the many highlighted passages in the booklet amusing, including "Suffer not a woman to teach nor usurp authority over the man but to sit in silence."¹³

There are several reasons why Cooper was successful in her attempt to secure a CCF nomination in a winnable constituency when so many other women were not. The women who did receive nominations from the CCF shared many common characteristics. They all had good leadership and organizational skills that had been gained through formal education, participation in the workforce and involvement in community work.¹⁴ Cooper certainly was not lacking in any of these areas.

These women also had husbands who were supportive of their work outside of the home and who were sympathetic to the CCF cause. Cooper's husband was always supportive of her involvement in the community and was one of the CCFers who pushed her to seek the party nomination. He had been a committed socialist for decades at the time of his wife's nomination, and had even considered seeking the nomination himself. He and Marjorie decided against it because they felt that the family was too dependent on his income as head of the math department at Central Collegiate. He was unprepared to give up the teaching that he loved for the uncertain world of politics.¹⁵

Ed Cooper shared his wife's belief that there should be more women in the legislature because they had different priorities which needed to be

¹² June Mitchell Interview.

¹³ Commonwealth, 13 August 1952.

¹⁴ Taylor, "The Women Shall Help Lead the Way: Saskatchewan Women Candidates in Provincial and Federal Elections, 1934-1966," p.149.

¹⁵ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

represented. After her husband's death in 1964, the Leader-Post reported that "Mrs. Cooper readily admits...that she enjoyed at all times his whole-hearted moral support, assistance and inspiration."¹⁶ Ed Cooper even filled in for his wife at a rally during the 1952 election campaign which she was unable to attend due to illness. Cooper herself strongly believed that her husband's involvement in the CCF and his contacts within the party contributed to her success in winning the nomination.

In addition to the very open and public support of her husband, Cooper had the personal and political advantage of living in the city which was also the seat of government. This enabled her to pursue a political career without being away from home, a factor which contributed to her decision to seek the nomination and made her more acceptable to the party and the public. The fact that Cooper could become an MLA without giving the appearance of deserting her family contributed to her success in winning the nomination. In addition, women who held leadership positions within the CCF were often either "just like a man" or very maternalistic.¹⁷ Cooper typified the latter. Louise Lucas once advised Gladys Strum that in order to be successful in politics women candidates had to "not only be puritanical, but had to appear to be puritanical."¹⁸ Cooper certainly fulfilled this requirement as well. She was respectability personified.

While Cooper shared many characteristics with other female CCF candidates, she was also an exception in some ways. Georgina Taylor asserts that women who won nominations all had had experience within the party as political educators, grass roots constituency workers, campaign managers or

¹⁶ Leader-Post, nd, Cooper Papers.

¹⁷ Sangster, Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950, p.102.

¹⁸ Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women," p.123.

fund-raisers in addition to holding key elected positions within the party.¹⁹ While Cooper had been involved in the Davin CCF Club and the Regina CCF Women's Club, she had relatively little experience volunteering for the party. While she had done some party work prior to her nomination, during her many years as a prominent leader of community groups she had intentionally steered clear of any partisanship. Cooper felt that this was in the best interests of the organizations she represented.

Unlike Trew and Strum, Cooper had not dedicated an extensive amount of time to the CCF prior to her nomination and she was not very well known outside of Regina. While her lack of experience as a CCF volunteer may have bothered some in the party, it also contributed to her success in winning both the nomination and the election. Although some fellow CCFers saw her as too conservative with narrowly defined interests, Cooper had the advantage of fitting in well with the CCF's new political moderation. The Douglas government had lost support between the 1944 and 1948 provincial elections. This contributed to the CCF's increasingly moderate tone and its growing focus on practical economic issues rather than ideology. Following the loss of electoral support in the 1948 provincial election, Douglas brought in Graham Spry to give him an unbiased outside opinion as to the state of public opinion in Saskatchewan. Spry concluded that " 'a Douglas government' and a 'government that does things' would win more votes than talk of the co-operative commonwealth."²⁰ Cooper fit in very well with this approach.

Georgina Taylor argues that Cooper won the nomination in spite of the renewed conservatism of the post-1945 period,²¹ but in fact this actually

¹⁹ Ibid., pp.150-1.

²⁰ Thomas and Ian McLeod, Tommy Douglas: The Road to Jerusalem, Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987, p.184.

²¹ Taylor, "Equals and Partners," p.164.

contributed to her success. Unlike some other prominent female CCFers, such as Gladys Strum, Cooper represented a voice of relative conservatism. She led a very traditional family life and her feminism was very non-confrontational. Her personality and the manner in which she presented ideas made it almost impossible for her to offend anyone inside or outside of the CCF. After the huge disruption of gender roles which had occurred during the Depression and World War Two, people craved the normalcy found in conventional gender roles and behavior.²² Cooper fit the model of a woman who was active in the community without openly questioning traditional gender roles. Cooper's primary focus on the home and the family was non-threatening.

At her retirement dinner in 1968, Douglas summed up his thoughts on Cooper's gender and political career. He stated that she had the

remarkable faculty of being in politics without losing her womanliness....sometimes women who go into public life try to ape the men [but Marjorie] kept her womanly charm [and] keen incisive mind....Women have a point of view, they have an understanding of problems that escape we men, [Marjorie] is the epitome of what I'm talking about.²³

The final factor which contributed to Cooper's success in winning her first nomination was the balance that she created within the slate of CCF candidates in Regina. Fines and Williams were both high-ranking cabinet ministers, while Cooper was presented to the public as a true representative of the ordinary people of Regina. In addition, the candidates whom she defeated at the nominating convention all had a labour background. Williams already represented the working class, whereas Cooper could appeal to voters in a different way. It was easier for women to get a nomination in a multi-member constituency because voters could cast at least one ballot for a male candidate and still vote for a woman too.

²² Azoulay, p.76; Kome, p.69.

²³ T.C. Douglas, Retirement Tape, Cooper Papers.

Although gaining the initial party nomination was difficult, winning a seat in the legislature also proved to be a great challenge for Cooper. T.C. Douglas described the 1952 election as a "very crucial election....The year 1952 would tell whether we were a flash in the pan and on our way out, or whether we were here to stay."²⁴ The CCF ran on the popularity of Douglas as a leader, the party's record of accomplishments since taking office in 1944 and its *Program for Progress*. This program included new highways and roads, the development of natural resources, increased access to power and natural gas in rural areas, increased grants to education and the extension of medical and social welfare benefits. The focus of the 1952 CCF election campaign was clearly on getting things done, not party ideology.

The CCF was aided in its electoral victory by the lack of any real competition. In fact the only party which posed any threat to the re-election of the CCF was the Liberal party. The Liberals hoped to gain rural support by appealing to farmers. In addition, the Liberals promised to maintain or improve on popular CCF social programs, leading Douglas to accuse the opposition party of coming down with a case of "me-too-ism."²⁵ Liberal candidates attempted to attract the anti-socialist vote too, by issuing dire threats that another CCF victory would result in the continued expansion of the civil service, the loss of personal freedom and other calamities.

In Regina, the three CCF candidates all played active and prominent roles in the campaign while addressing different issues. Williams and Fines highlighted their accomplishments during their time in office while Cooper ran on her prominence as an active person in the community. Cooper focused on what she referred to as human issues, a tactic which had been typical of female

²⁴ T.C. Douglas in Lewis H. Thomas ed., The Making of a Socialist: The Recollections of T.C. Douglas, Edmonton: The University of Alberta Press, 1982, p.303.

²⁵ Leader-Post, 4 June 1952.

candidates dating back to the 1920s and 1930s.²⁶ She campaigned on her belief that the CCF held certain principles which directed all of their actions. These principles included putting humanity before money, respect for all labour, equality of opportunity, a duty to care for the weak and a right to health. She argued that the CCF government had been so successful because it combined this humanitarian legislation with sound financing and efficient administration.²⁷

Cooper was certainly not unique in using these and other similar arguments in her campaign. What was unique was the way in which she was presented to the Regina electorate. Cooper was presented as

an able community leader with experience in every phase of community activity...Mrs. Cooper is well known to the people of Regina and is familiar with their problems: she is well qualified to represent Regina in the next provincial legislature.²⁸

Unlike Fines and Williams, who focused on their previous political accomplishments, Cooper emphasized her close links to the community.

In one campaign speech Cooper outlined her volunteer work in Regina and went on to state: "I feel that election to the provincial legislature would give me a wider opportunity for service to the homes of this community and province."²⁹ This statement is very reminiscent of first wave feminists who had justified their desire to become active in politics by arguing that it would enable them to perform their social reform work more effectively. It also illustrates Cooper's view that becoming an MLA was an extension of the work she had performed in the past, rather than a break from it.

Cooper wasted no time in attempting to focus public attention on an issue which she had stressed for years: the need for subsidized public housing. In the

²⁶ Mary Kinnear, "Post-Suffrage Prairie Politics: Women Candidates in Winnipeg Municipal Elections, 1918-1938," Prairie Forum, Vol.16 No.1 (Spring 1991), p.47.

²⁷ Leader Post, 4 June 1952.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 21 May 1952.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4 June 1952.

1952 election campaign she announced that "I am making one special promise to work unceasingly for better housing for this city."³⁰ Cooper had gained extensive knowledge of the housing issue while a member of the RCW and the YWCA. Across Canada groups concerned with social welfare had been making demands for public housing since the end of the First World War. They saw public housing projects as an effective means of creating jobs, improving the lives of the poor and protecting public health. While calls for public housing declined in the 1920s, the effects of the Depression and the Second World War re-ignited the issue.

Although the situation in Regina was not as bad as in many other Canadian cities, the need for public housing did exist. Early attempts to deal with the problem, such as the creation of Saskatchewan Reconstruction Housing Corporation, had been inadequate. It became clear to the provincial government that what needed to be done was beyond its financial capabilities. The province subsequently began to lobby the federal government for a low rental public housing program. Under the National Housing Act (NHA) the federal government had been giving loans to private limited dividend housing corporations, but not to provincial or municipal governments. The Saskatchewan CCF called on the federal government to give other levels of government the same privileges as limited dividend housing corporations.³¹ The federal government refused and continued to rely on private industry to meet the housing needs of low-income families.

In 1949 the federal government accepted some of the CCF proposals, including taking responsibility for 75% of the cost of housing projects. The remaining 25% fell on the provinces, which could choose to pass on a portion of

³⁰ Ibid..

³¹ Lance Dawson, "The Evolution of Social Housing Policy in Saskatchewan: A Comparative Study of Regina and Moose Jaw, 1944-1982," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Regina, 1996, p.5.

this to municipalities. This gave the CCF government the means to carry out its plans and in 1950 it initiated a public housing program. In spite of the fact that housing was seen as Regina's most pressing problem, by 1952 there was still no construction due to city council's lack of commitment to the idea of subsidized public housing.³²

While housing was Cooper's major campaign issue, the role of women in politics also held a prominent place in her campaign. Cooper acted as the unofficial defender of women's interests. In a speech to a Regina CCF women's club early in the campaign she defended the record of the Douglas government's treatment of women. In response to Liberal claims that the CCF had not done enough for women, Cooper stated:

What about the amendment to the jury act, the equal pay for equal work legislation, the amendment to the deserted wives act, the free legal assistance to veterans' widows for the administration of their estates?³³

Cooper was representative of the changing attitudes of women in the CCF, and Canadian society in general, in the post-1945 period. Prior to the Second World War "women's issues" had been family issues. This is illustrated in the work of the RCW and the YWCA in Regina during this period. By the end of the war, the condition of the ever-increasing number of wage-earning women was gaining prominence. In spite of this growing recognition of women's concerns outside of the home, Cooper continued to focus on the needs of housewives rather than working women. Cooper also continued to subordinate her feminist goals to her social ones and saw class rather than gender as the basis of many social problems.

Cooper often called for more women in all levels of government. In one speech she expressed regret at the small number of female candidates because

³² *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

³³ Leader-Post, 9 May 1952.

"women deserve some direct voice in government, since women are affected by everything the government does."³⁴ She also argued that any government would be strengthened by the representation of a variety of view points. In order to strengthen her position that women had an important place in electoral politics Cooper drew from maternal feminist ideology which argued that women could bring their special nurturing, maternal talents to politics for the betterment of society, a respectable thing for women to do. In the Commonwealth she stated that there was nobody better to make the world safe for children and improve homes than women. "It is because we are so concerned with these things that women are becoming increasingly active in politics."³⁵

The campaigns of Cooper, Williams and Fines - combined with the CCF's record - helped to create support for the party among various organizations in the city, including labour and women's organizations. When all the Regina candidates addressed the League of Women Voters, the Leader-Post reported: "judging from the applause and the heckling the majority of the approximately 200 persons at the Regina League of Women Voters meeting...were CCF supporters."³⁶ George Lane, a "railway man" and spokesperson for labour, also praised CCF labour policy and the improvements which they had brought to the working class.

On 12 June 1952 the front page of the Leader-Post announced "DOUGLAS AND CABINET SWEEP BACK INTO POWER." The CCF won 42 seats, up from 31 in the previous election, and the Liberals took 11, down from 19 in 1948 (see Appendix A, Table Two). In Regina all three CCF candidates were elected with between 19 and 20 % of the popular vote, the three Liberal candidates received around 12% each and the other candidates 1.19% or less

³⁴ Ibid., 27 May 1952.

³⁵ Commonwealth, 14 May 1952.

³⁶ Leader-Post, 27 May 1952.

(see Appendix A, Tables Three and Four). The Commonwealth reported that the victory illustrated that people were pleased with the record of the Douglas government and that they disliked the Liberals' use of smear tactics and personal attacks during the campaign. The Commonwealth was correct in assuming that the people of Saskatchewan were happy with the progress of the CCF. Its electoral success was also a result of the presentation of the CCF as the party of economic growth and stability, a renewed emphasis on party organization and the weakness of the opposition parties.

Judging from the election results in various polls in Regina the CCF drew the majority of its support from the city's working class. The CCF candidates polled most poorly in the south end, as the results from the polling stations at Lakeview School, Davin School, 2859 Retallack Street and 3004 Albert Street illustrate (see Appendix A, Table Five). The support for the CCF in Regina's northeast and other working class areas was enough to elect all three CCF members. The results from the polling stations at the Serbian Hall, the Labour Temple, 4738 Dewdney Avenue and 401 Cornwall Street illustrate the level of working class support for the CCF (see Appendix A, Table Five).

Whether the CCF polled well or poorly, all three of its candidates received about the same level of support. This indicates that in a multi-member constituency voters were not reluctant to cast their ballots for a woman candidate. These results also helped to discredit the myth commonly held in the CCF that voters were too conservative to support a woman.

None of Cooper's subsequent attempts to gain a CCF nomination proved to be as difficult as her first attempt in 1952. Cooper had illustrated beyond a doubt that the people of Regina were ready to elect a female MLA. In 1956 Cooper, Williams and Fines were all nominated by acclamation. In fact, when organizers attempted to provide an opportunity at the nominating convention for

last-minute candidates, the crowd of over 900 could not contain their applause for the three popular MLAs.

The outcome of the 1960 nominating convention in Regina was a little less predictable, largely due to the addition of a fourth seat in the Regina constituency and Fines' retirement from provincial politics. As an incumbent MLA Cooper had no trouble securing her nomination. Both she and Williams were clear winners, with their names marked on over 75% of the first ballots. Allan Blakeney, who was nominated by Fines, won on the second ballot, while Ed Whelan won on the fourth. In 1964 Regina was divided into four constituencies: Regina East and West (with two members to be elected in each) and North and South (each single-member ridings). Cooper and Blakeney won the two nominations for Regina West by acclamation. Cooper's ability to win a CCF nomination in Regina was virtually guaranteed after her success in 1952.

Cooper's role in subsequent election campaigns diverged little from the precedent set in 1952. Cooper continued to focus on "human issues" throughout all three of her re-election campaigns. In 1956, the CCF ran again on Douglas' strong leadership, the party's record and its *Program for Prosperity*. In Regina, the status of Regina College was an important local issue.³⁷

In 1956 the three CCF candidates in Regina campaigned in the same manner as they had in 1952. While Fines continued to address financial concerns and Williams continued to address labour issues, Cooper reminded voters of the advantages of having more women in the legislature, and pointed to the CCF's excellent record on health care, social welfare and housing. She also promised that the government would increase the money spent on education in the province. In addition to these themes, all of which had been introduced in her first campaign, Cooper became willing to address less traditional issues,

³⁷ For a fuller discussion of the debate surrounding post secondary education in Regina, see Chapter Four, pp.90-93.

such as the success of the crown corporations.

In 1960 the overwhelming election issue throughout the province was Medicare. Not surprisingly, nearly every speech Cooper made during the campaign focused on the need for and advantages of socialized medicine. While Cooper was certainly not unique in her focus on Medicare, her image as a respectable mother of all needy people made her a perfect spokesperson for socialized medicine. The Commonwealth reported that "this little lady is busy crusading for the greatest piece of humanitarian legislation - Medicare."³⁸

Cooper's role in the 1964 election campaign was fairly limited due to the fatal heart attack her husband suffered a month prior to election day. While Cooper did not drop out of the campaign altogether, she kept a low profile following Ed Cooper's death. Her decision to carry on was based on "what she felt as a real sense of obligation to her party and her constituents."³⁹ Cooper's performance during this difficult campaign made her colleagues, friends and family proud, and was a testament to her strength as an individual. The press also praised her performance. After the election the Leader-Post published an article on the performance of female candidates in the campaign, stating that "judged solely on performance and courage Mrs. J.E. (Marjorie) Cooper surely has no rival."⁴⁰

On the occasions when she did campaign, she promised to continue to push for a base hospital in Regina and for the adoption of the Woods Commission recommendations concerning hospital privileges for physicians.⁴¹ Cooper won her fourth election in 1964, although this time she would return to the legislature as a member of the opposition. The CCF lost power largely

³⁸ Commonwealth, 18 May 1960.

³⁹ Allan Blakeney, Debates and Proceedings of the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly (hereafter cited as Debates and Proceedings), 30 November 1984.

⁴⁰ Leader-Post, nd, Cooper Papers.

⁴¹ For a fuller discussion of the Woods Report, see Chapter 4, pp.95-98.

because of Medicare's polarization of Saskatchewan politics and the re-emergence of the Liberals as a well-organized, strongly led, youthful alternative to the CCF.

As Cooper gained more political experience, the manner in which she was presented to the electorate evolved slightly. Cooper continued to be portrayed as "as housewife [who] has given most of her attention to matters that directly affect the home." Her extensive involvement in community activities also remained a very important feature of all of her campaigns. But even by 1956, Cooper's other abilities and experiences also began to be emphasized, if only briefly. She was referred to as "an expert on labour relations"⁴² because of her experience on the Labour Relations Board. By this time she also had experience on various legislative and caucus committees to include in her list of accomplishments.

In spite of these small changes in the approach taken in Cooper's campaigns, the fact that she was a woman, a housewife, a mother and a teacher remained prominent. In 1960 the Commonwealth boasted:

It is a welcome symbol and aptly speaks of the subtle injection of humanity when this lady decided to forsake a teaching career and heed the message of J.S. Woodsworth.⁴³

Referring to her as a "lady" rather than a "woman" emphasized her respectability.

The results of the 1956, 1960 and 1964 elections in Regina reinforced the fact that voters there had no hesitation to cast their ballots for a woman in a multi-member constituency. Cooper consistently emerged near the top of the poll on election day (see Appendix A, Tables Six-Eight). Even in 1964, when the CCF lost the election to the Liberals and Cooper was virtually absent from the campaign due to the death of her husband, she trailed only slightly behind Allan

⁴² Commonwealth, 9 May 1956.

⁴³ ibid., 18 May 1960.

Blakeney in the polls.

Cooper found her first attempt to seek a CCF nomination and her first election campaign to be the most challenging of her career. Her efforts were rewarded with a seat in the Saskatchewan Legislature. Three more party nominations and election victories demonstrated to Cooper's fellow CCFers that the people of Regina were not too conservative to vote for a woman. In addition, she had proven to her party and her constituency that she could be an active and effective MLA without rejecting her femininity or neglecting her familial responsibilities.

Chapter Three: The Honourable Lady Member

Following the success of her first provincial election campaign, Marjorie Cooper hoped that the novelty of being the sole woman MLA would fade quickly. While the focus on Cooper's gender did slowly decline, it remained an issue until the end of her political career. Cooper often spoke as a woman and for women, but in many cases she felt that this role was thrust upon her. Allan Blakeney accurately described the way in which she dealt with women's issues when he stated that she

pressed the cause of feminism in the 1950s and 1960s...in a way which did not alienate anybody. She retained her sense of humour. It was a great asset to her struggles.¹

This chapter explores the ways in which Cooper's experience in the legislature was shaped by her gender. It discusses the manner in which Cooper reflected the concerns of Saskatchewan women in the legislature. This includes her work in education, international affairs, health care (including mental health), penal reform and alcohol abuse. Chapter Four examines in more detail Cooper's role as a CCF MLA and her effectiveness in representing her constituents in Regina. It further explores her work in the areas of housing, post-secondary education and health care (including the construction of the Plains Hospital and the Woods Report). It also examines the manner in which Cooper expressed her religious values through her career in public office. By the end of Chapters Three and Four a clear picture of Cooper's work as a woman, a Regina, a CCFer and a devotee to the social gospel emerges.

¹ Allan Blakeney, Debates and Proceedings, 30 November 1984.

After Marjorie Cooper's victory in Regina, the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly again boasted a female member. There had been no women since Beatrice Trew had been defeated in 1948. As the Leader-Post reported, "Strangely, Mrs. Cooper sits in the same place as Mrs. Trew used to, on the extreme right hand side of the front row of government benches."² It was likely not coincidental that the two women shared the same prominent seat in the house. The CCF was pleased to put Cooper forward as an example of its progressiveness. Shortly after the election the Commonwealth published an article on Cooper that began:

She is not very tall but her reach in community activities is as long as Paul Bunyan's arm. She's a housewife and a grandmother and can bake a chocolate cake. She's an expert on labour relations problems. She's Marjorie Cooper of Regina, only woman elected to the Saskatchewan legislature in the June 11 election. Of course she's CCF.³

Cooper accepted her status as the only female MLA with good humour. She recalled that her first caucus meeting was like walking into a men's club, but stated that "I was determined to be a member like anyone else."⁴ She revealed that initially she was somewhat uncomfortable being the only woman among so many men, but "after a few good arguments, I soon got over that feeling."⁵ Cooper was concerned with moving beyond the novelty of being *the female member* to being a member like everyone else. When she was first elected the Leader-Post wanted to take a picture of her in the kitchen baking a cake. Cooper later commented:

That was their idea of a woman in the legislature. I said, Thank-you, no. If you want a picture of me it will be at my desk, not baking a cake. I am elected as an MLA, not a cook.⁶

² Leader-Post, 17 February 1953.

³ Commonwealth, 13 August 1952.

⁴ Leader-Post, 12 June 1982.

⁵ Marjorie Cooper, speech notes, 28 November 1980, Cooper Papers.

⁶ Marjorie Cooper, Larmour Interview, SAB.

This is characteristic of the treatment Cooper received in the press. While coverage of Cooper tended to be favourable, it was often tainted with what would now be perceived as condescension. This was particularly prevalent during Cooper's first term in office. The novelty of having a women in the Legislature was of obvious interest to the Leader-Post, and likely to its readership. Articles about Cooper's role in the opening of the legislative session are full of descriptions of "the petite, junior member [in her] tidy suit...[with]...neatly curled hair."⁷

Throughout Cooper's term in office, the Leader-Post always published an article describing what the female guests in attendance for the opening of the legislative session were wearing. Under a title such as "Feminine guests turn out in their spring finery," Cooper was included with the "feminine guests," the wives and daughters of prominent MLAs, rather than with her male colleagues.⁸ The paper rarely failed to mention what "Saskatchewan's only woman MLA" wore for the opening of the session.

Cooper's male colleagues often took the opportunity to behave like gentlemen around Cooper. Before and after her first speech in the legislature, James Gibson (CCF-Morse), who sat behind Cooper, "chivalrously" rose to hold her chair. In a 1955 speech to the Regina section of the National Council of Jewish Women, Cooper reported that she and her fellow MLAs had forgotten there was a difference between them. In a revealing quote, Cooper stated: "I'm one of the boys up there now. They call me junior."⁹

Cooper recalled her first caucus meeting where she was greeted "heartily", then asked to be caucus secretary, a request she refused. While Cooper never did act as caucus secretary, she did serve as secretary for several

⁷ Leader-Post, 17 February 1953.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 11 February 1955.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 31 March 1955.

committees on occasion. She was happy to take her turn doing this like every one else, but refused to be pigeonholed as permanent caucus secretary. Cooper felt that although the caucus initially treated her differently this soon changed. She believed that the caucus did not initially take her seriously because they thought of her as a woman first. Cooper later recalled that this changed as soon as she engaged in a few battles with her fellow caucus members, "and they had to battle back. Then we were all just MLAs."¹⁰ Cooper felt that in caucus she was generally treated fairly, if not necessarily identically to everyone else.

Cooper's experience with her caucus was different from that of Sarah Ramsland and Beatrice Trew. Ramsland always felt that her colleagues "had no faith in her, and...showed it by allotting her only meaningless parliamentary duties."¹¹ Trew's experience was a little more positive. While she believed that she was forced to prove herself in a way that men were not, after her retirement she said: "I have no quarrel with the recognition I received." She also felt there were advantages to being a woman including "some assignments not usually given to a new, green backbencher."¹²

Cooper found that the Opposition reacted to her in the same way as the CCF caucus did: they treated her with an extra degree of respect and "at first they tried to be a bit gentle."¹³ They soon found that she was willing to take them on, and so they reciprocated. Cooper was always cautious to avoid hurling personal insults because she felt it would be unfair to the men in the Opposition who would be too gentlemanly to hurl them back.

While fellow MLAs and the media used the term "the woman MLA" to

¹⁰ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

¹¹ Savage, p.43.

¹² Beatrice Trew to Mrs. Wolfe, 23 March 1975, Legislative Library MLA Data Files.

¹³ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

describe Cooper less frequently over the years, it never entirely disappeared. In spite of the increasing number of women elected to the legislature (see Appendix A, Table One), the fact that Cooper was a woman first and an MLA second was a recurring theme in all aspects of her political career. Following the election of Liberal MLA Mary Batten in 1956 Douglas placed valentines on the desks of "our two lady members."¹⁴ Rather than expressing any kind of indifference or even offense, Cooper voiced appreciation and thanks to Douglas. As late as 1965 fellow MLAs continued to refer to Cooper as "the honourable lady member from Regina."¹⁵

Georgina Taylor mistakenly contends that Cooper did not confront sexism within the caucus because she was unaware of it.¹⁶ In fact, it was not that Cooper was oblivious to the sexism that existed, she simply chose to react to it in a very non-confrontational manner. She placed her commitment to the party and its social goals before her concern for the elimination of sexism within the CCF and within society in general. Like most other women who were drawn into the CCF, Cooper did not come with feminist goals.¹⁷

In spite of her statement during the 1952 election campaign that "I am proud to say that the CCF has once again demonstrated sincerity in its belief in equality for all...by choosing a woman as one of its candidates,"¹⁸ Cooper herself was not entirely convinced of this. It is not surprising that she never openly spoke about any sexism she encountered in the party until after her retirement from public life. Because the CCF wanted to portray itself as being egalitarian "it

¹⁴ T.C. Douglas, Debates and Proceedings, 18 February 1957.

¹⁵ T. Nollet and D. Steuart, Debates and Proceedings, 17 April 1965.

¹⁶ Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women", p.174.

¹⁷ Sangster, "Women and the New Era: The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933-1940," pp.69-92.

¹⁸ Leader-Post, 6 May 1952.

was extremely important to the CCF that women did not complain about unequal treatment."¹⁹

After her retirement Cooper spoke more freely on the subject. She stated: "I think that they (the CCF) are not much more advanced than the rest of society as to their idea of the roles of women." Cooper argued that every organization has "Marys," who are women with real power and control over policy, and "Marthas," who do things like put on lunches. Cooper stated that the majority of women in the CCF, like other organizations that she had worked for, were "Marthas." "I think they are [the majority] in the whole of society."²⁰ Cooper was accurate in her assessment of the role of women in the CCF, where the division of labour was a reflection of Canadian society in general.²¹ She went on to state that the CCF/NDP had a guilt complex because of the lack of women in the legislature and that improving this situation would be a slow process. After Cooper retired from politics another NDP woman would not hold a seat in the legislature until 1986(see Appendix A, Table Nine).

The question of having a woman in cabinet was of great concern to some, including Gladys Strum, but Cooper herself was not all that concerned with the issue. Several times during Cooper's term in office there was some discussion that she would be appointed to cabinet. In 1961 a Leader-Post headline speculated "Cooper Considered for Cabinet Post?"²² The article suggested that Cooper was "considered a likely candidate for education," but that her appointment would result in there being three members in the cabinet from Regina.

¹⁹ Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women," p.221.

²⁰ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

²¹ Sangster, "Women and the New Era: The Role of Women in the Early CCF, 1933-1940," pp.69-92.

²² Leader-Post, 4 November 1961.

The reason why Cooper was never given a cabinet post is not clear. Some fellow CCFers felt that Cooper was not appointed to cabinet because she was a woman and that simply was not done at that time. I.C. Nollet, Cooper's seatmate and colleague on the Liquor Sales Outlets Inquiry Committee, stated: "She was certainly cabinet material and I know Tommy thought the same thing." As to why she was not given a cabinet post, Nollet replied: "Damned if I know."²³

Cooper herself gave the following explanation: "I never wanted to be in cabinet. I felt it would take too much time away from my family life. My girls were grown up and I didn't want to leave my husband alone too much." She felt that her work as an MLA kept her busy and away from home enough and did not want to add to this. Cooper was certainly an active MLA. In addition to acting as an unofficial women's advocate she sat on numerous committees, including the Crown Corporations, Cabinet Planning, Health and Welfare, Public Accounts, and Law Amendments Committees. Cooper was confident that through her work on these committees and her other duties as an MLA she was effecting change. Cooper stated that all the members of Douglas' caucus "felt they had an impact."²⁴

Cooper had another reason for not pursuing a cabinet post: she lacked confidence in her administrative abilities and she was unsure if she would be capable of handling a department and all its staff. While Cooper was never offered a specific post, she did discuss the idea of being in the cabinet with both Premier T.C. Douglas and his successor Woodrow Lloyd. She made it clear to both that she was not interested in being a cabinet minister.²⁵

Cooper's handling of the cabinet post issue is an excellent example of her ability to harmonize traditional images of women with her work in the public

²³ I.C. Nollet, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

²⁴ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

²⁵ Ibid..

sphere; it was this ability which contributed to her political success. As Taylor argues, "by reconciling their activities for the CCF with the traditional work of women, they demonstrated that it was possible for a woman to be a 'good woman' and a political person."²⁶ Not only was Cooper married with children, but even after these children had grown and left home her family life was given priority over her political life.

Although Cooper was never made a cabinet minister, she, like many other female politicians, unofficially acted as a women's advocate throughout her career. In many ways this role was one that she accepted by default rather than one she aggressively sought to perform. Fellow MLAs and the press drew attention to Cooper's role as a representative of the women of the province on numerous occasions. Following her Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne in June 1953, C.G. Willis commented: "I am certain...that the women of this province will be ably represented in this Assembly."²⁷ In an editorial on 13 June the Leader-Post was correct in its assessment of Cooper's role as the only female MLA: "On Mrs. Cooper's shoulders...falls a responsibility heavier perhaps than usually falls on an elected candidate."²⁸

In Cooper's maiden speech in the legislature she addressed the issue of women in politics immediately after thanking her constituents for electing her. She stated that she had always thought there was a need for more women in politics as they made up half the population and had just as much at stake in the government as men. She also believed government was strengthened when a variety of viewpoints were represented. Her most compelling reason for wanting more women in the house was their ability and willingness to do the job. Cooper

²⁶ Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women," p.193.

²⁷ C.G. Willis, Debates and Proceedings, 13 February 1953.

²⁸ Leader Post, 13 June 1952.

stated that men trusted women to run homes, raise children and handle money.

Surely then, women can be trusted to work for the kind of legislation that will protect these homes and make life a safer and happier place for the children that we bring into this world. Who could be more concerned than women in seeing that every child has a decent home to live in, enough to eat, adequate medical care and all the education they have the desire and the ability to obtain. It is because we are concerned about these things that women are becoming increasingly active in politics.²⁹

Throughout her career in the male-dominated world of politics, Cooper maintained a traditional, socially acceptable lifestyle. In spite of the post-war "happy homemaker" movement, the number of women in the workforce was increasing steadily by the mid-1950s. This included married women and women with children. Notwithstanding the reality of the large numbers of women working outside the home, marriage and motherhood was still considered the normal state for women. The media and medical experts reinforced this stereotype.³⁰

Cooper reflected the ideal image of a working woman in the 1950s. Until the birth of the modern women's movement in the mid-1960s it was taken for granted that Canadian women, including Cooper and other women in the CCF, would work in fields which were an extension of their reproductive work in the home.³¹ This entailed caring for the physical, spiritual and intellectual needs of the family either directly as a wife and mother, or through institutions such as schools, hospitals and churches. Cooper may have stretched the stereotype by working in such a male stronghold, but her work was second to her family, her children were grown and her areas of interest carried on the tradition of the good works of earlier female reformers. Remarkably, Cooper was able to accomplish all of this while quietly breaking new ground.

²⁹ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 16 February 1953.

³⁰ Prentice et al, p.383.

³¹ Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women", p.24.

Education was a traditional area of interest for many female reformers and Cooper was no exception. In her first term in office she congratulated the government on its accomplishments in education and cited larger school units, increased school grants, the loan fund for university students and new schools in the North as proof of the CCF's commitment to education.³²

Cooper was also critical of the government for its failure to deal with issues such as the continued teacher shortage, and encouraged it to make more money available as loans to students wishing to pursue teacher training. The real importance of Cooper's efforts in education lay in her role as an advocate for the people of Regina.³³

Like many other female reformers and her CCF colleagues, Cooper often spoke out about international affairs. She believed that all women had a special obligation to play a role in international affairs. By the time Cooper expressed such views, motherhood and anti-war sentiment had been wedded for well over a century.³⁴ While Cooper was never active in the Voice of Women (VOW), she shared a similar attitude. The VOW was founded in Toronto in 1960 following the breakdown of talks between the United States and the Soviet Union at the Paris Summit. Within two years this non-partisan organization had 10,000 members across the country. The VOW emphasized women's perspectives on international affairs and in doing so made women more visible as political participants.³⁵ Cooper, like the VOW, argued that

it is a woman's special mission in this world to create and to preserve life...and in the dangerous situation in which we find the world today...I feel that in all good conscience no woman can remain silent.³⁶

³² Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 18 February 1955.

³³ A lengthier discussion of Marjorie Cooper's work in the field of post-secondary education can be found in Chapter Four, pp.89-93.

³⁴ Kome, p.74.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.74-76; Prentice, et al, p.335.

³⁶ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 18 March 1966.

Cooper spoke in favour of world disarmament, a ban on nuclear testing and what she identified as the real root of warfare - an inequitable distribution of the world's wealth. Disarmament was a first step, Cooper contended, but the world would never find peace "until we can find a better and a fairer method of distributing the world's goods."³⁷ Cooper's adherence to the social gospel resonates through her speeches on international issues. In another discussion on disarmament in the Legislature, Cooper identified the causes of war as

poverty and insecurity, and race prejudice and fear. These are the seeds of war, and until we learn the great lesson of our Christian faith, that we are our brothers' keepers...we will continue to live in an uneasy world and a world that is dominated by fear and insecurity and hate.³⁸

Cooper brought similar sentiments to health care issues. Her ability to appeal to the public as a mother was particularly useful during the Medicare debate. In 1961, when Premier Douglas announced his intention to introduce the Medicare legislation, he asked Cooper to move the Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne. Cooper felt that Douglas asked her to move the Address in Reply for several reasons. She had studied the issue extensively and Douglas had confidence that she would be able to explain the principles behind the legislation. Moreover, Douglas chose Cooper because he believed that medical care issues were of particular concern to women.

During the debate which followed, Cooper responded to a request from the Leader of the Opposition to delay the Medicare legislation for a year: "It has been my experience in raising a family...that sickness is no respecter of the state of your pocket book."³⁹ While this reasoning was not radically different than that employed by other MLAs, Cooper's gender and character likely made her pleas

³⁷ Ibid., 28 March 1955.

³⁸ Ibid., 17 March 1960.

³⁹ Ibid., 11 October 1961.

more effective. Cooper later speculated that she had been chosen because of her ability to deal with controversial legislation. As she put it, "I think Tommy thought I had the right style."⁴⁰

Cooper went beyond simply arguing for Medicare as a mother. She also dealt with some of the more difficult issues surrounding the subject. Cooper was adamant the plan be universal to ensure that everyone would pay their share. In response to cries from the College of Physicians and Surgeons about compulsion and loss of freedom, Cooper said:

The world we live in is full of compulsion [which is] necessary for the good of society as a whole....As society progresses and becomes more aware of its social and moral responsibilities for the safety and health and welfare of the people as a whole, freedom of arbitrary action on the part of the individual has been subordinated to a greater freedom for the group and the society as a whole. Could anyone deny that this is a healthy and progressive trend?.... As civilization becomes more mature, more conscious of social needs, this broader concept of freedom will be enlarged.⁴¹

Cooper even dealt with the controversial method of payment issue. She outlined the stated goals of the plan and the reasons why fee-for-service would be unable to meet these goals. She then outlined the advantages of having salaried doctors, including administrative simplicity, ensuring the presence of doctors in rural Saskatchewan and the fact that it would encourage a high quality of health care. The province's doctors likely took little comfort in Cooper's closing statement: "but by whatever method a doctor is paid, he should certainly be well paid for his work."⁴²

Cooper's likeability and diplomacy did not save her or her family from the bitterness of the Medicare debate and the doctors' strike. Like Premier Lloyd, Allan Blakeney and other CCF cabinet ministers and caucus members, Cooper's

⁴⁰ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁴¹ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 11 October 1961.

⁴² Ibid..

home was "besieged by threatening and obscene phone calls. Ed [Cooper] insisted that he alone was to answer the phone."⁴³

Within the field of health care, Cooper had a special interest in the treatment of mental illness. The CCF government had devoted a good deal of attention to the state of mental health care in Saskatchewan after its election in 1944. Prior to 1930 mental health was essentially a legal issue. "Treatment" consisted primarily of institutionalization at the request of the courts in the Saskatchewan Mental Hospitals in Weyburn and North Battleford and in the Psychopathic Ward of the Regina General Hospital. Not surprisingly, these facilities were in poor condition and severely overcrowded. In 1944-45 the province's two mental hospitals were operating at 89% over capacity.⁴⁴ Between 1930 and 1944 only a few changes had been implemented, notably a change in emphasis from custody to treatment. This was reflected in the government's decision to transfer the mental hospitals from the Department of Public Works to the Department of Health.⁴⁵

In November 1944 the new CCF government amended the Mental Hygiene Act to provide free treatment for patients admitted to an institution. Two months later, the government took further steps to improve the quality of mental health care in the province. Dr. C.M. Hincks of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene was invited to Saskatchewan and asked to study its services and make recommendations for improvement. Many of his suggestions concurred with the findings of the Sigerist Commission which had been created in 1944 to look into the expansion of health programs in Saskatchewan. Its

⁴³ Mitchell, "Marjorie," Mitchell Papers.

⁴⁴ Harley Dickinson, The Two Psychiatries: The Transformation of Psychiatric Work in Saskatchewan, 1905-1984, Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1989, p.77.

⁴⁵ Duane John Mombourquette, "A Government and Health Care: The Co-operative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan, 1944-1964," unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Regina, 1990, pp.12-14.

recommendations included a greater specialization of treatment, the creation of geriatric centres, selective sterilization and the creation of local and traveling clinics.⁴⁶

The government acted on many, but not all, of Dr. Hincks' suggestions. One of the most important was the appointment of Dr. D. G. McKerracher as Commissioner of Mental Services and Chief Psychiatrist. Under his direction significant changes were implemented. The names of the institutions were changed to Saskatchewan Hospital Weyburn and Saskatchewan Hospital North Battleford to help remove some of the stigma attached to the treatment of the mentally ill. In addition, increased training was required for mental health workers, community-based programs were slowly developed⁴⁷ and in 1950 the power to institutionalize was taken from the courts and placed in the hands of the medical community.⁴⁸

In the early 1950s the "Saskatchewan Plan" was developed in a further attempt to medicalize psychiatry in the province. One of the ways to accomplish this, supporters of the plan argued, was to replace large asylums with small, local mental hospitals.⁴⁹ The Canadian Mental Health Association and Dr. Hincks had advocated this idea since the 1920s. Ideally, this plan would reduce the isolation the mentally ill experienced during treatment by increasing contact with the community. It was felt that this would be a great asset in speeding recovery.

As part of her attempts to improve the facilities and treatment available to the mentally ill, Cooper was a supporter of the approach advocated in the Saskatchewan Plan. Cooper often urged the province to adopt the Canadian

⁴⁶ Dickinson, p.77.

⁴⁷ These community-based programs included outpatient services, mental hygiene clinics and the expansion of psychiatric wards in general hospitals.

⁴⁸ Mombourquette, pp.74-75.

⁴⁹ Dickinson, p.146.

Mental Health Association (CMHA) recommendations for treatment. She contended that not only would this be a more humane approach, but it would also save money in the long run due to shorter hospital stays and higher rates of people going home cured. Cooper constantly pressured the province to deal with the overcrowding and lack of privacy in mental hospitals. She pushed to have the mentally ill separated from the "mentally defective" in treatment facilities as their needs were different. Cooper also advocated treating the mentally ill in small, local hospitals, as recommended by the Saskatchewan Plan and the CMHA.

In spite of the CCF government's genuine desire to improve the province's mental health system, by the mid-1950s the system was strained and considerable tension existed between the government and its mental health professionals. Supporters of the Saskatchewan Plan sought to generate public support by exposing the problems associated with large mental hospitals. T.C. Douglas, who personally favoured the more economical "centres of excellence" approach, was angered by these attempts to influence the public.⁵⁰ By 1954 the government was under "acute pressure" from the civil service and the CMHA to improve conditions in the mental hospitals. Shortly after an investigation of the Weyburn hospital, where conditions were found to be worse than the government suspected, changes were initiated.⁵¹

One of these changes was a decision to construct a new community mental hospital in Yorkton. When the CCF government made the announcement, Cooper expressed her satisfaction: "This is one of the things that has been very close to my heart and something which I have advocated many times."⁵² Her jubilation, shared by other advocates of this approach, soon turned

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

⁵¹ Mombourquette, pp. 124-127.

⁵² Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 23 February 1960.

to disappointment when construction had not begun by the summer of 1961.⁵³ The facility was eventually constructed and opened in 1963, but with fewer beds than had been recommended in the Saskatchewan Plan.

Cooper considered the opening of the Yorkton facility to be one of her greatest accomplishments. In an interview in 1965 Cooper spoke about the future of the Saskatchewan Plan for Mental Health and the new hospital in Yorkton. "I am confident that it will succeed and become a pattern for other hospitals of its kind."⁵⁴ Undoubtedly to the disappointment of Cooper and many mental health care professionals, the government never fully implemented the Saskatchewan Plan. The government did not openly reject the plan, which was theoretically sound and had a great deal of public and professional support, but the substantial costs involved in its implementation were seen as prohibitive.⁵⁵ By the mid-1960s, a "transmutation" of the Saskatchewan Plan was being implemented. This included a shift toward general hospital psychiatry, a reduction in the number of patients being treated as in-patients and the development of private sector psychiatry.⁵⁶

Cooper felt that many of the changes which had been made were very positive, but that many more changes were necessary. She was particularly interested in removing the stigma attached to mental illness. Cooper stated that "the only difference between mental and physical illness is geography."⁵⁷ She argued in the Legislative Assembly that the province needed to do more to reverse the decision of the federal government to exclude community mental hospitals from the proposed Hospital Insurance and Diagnostic Services Act.

Cooper raised this issue in the legislature again in 1960 following the

⁵³ Dickinson, p.169.

⁵⁴ Leader-Post, 4 February 1965.

⁵⁵ Dickinson, p.54.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.193, 207, 209.

⁵⁷ Commonwealth, 22 February 1956.

announcement that mental hospitals would be excluded from the national hospital insurance plan. Cooper stated: "There is no reason...for any artificial division between certain types of illnesses and certain types of people" and the health care needs of the mentally ill are as important as those of the physically ill.⁵⁸ Surely Cooper was extremely disappointed when mental hospitals were excluded from the federal plan. This exclusion marked the end of any hopes of implementing the expensive Saskatchewan Plan.⁵⁹

Just as Cooper experienced some triumphs and some disappointments in the field of mental health, the same was true in the area of penal reform. Cooper had first become interested in penal reform as a volunteer for the John Howard Society and she carried this interest with her to the legislature. Saskatchewan penology had changed little between 1905 and the creation of the Penal Commission in 1946.⁶⁰ Institutions focused on the punishment of criminals and the protection of society rather than on treatment and rehabilitation. The attitude of the government towards corrections is illustrated by the fact that the Department of the Attorney General and the Department of Public Works were responsible for the administration of Saskatchewan's three prisons. All were in poor physical condition and were run in a very strict, militaristic manner.⁶¹

The report of the 1946 Penal Commission marked a watershed in the history of corrections policy in Saskatchewan. After careful inspection of the province's three jails, jails in other jurisdictions and a series of public hearings, the Commission made many recommendations for more humanitarian treatment of prisoners. Some of the Commission's suggestions included: a program of crime prevention, the use of scientific methods for rehabilitation, educational and

⁵⁸ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 15 March 1960.

⁵⁹ Dickinson, p.160.

⁶⁰ Shirley Skinner et al, Corrections: An Historical Perspective of the Saskatchewan Experience, Regina: Canadian Plains Research Centre, 1981, p.23.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp.33-34.

recreational programs for prisoners, full probation services, a greater use of parole and an adequate system of after care in order to reestablish offenders in the community.

These proposed changes were justified on the grounds that they would reduce crime and save money, and also that they reflected a Christian philosophy of charity and mercy. Both the government and the general public welcomed the recommendations of the Committee and the province began to implement some of them immediately. By 1948 it had established a Corrections Branch (with a trained penologist as its director) within the Department of Social Welfare. The era of treatment and education as opposed to punishment and societal protection had arrived, and there were high expectations that this new approach would be successful.⁶²

In spite of the 1950 Corrections Act which formalized many of the Commission's recommendations, the introduction of the treatment approach was neither smooth nor rapid for a variety of reasons. Many of the expectations surrounding treatment were unrealistic and attitudes among the public and prison staff were slow to change. Some advancements were made, including the improvement of prison facilities to include vocational shops and recreation areas, but many other things remained unchanged. Older notions of retribution, deterrence through punishment and the need to protect society were still strong influences in shaping corrections policy in Saskatchewan.

As a newly elected member of the legislature, Cooper took a particular interest in the conditions of female prisoners who were housed in a special section of the men's prison in Prince Albert. Cooper argued that "the women's jail is in the same building as the men's [and] this is not good."⁶³ She felt that

⁶² Ibid., pp.90-92.

⁶³ Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 19 February 1954.

women did not need bars like the men because they posed less of a threat to society. She contended that the shared facility resulted in discipline problems that were "a bit unpleasant."⁶⁴ In 1956, two years following this initial push for a new women's jail, Cooper was pleased that in the Throne Speech the government announced its intention to construct one.

The Pine Grove Centre in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan's first female prison, was completed in February 1967, shortly before Cooper's retirement. The new facility boasted 52 "inmate rooms" and a capacity for 72 female offenders. New attitudes surrounding corrections are evident in this description of Pine Grove offered by the Leader-Post:

The design of the H-shaped split-level building takes into consideration the physical requirements of the rehabilitation program which aims at changing attitudes of inmates and providing training to upgrade work habits, work skills and educational standards.⁶⁵

Cooper was pleased to see the construction of a female prison, improved staff training and an increased focus on rehabilitation in Saskatchewan's prisons. But she continued to press for the implementation of other recommendations of the Penal Commission. Cooper argued that the existing facilities had been built in the old days when "a gaol was just a lock up - some place to get a person out of the way, out of the view of the public, and there was very little emphasis on the rehabilitation and personal needs of the inmate."⁶⁶

Cooper pushed for an extended parole and probation program. No matter how good the rehabilitation programs were in jail, she argued, their work "can be completely frustrated unless we have trained people to follow up that work in the community." Cooper contended that these programs could help certain types of

⁶⁴ Ibid..

⁶⁵ Leader-Post, 7 September 1967.

⁶⁶ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 22 February 1957.

offenders avoid the unhealthy influences of jail, save money, reduce re-offender rates, speed rehabilitation and lower prison populations. Cooper was quick to add: "I do realize that the protection of society must be the first consideration in any corrections program."⁶⁷

In 1961 Cooper voiced her disappointment that not enough had been done in the areas of parole and probation. While a parole and probation division had been established in 1948, it remained informal as no classification centre had been created to determine the best treatment for offenders. Probation was primarily reserved for juveniles. Perhaps the largest challenge those advocating greater use of parole and probation faced was the general lack of acceptance of the idea. In 1961 Cooper stated:

I look forward to the day when this province can put more emphasis on probation and parole, because in the long run I think this may be a more effective policy, and certainly more economical too.⁶⁸

Cooper's pleas to expand these programs were not successful until the late 1960s when parole and probation gained wider acceptance as part of a trend towards community-based corrections and the integration of offenders into society. In 1967 a new Corrections Act was introduced and it included several concepts which would undoubtedly have pleased Cooper.

A Corrections Branch was created within the Department of Welfare. "Classification teams" were established at each correctional institution. These teams consisted of a psychologist, a psychiatrist, a social worker and any other specialists deemed necessary. If inmates met eligibility requirements, they could participate in training and work programs which included attending educational institutions and obtaining or maintaining employment in the community. In 1967 nine inmates in Regina were released with "encouraging results" in a pilot project

⁶⁷ Ibid..

⁶⁸ Ibid., 2 March 1961.

of the work-training program. Regina was also home to a pilot project in family therapy.⁶⁹

Many of Cooper's recommendations in the area of penology were ahead of their time. She had been active in the John Howard Society long before most believed that prisoners deserved respect and had the potential to be rehabilitated. Improvements that Cooper advocated as a member of the John Howard Society prior to her election and in the early 1950s as an MLA were not implemented until the late 1960s with the revised Corrections Act.

While Cooper held progressive views on issues concerning mental health and criminal justice, many considered her views on the sale and consumption of alcohol as antiquated. Throughout her political career Cooper fought against loosening the limitations on the sale of liquor because she believed it would lead to an increase in car accidents, property damage, crime and human suffering. Cooper herself never took a drink and for years refused to serve alcohol in her home. Because Cooper believed that the abuse of alcohol was both a health and a social issue she argued it was the duty of government not only to restrict access to alcohol but also to remove the factors which led to alcohol abuse including poor, overcrowded housing conditions and the tension caused by war.

Despite changing CCF government policy, and changing public attitudes, Cooper remained strongly committed to her view that the government needed to restrict access to alcohol as much as possible. As the 1950s went on, Cooper and those who shared her views increasingly found themselves in the minority. By the mid-1950s it was very apparent that the prairies were changing and becoming more supportive of the idea of liberalized liquor laws.

The prairie economy was thriving with low unemployment, good farm commodity prices and higher wages. In addition to these forces, pressure for

⁶⁹ Department of Welfare, Annual Report, Regina: Queen's Printer, 1967.

change was coming from the United States and Eastern Canada. There had been cocktail bars and liquor had been served in restaurants in Toronto since 1947, and word was slowly drifting west that these places were "delightful." Many prairie residents reported that they enjoyed the freedom to patronize licensed outlets while vacationing in the United States. The "backwardness" of Saskatchewan was further highlighted by reports of American tourists who came to the province and complained about the its "archaic" liquor laws.⁷⁰

British Columbia had given in to these pressures and loosened its liquor laws in 1953. The following year the province of Manitoba appointed a Royal Commission, known as the Bracken Commission, to look into that province's liquor laws and make recommendations for the future. Convinced that the public wanted liberalized liquor laws, the Commission released its report in February 1955 and called for a plebiscite on the issue.⁷¹

The Commission proved to be correct in its belief that the people of Manitoba were ready for change. In 1956 numerous plebiscites were held and all major centres in the province voted in favour of beer parlours, cocktail bars, cabarets and the licensing of first class dining rooms. The Alberta government soon followed suit and liberalized its liquor laws.

Amidst this background it is not surprising that the Douglas government decided that it was time to look at changing Saskatchewan's liquor legislation. Douglas argued that while no changes had been made to Saskatchewan's liquor legislation since 1934, when men-only beer parlours opened, many other provinces had made significant changes to their legislation. In 1958 Douglas approached the issue by forming a multi-party Liquor Sales Outlets Inquiry Committee. The Committee was composed of six CCFers, including Cooper and

⁷⁰ James H. Gray, Bacchanalia Revisited: Western Canada's Boozy Skid to Social Disaster, Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1982, pp.94-97.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p.106.

Fines, three Liberals, including the leader of the opposition A.H. (Hammy) McDonald and Mary Batten, and one Socred.⁷²

Douglas argued that the whole question of liquor legislation was a difficult one because he believed it was primarily a matter of opinion. He stated that it was his opinion that there would be less poverty and crime if people did not drink, but that this was only his opinion. He contended that "In a free society I have no more right to prevent another man from drinking than he has to force me to drink when I don't want to." While Douglas, like Cooper, would have preferred to maintain the province's existing liquor legislation, his opinion was that people had to choose if they wanted to drink or not and that in "the final analysis we cannot legislate morality."⁷³

Cooper was pleased to be selected to sit on the Committee as the issue of alcohol regulation and education was one she had dealt with in the past. She agreed with the government's plan to study the issue prior to making any decisions regarding changes in the legislation. Cooper was a firm advocate of dealing with the problems surrounding the use and abuse of alcohol through a careful analysis of all available information on the subject.

Douglas faced no opposition to his proposal for an inquiry from members of the Legislature. Both Hammy McDonald and the Social Credit leader felt that this was the proper way to proceed, although they both argued that the terms of reference should be wider. Even the Leader-Post followed the announcement of the creation of the Committee with an editorial entitled "Liquor inquiry wise move."⁷⁴ It was the opinion of the editor that the government was taking the right

⁷² The Liquor Sales Outlets Inquiry Committee was composed of the following members: Peter Howe - Chair (CCF), Provincial Treasurer Clarence Fines (CCF), Attorney General R.A. Walker (CCF), Fred Neibrandt (CCF), E.I. Wood (CCF), Marjorie Cooper (CCF), Leader of the Opposition A.H. McDonald (Liberal), J.H. Barrie (Liberal), Mary Batten (Liberal) and A.P. Weber (Social Credit).

⁷³ Leader-Post, 15 March 1958.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 19 March 1958.

approach because any changes to the legislation needed to be supported by the public if they were to be successful.

The Liquor Sales Outlets Inquiry Committee set about its work immediately. Its mandate was to complete a report by July 1958 for discussion during the following legislative session. The Committee began by studying the reports concerning liquor legislation which other provinces had commissioned since the late 1940s. The Committee studied Manitoba's Bracken Commission report in considerable detail since it was the most recent and most relevant to the situation in Saskatchewan.

By looking at this material the Committee found itself

confronted with the fact that four provinces of Canada in a relatively short space of time, had found it expedient to relax their restrictions on the sale of alcoholic beverages through governmental and public outlets. It was a matter of history...that prohibitory legislation had failed.⁷⁵

Thus the Committee was presented with the challenge of deciding whether or not it was appropriate for Saskatchewan to follow suit.

The Committee traveled to other Canadian provinces and to the United States to investigate the impact of liberalized legislation. Its general findings were that most jurisdictions were pleased with the results of relaxed legislation. In fact, it found that in Manitoba everyone, including the police and temperance groups, "were unanimously of the opinion that the new system was a marked improvement over the old."⁷⁶

Following these out-of-province investigations the Committee held public hearings in Regina, Saskatoon and several smaller communities to give the people of Saskatchewan a chance to make their opinions known. It found that in both the cities and rural areas most submissions came from groups and

⁷⁵ Report of the Liquor Sales Outlets Inquiry Committee (hereafter cited as Liquor Report), Introduction, 29 July 1958, Douglas Papers, File XXXV-33 Folder 1, SAB.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p.6.

individuals who were opposed to any relaxation of the liquor laws. Those who expressed this temperance viewpoint shared many common concerns. They argued that because alcohol was a poison which resulted in broken homes and increased immorality, any proposals for changes should be viewed with extreme caution. They were particularly concerned about the dangers of "mixed" drinking and the increased consumption they felt would inevitably follow easier access to alcohol. To add weight to their argument, temperance supporters urged the Committee to bear in mind the economic costs associated with the consumption of alcohol, including the need for more prisons, the provision of treatment for alcoholics and alcohol-related property damage.

While the majority of Committee members expressed sympathy with this viewpoint, they were not "entirely convinced that either the increasing incidence of alcoholism or the increased per capita consumption of alcoholic beverages is wholly attributable to new outlets."⁷⁷ The Committee argued that on the basis of research it had conducted in neighboring provinces and states there was little hard evidence to support this view.

The Committee found that "Women's organizations were generally opposed to the idea of 'mixed drinking.'" Various women and women's organizations, including the RCW, presented submissions. The RCW had circulated a petition among its members which clearly indicated that the majority were opposed to relaxed legislation. Some individuals and organizations did support the idea of mixed drinking, providing that it took place in an appropriate establishment. "The theory is that the presence of women will be conducive to restraint, to better social behavior and thus to better drinking habits."⁷⁸

The submissions to the Committee which favoured the opening of new

⁷⁷ Ibid., p.13.

⁷⁸ Ibid., p.23.

outlets came from two groups: those with a vested economic interest and the police. Hotel keepers and restaurant associations, with support from the Saskatchewan Chamber of Commerce, favoured changes to existing legislation for obvious reasons. The submissions from various police forces, including the Regina and Saskatoon City Police forces and the RCMP, argued that the type of drinking establishments to be permitted was a more important factor than the number of such establishments. The Saskatoon Chief of Police sent a letter to Douglas supporting this position. He stated:

Personally, I am firmly convinced that the liquor laws in the Province of Saskatchewan are completely outmoded and outdated and are totally inadequate for the proper enforcement of the handling and consumption of liquor.⁷⁹

The police argued that beer parlours tended to promote over-indulgence whereas establishments with a better atmosphere, where food was served and mixed drinking was allowed, would do more to encourage moderation. This viewpoint was very influential because it was expressed by police forces and because it was consistent with the Committee's findings in other provinces and states.

The Committee's final report recommended that liquor laws should be made more open under the following conditions:

1. Local option be made a permanent feature of the liquor system.
2. Men only beer parlours remain a part of the system with improvements.
3. Only fit and proper persons be permitted to manage drinking establishments.
4. That the aim should not be to increase the number of drinking establishments, only the variety.
5. The committee recognizes the social evils of drinking therefore the goal of any policy should be to slow the tempo of drinking.
6. Any changes should proceed slowly.⁸⁰

⁷⁹ James G. Kettles to Douglas, 19 July 1957, Douglas Papers, File XXXV-33 Folder 1, SAB.

⁸⁰ Liquor Report, p.32, SAB.

The Committee further recommended that Indians be allowed to purchase liquor and to enter licensed premises and that restrictions on women be lifted. The Committee contended that although dangers existed, it felt that "a calculated risk might be justifiably taken in the interests of the long term objective."⁸¹

All members of the Committee endorsed the report, although two members expressed some reservations. E.I. Wood felt that local option votes should require a 55% majority rather than a simple majority. In a written statement appended to the report Cooper expressed a far more fundamental concern: "I am opposed to the committee's recommending mixed beverage rooms and cocktail bars."⁸² Cooper argued that dining rooms and restaurants which served alcohol were more consistent with the expressed aim of the Committee.

Legislation based on the report of the Liquor Sales Outlets Inquiry Committee was tabled early in 1959. The legislation made provision for the on-premises consumption of alcohol in clubs, bars and restaurants following a favourable local option vote. When the Bill reached its second reading Cooper had the opportunity to further comment on the work of the Committee and the proposed legislation.

Cooper stated that everyone on the Committee was in agreement that the goal should be to encourage moderation and to increase the variety rather than the number of licensed outlets. She went on to say that the Committee members had different opinions on how these goals could be reached. Cooper expanded upon the reservations she had expressed in the report. She asserted that while the goal of the Committee was not to increase the number of outlets, there would be a fairly substantial increase because of the various types of

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p.23.

⁸² *Ibid.*, Appendix.

establishments which would now be permitted.

Cooper was willing to allow for drinking in hotel dining rooms and in restaurants because she felt that drinking with meals encouraged moderation. But she argued: "I am convinced that beverage rooms will increase drinking, particularly among women, far more than a licensed restaurant or a hotel dining room will."⁸³ Cooper's main concern with beer parlours, beverage rooms and cocktail bars was that the emphasis would be on drinking. She felt that simply admitting women would not be sufficient to change the character of these establishments.

The atmosphere found in cocktail bars was of particular concern to Cooper. She stated that they "glamorize drinking, with the dim lights and the luxurious settings and fancy bars and, in some cases, we saw red coated waiters."⁸⁴ Cooper further supported her arguments against mixed drinking establishments by pointing out that of the few demands which had been made for mixed beverage rooms, none had come from a woman or a women's organization.

Cooper viewed the issue of allowing women into bars as a question of morality rather than one of gender discrimination. She believed that women were simply above this type of behavior. Cooper was not alone in her belief that women did not have the need or the desire to be allowed into drinking establishments. Much of the opposition to the legislation in general, and to the specific issue of allowing women access to bars, came from women and women's groups.

A letter to Douglas from a women's Presbyterian Church group in Moose Jaw stated that it failed to see "how the inclusion of outlets for women can be an

⁸³ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 2 March 1959.

⁸⁴ Ibid..

improvement. Personally... I find it hard to believe that the women of Saskatchewan are asking for this doubtful privilege."⁸⁵ Another woman expressed concern that the government was cashing in on the weakness of others and that it was bad enough for children to have a drinking father "but it will be ten times worse to have a drinking mother as well."⁸⁶

Cooper argued that the demands for relaxed legislation could be met by allowing alcohol in restaurants alone. She stated that the calls for relaxed legislation were based on two arguments: that beer parlours needed improvement and that there was no place for a man to take his wife or girlfriend for a drink. Cooper believed that these demands could be met by serving alcohol in restaurants and that it was not necessary to open a variety of establishments. She went on to argue that people might still want other types of outlets, but these could be opened at a later date because it would be easier to move forward than to backtrack.

In spite of these objections, Cooper supported the Bill. Following its second reading she stated: "I shall support the principle of the Bill but I wanted [sic] it understood that these particular parts of the Bill I will oppose."⁸⁷ In the end, little was made in the Assembly or in the press of her opposition to certain parts of the legislation. Some individuals and groups which supported temperance saw Cooper as an ally in their cause. Several sent letters to Douglas commending Cooper's position and urging the Premier to amend the legislation as she proposed.

Ultimately, the legislation was enacted without Cooper's suggestions being incorporated into it. This was a reflection of the fact that although there

⁸⁵ Isabella Rothwell to T.C. Douglas, 10 October 1958, Douglas Papers, File XXXV-33 Folder 1, SAB.

⁸⁶ Myrtle Dahiman to T.C. Douglas, 18 September 1958, Douglas Papers, File XXXV-33 Folder 1, SAB.

⁸⁷ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 2 March 1959.

was a vocal minority opposed to the legislation, the times had changed too much for the existing outdated legislation to survive much longer. In addition, while the people who pushed for changes made many reasonable arguments in their favour, some of those who were opposed sounded increasingly out of touch with the changing attitudes of society. One letter to the Leader-Post argued that alcohol was one of the forces that was "raging to destroy and degrade man so that he became a beast."⁸⁸

Marjorie Cooper's home city acted quickly to take advantage of its new-found ability to liberalize the availability of liquor. On 29 June 1959 a local option vote was held on the issue. Five separate questions were asked concerning the sale of liquor to people of both sexes with meals in restaurants, with meals in dining rooms, in beverage rooms, in cocktail rooms and in incorporated clubs. The local option area, which included Regina and some of the surrounding rural municipalities, voted in favour of allowing liquor to be sold in all five types of establishments. 74% voted in favour of allowing alcohol to be served with meals, the option Cooper herself favoured. 70% of voters called for serving liquor without meals in licensed beverage rooms, cocktail room and clubs. These results demonstrate that most of Cooper's constituents thought that it was time to loosen up restrictions on the sale of liquor.

Cooper did not let her opposition to the liberalization of Saskatchewan's liquor legislation rest following her work on the Liquor Sales Outlets Inquiry Committee. After the defeat of the CCF in 1964 Cooper found herself in the Opposition arguing against further changes the Liberals proposed on several occasions. By this point Cooper was well known as a resolute opponent of liberalized liquor legislation. In April 1965 the Liberal government proposed further changes to the liquor legislation, including permissive legislation which

⁸⁸ Leader-Post, 21 February 1959.

would allow for liquor outlets in drug stores. Cooper spoke against the proposed changes and opened by stating: "I think very few people in this assembly will be surprised that I am opposing this Bill." Cooper fought against changes to the legislation by arguing that "there is too much liquor consumption in this province now" and that "easy availability increases consumption every time."⁸⁹ She accused the government of taking this action to increase the profits from its liquor stores.

Cooper voiced her opposition again in 1966 when the Thatcher government introduced legislation to allow for more outlets. She argued that profit and their ties to the business community motivated the Liberals. She stated that "the government is a friend to big business, to private enterprise, to the breweries, but certainly no friend to the mothers and wives and children." Cooper went on to argue that while "profits are up, death and destruction on the highways are up too, alcoholism is up...the number of people in jails is up. Broken homes continue. Poverty and dependence result."⁹⁰ Cooper continued to provide a voice for women and children, whom she considered to be the real victims of the abuse of alcohol.

While Cooper rarely spoke out for the needs of the increasing number of wage earning women, she did provide a strong voice in the legislature for Saskatchewan's housewives and mothers. During the 1966 budget debate, for example, Cooper raised an issue that had been of concern to her for years: assistance to deserted wives. Cooper pushed the Liberal government, as she had pushed her own CCF government, to devise a better method of assisting wives whose husbands ignored court orders to pay maintenance. She spoke of the many women who came to her with the same story: "It is reasonably easy to

⁸⁹ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 2 April 1965.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18 March 1966.

get a court order against a husband; it is another thing altogether to get action on that order."⁹¹ Cooper expressed frustration with a system which put people in jail for failing to pay speeding tickets, but did nothing to men who failed to pay child support. She expressed further frustration that the courts did not hesitate to garnishee wages for a commercial debt, but did not put the same priority on family support.

In 1965 the Maintenance of Deserted Wives and Children Act was passed. This Act called for many of the things which Cooper had long advocated. Husbands who refused to follow court orders to pay maintenance were subject to garnishment of wages, liens on property and imprisonment. Maintenance payments were given legal priority over other debts. In addition, the burden of proof concerning inability to make payments now lay on the husband. Cooper's frustration appears to have been with the courts' failure to enforce the act, rather than with the act itself.

Cooper reiterated a recommendation which she had made before: that the Department of Welfare should pay family support to deserted wives and then be responsible for collecting money from the husbands. Cooper also suggested that a crown prosecutor be appointed to represent women's interests in court. She argued that "A Crown Prosecutor could present a much more coherent case for a woman whose emotional state may make her bitter and give an hysterical performance and lose the court's sympathy."⁹²

Cooper also spoke out against an increase in taxes on household products. In reference to a proposed tax on soaps and detergents she stated she would like to ask the Premier "why he had to put in that mean little tax for the housewives?...surely the housewife didn't need to have that extra tax on soap."⁹³

⁹¹ Ibid., 1 March 1966.

⁹² Ibid..

⁹³ Ibid..

On this same issue, she later stated: "I do think that on behalf of the housewives of this province I should make a very vigorous protest on this matter."⁹⁴

In 1967 Cooper spoke out in favor of the creation of a Prices Review Board to prevent unwarranted increases in the price of consumer goods. Cooper articulated her reasons for addressing this issue. "As a housewife, and speaking on behalf of housewives, I feel that I would have been remiss in my duty if I didn't have something to say about this."⁹⁵ It is interesting to note that after 15 years as an MLA she still identified herself as a housewife.

Cooper was reluctant to think of herself or to refer to herself as a feminist, largely because she appears to have been uncomfortable with the term. In many of her actions though, she was a feminist and "she never felt inferior to any man."⁹⁶ She stated that "I don't like the word feminism because I think that people...should all have the opportunity to fulfill the best that is within them ...[and]...sex shouldn't enter into it." Cooper went on to say that "there should be no special advantage to women because they are women."⁹⁷

While she believed that women should be able to enter into any job they were capable of doing, she also believed men and women had different strengths and interests. The following statement summarizes Cooper's views on feminism and gender equality:

I believe that women should have equal opportunities with men to fulfill their ambitions in life. They should get equal pay if they are doing equal jobs. They should have an equal opportunity for power positions with more authority in policy making than they have. That is my idea of feminism.⁹⁸

Cooper went on to qualify this assertion. She stated that, while her

⁹⁴ Ibid., 28 March 1966.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 2 March 1967.

⁹⁶ Mitchell Interview.

⁹⁷ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁹⁸ Ibid..

daughter would disagree with this, she herself believed

We're biologically different, and our priorities are different, we're emotionally different, and from that point of view I don't think that a woman can be a man and a man can be a woman. ...I think that there are some jobs men can do better than women. I think that there are some jobs that women can do better than men. Now a real feminist wouldn't say that.⁹⁹

On numerous occasions during her time as an MLA Cooper expressed her belief that women and men viewed the world differently and did not share the same priorities. In 1966 she congratulated the Liberal Minister of Health for setting up an investigating committee on mental health. She was particularly pleased to see two women appointed to the committee because, she argued, "In this type of investigation I believe that a woman may see situations and problems that a man may overlook."¹⁰⁰

While Cooper's respectable feminism made her more acceptable to the voting public and the majority of the CCF, others were critical of her moderation and her failure to push more aggressively for gender equality. Gladys Strum, who had a different feminist philosophy, disagreed with Cooper's respectable approach. While Cooper enjoyed receiving flowers on her desk the first day of each session, Strum was extremely offended by this gesture and openly expressed her feelings by stating that she wanted a woman in cabinet, not flowers on her desk.¹⁰¹ Strum argued that the flowers and other such gestures by the CCF caucus were symptomatic of a much larger problem - the party's lack

⁹⁹ Ibid..

¹⁰⁰ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 1 March 1966.

¹⁰¹ Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women," p.168.

of respect for women.¹⁰² For her part, Cooper felt that Strum often attempted to make her feel dissatisfied, even though Cooper stated "I didn't feel I was being discriminated against."¹⁰³ Cooper laughed when Douglas kidded her by asking "if my husband made my speech for me."¹⁰⁴ It is not difficult to see why Cooper was stereotyped as a mother and Strum as a crusading feminist.

Not surprisingly, while Cooper cited her term as an MLA as one of the most productive and rewarding of her life, Strum despised the time she spent there. While Strum loved her term as a Member of Parliament, she found her term in the Saskatchewan Legislature extremely difficult. These two opposing perspectives were based, at least in part, on the different expectations the two women had. Cooper was content to continue with her "good works" through a career in public office. Any attempts to change gender roles were moderate and indirect. Strum had no patience for old-fashioned gender structures and role-playing.

Any animosity which existed between Cooper and Strum stayed outside of the legislature and out of public view entirely. Strum recalled the two working together on various issues in caucus. Prior to the 1964 election the two women stood alone in their attempt to convince their colleagues to remove the tax on the sale of children's clothing and schoolbooks. Strum and Cooper argued that this gesture would carry a lot of weight with women voters.

The relationship which Cooper had with Liberal MLA Mary Batten also reveals something about Cooper's social and political priorities. Like many other

¹⁰² Gladys Strum, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

¹⁰³ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

¹⁰⁴ Marjorie Cooper, Larmour Interview, SAB.

female politicians, Cooper was not extremely partisan. She and Mary Batten worked together on the Liquor Sales Outlet Inquiry Committee and occasionally spoke on the same subjects in the house. Both women had an interest in the treatment of the mentally ill and the welfare of deserted wives and children. But in most respects, the two women were very different.

Batten was much more career-oriented than Cooper had been. Batten had practiced law prior to her election to the legislature in 1956. She also had a very young family while in public office. In 1964, the year she left politics, her children were ages six, four, three and two. During her career as an MLA Batten dealt with many subjects which Cooper never touched on, including land titles, civil rights, water rights and income tax. The two women, as to be expected, generally debated opposite sides of issues, including the proper level of government intervention in the economy.¹⁰⁵

Notwithstanding their different views, Cooper had a great deal of respect for Batten. In February 1964 Cooper offered her congratulations to retiring members, especially to Mary Batten. Cooper stated that although they were on opposite sides of the house, she always had a great deal of respect for Batten and her abilities. She went on: "I was hoping, Mr. Speaker, that the honourable lady might have been named a judge. We need some women judges and it's time we had them."¹⁰⁶ Mary Batten was appointed a District Court Judge in Saskatoon in 1963, the first woman to hold this position in Saskatchewan. In 1980 she was appointed to the Court of Queen's Bench. In 1983 Batten became the Chief Justice of the Court of Queen's Bench.

¹⁰⁵ Marjorie Cooper and Mary Batten, Debates and Proceedings, 28 February 1961.

Cooper appears to have maintained her respectable feminism throughout most of her life, but there is evidence that she was somewhat affected by the growth of the second wave feminist movement. In an interview with the CBC she questioned "Why must it be the wife and mother at home with the children?" She also wrote "women's lib [is] radical but [it] has done much to focus attention on areas of discrimination."¹⁰⁷ In 1982 Cooper expressed frustration with the slow rate of improvement in the number of women running as candidates in federal and provincial elections. She questioned: "Why not a female Prime Minister? ...it all depends on the ability to do the job, not the sex...you need a balance and balance isn't there when men run everything" Cooper was critical of a society where women were "made to look like morons in TV commercials" and only "educated to be housewives."¹⁰⁸ While Cooper may have been unaware of it herself, her emphasis on respectable feminism declined as she aged.

Throughout her career Cooper was able to occupy the limited space where being a good wife and mother overlapped with an active role in a male dominated profession. Women in politics were always vulnerable to criticism that they were neglecting their families. While this may have been less of an issue for Cooper than it had been for some of the women who had been active in the CCF prior to the Second World War, she had to at least appear to be reconciling the two roles. Of all the women who held active and prominent positions within the CCF, Cooper was the most successful at accomplishing this. Her success was a result of her non-confrontational nature and her gentle challenge to

¹⁰⁶ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 12 February 1964.

¹⁰⁷ Marjorie Cooper, speech notes, nd, Cooper Papers.

¹⁰⁸ Leader-Post, 12 June 1982.

traditional gender roles. Georgina Taylor accurately states: "Whilst an MLA from 1952 to 1967, Marjorie Cooper sought to convey, in a moderate and accommodating way, her view on the place of women in politics and society."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women," p.73.

Chapter Four: The CCF Member from Regina

At the time of Cooper's retirement, Woodrow Lloyd stated that "by example and emphasis she made the point that government should be human, that government should have a heart."¹ Cooper was well suited to the respectable maternal role that characterized many successful women in the CCF. "They were being the political mothers of all needy people."² As the previous chapter has made clear, much of Cooper's work as an MLA illustrates why she was viewed as a maternal political figure. While that aspect of Cooper's career is important, it is not the only thing for which she ought to be remembered.

This chapter further explores Cooper's efforts in the areas of housing, education, and health care. It also includes a discussion of the manner in which Cooper's religious views affected her politics. Although these issues could be studied from the perspective of Marjorie Cooper the female parliamentarian, they can also be examined from the viewpoint of her effectiveness as a CCF MLA and as one of Regina's representatives in the Legislative Assembly.

Marjorie Cooper was known to be a well-prepared and competent orator. Allan Blakeney described her abilities positively.

Marjorie was a thoroughly competent debater. She usually spoke from notes which she held in her hands. As she explained, if she put them on her desk, her bifocals sometimes produced disastrous results... Substance and fact were her strong points, presented with clarity and often with elegance.³

It was not coincidental that Cooper, as a symbol of the progressiveness of

¹ Retirement Tape, Cooper Papers.

² Taylor, "Equals and Partners? An Examination of How Saskatchewan Women Reconciled Their Political Activities for the Cooperative Commonwealth Federation with Traditional Roles for Women," p.226.

³ Commonwealth, 26 September 1984.

the CCF, was chosen to move the 1953 Address in Reply to the Speech from the Throne which was broadcast over the radio. Cooper later recalled:

that being my first speech, and being the only woman, I spoke a bit about what I thought a woman could do in the legislature as a member, not just as a woman, but what I thought was important....being a housewife and an ex-teacher...it was the things that affected the family most that I concentrated on.⁴

Not surprisingly, Cooper opened her speech by thanking her constituents for electing her. She went on to praise the CCF for the work it had done since taking office and then focused on the "housing crisis" and potential solutions.

Housing, which Cooper had addressed extensively in the 1952 election campaign, figured prominently during her career as a MLA. Cooper focused her attention on the housing situation in Regina. While she certainly was concerned with improving housing conditions province-wide, she was most familiar with the situation in her home town. Cooper argued that since private enterprise only built homes for profit, the government needed a program of public housing which would include low-rental, subsidized units. Cooper believed that the "home...is the most sacred institution we have," and described substandard housing as "Canada's number one welfare problem." She argued it was the cause of much ill health, mental illness, juvenile delinquency and broken homes.⁵

In spite of federal government initiatives, little had been done by the early 1950s to alleviate housing problems in Regina and other cities in Saskatchewan. While the CCF government had pledged to do something, it was slow to come up with a broad-based, permanent solution to overcrowded, substandard housing conditions. The province had implemented the Emergency Housing Program (EHP) in 1944 which provided temporary housing for returning war veterans. But this program, which lasted until 1958, did not even aim to meet the

⁴ Marjorie Cooper, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁵ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 16 February 1953.

need for a comprehensive, low rental public housing program. It was clear to the CCF government that what the province needed was beyond its financial capabilities. As such, it began to lobby the federal government for assistance.⁶ All attempts to provide public housing for low-income Regina in the late 1940s and early 1950s failed, largely because of federal government delays and the ideological opposition of city council to any form of subsidized housing.⁷

In 1954 Cooper introduced a housing resolution which urged the federal government to make some changes to the NHA. Her proposals included reducing interest rates, extending the amortization period and allowing provincial governments to establish limited dividend housing corporations to give them the ability to pursue a more vigorous housing program.⁸ Cooper stressed that private industry had not and could not solve the problems of low income housing. As a result, the government would have to intervene more extensively to ensure that all people had decent, proper homes.

Support for public housing in Regina started to grow after mid-decade as a result of several factors. The city appointed a city planner who advocated public housing as part of a large scheme of urban renewal. Regina conducted a survey which illustrated a real need to clean up parts of the city. In addition, the general public was putting more pressure on city council, which was itself becoming increasingly sympathetic to the idea of public housing.⁹

Still, Cooper was very disappointed that municipalities, including Regina, were failing to take advantage of what she viewed as the "very generous provisions" in the NHA.¹⁰ Cooper continued to raise the issue of public housing through the 1950s, but she appears to have recognized that until City Council

⁶ Dawson, pp.5-7.

⁷ Ibid., pp.11-21.

⁸ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 18 March 1954.

⁹ Dawson, pp.35-38.

¹⁰ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 20 February 1959.

came around, there was little the province could accomplish alone. She remained convinced that government intervention was the only solution, arguing that it "is only by socialistic measures that we can solve this problem."¹¹

In April 1959 the CCF announced a new housing policy which included an education program to inform municipalities of what was available to them under the NHA. The provincial government also offered to take over part of the financial burden from the municipalities. This brought the city of Regina on side, and it proceeded to build a subsidized housing project, Regent Court, that same year. The province's decision to pay 20% of the cost of the project, leaving the city to cover only 5%, may also have contributed to Regina's decision to complete a second project, Greer Court, in 1966.¹² While the development of public housing in Regina and across Saskatchewan in general fell far short of what Cooper had called for, her efforts had not been entirely in vain. If nothing else, Cooper's role as a long-time vocal activist for public housing kept the issue from fading into obscurity.

Like housing, education was another traditional area of interest for left-wing reformers. Cooper's interest in education extended to include the post-secondary level, particularly in Regina. She often spoke on behalf of her constituents by pushing the province to increase the post-secondary opportunities available in Regina. In 1957 she cited the reasons why Regina would be an excellent location for the province's proposed new technical school: it had a large population base to draw from and there would be good job opportunities for graduates.¹³ In 1963 the province's dentists approached the University of Saskatchewan Senate and asked it to consider the establishment of a dental college. Cooper urged that Saskatchewan's new dental college be

¹¹ Ibid., 2 March 1961.

¹² Dawson, pp.38-40.

¹³ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 22 February 1957.

located in Regina.¹⁴ While her attempts to expand educational opportunities in Regina in these areas met with failure, Cooper was extremely pleased when the University of Saskatchewan decided to raise Regina College to full degree-granting status in 1959 and to build a new campus in the city.

Regina College had been founded in 1910 by the Methodist Church. Initially only a high school, it had hopes of becoming a junior college and it did so in 1925 when it became affiliated with the University of Saskatchewan. In 1934 the university absorbed Regina College due to its financial difficulties. Although the takeover of Regina College was a setback at the time, "some Reginans refused to give up their desire to have their own university."¹⁵

Just as Cooper was entering the world of politics in the early 1950s an "expansion campaign" led by the new dean of Regina College, W.A. Riddell, was gaining momentum. Riddell, among others, wanted to expand Regina College's course offerings to include the second year of the Arts and Science degree as well as technical and adult education classes. This campaign, combined with pressure from the Regina Trades and Labour Council, City Council, the Chamber of Commerce and a large public meeting held in Regina in 1954, increased pressure on the government to change the University Act. As it stood, the Act forbade the province from interfering with academic planning at the University of Saskatchewan. Amidst these increased tensions, it is not surprising that the issue played a role in the 1956 provincial election.¹⁶

The provincial government was feeling pressure to intervene and establish a full Bachelor of Arts and Science program at Regina College. During the 1956 Throne Speech Debate Cooper stated:

¹⁴ Ibid., 14 March 1963.

¹⁵ Michael Hayden, Seeking a Balance: The University of Saskatchewan 1907-1982, Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1983, p.55.

¹⁶ For a fuller discussion of these developments, see Hayden, pp.232-233.

The Leader of the Opposition criticized the government, in his speech, because we don't have a degree course in Regina College, and recently, one or two very vocal individuals belonging to the Liberal Party – Regina Citizens – have made some criticisms of the Regina MLAs because we haven't said much on this subject.

Speaking for myself, I have purposely refrained from making any public statements on this matter for... a good and logical reason.... I feel the matter of an Arts degree course for Regina College is primarily a matter of discussion between the Senate and the Board of Governors.

The University Act was set up many years ago... for the express purpose of keeping university affairs completely free from politics.... But, Mister Speaker, that I have made no public statements on this matter is no sign that I haven't taken an active interest in it. All of my life I have been tied up in one way or another with education, and naturally I would like to see the courses at Regina College extended as much as economically and physically possible; and I have thought in my own mind sometimes that the Board of Governors might consider trying a second year in the Arts, to see how it works out. But, I have been interested; I have followed the matter, and I have attended every meeting where this matter was discussed. I have studied every brief that has been presented with the greatest of care. I have interviewed the principals and vice-principals of every Regina collegiate to find their opinions and also to get an idea of how many young people they felt would be available if there was an Arts course. I talked to the Dean of Regina College; I went to the University of Saskatchewan and talked to the Dean of Arts and Sciences. I have compiled information from other provinces.... In fact, Mr. Speaker, I have compiled a very sizable file on the matter.

There is one more thing that I would like to say before leaving this subject, and it is that Regina is well represented on the governing bodies of the University. It is represented by men with ability, men with integrity, and men who are seriously...interested in education, and no thinking person would deny this fact.¹⁷

Alex Jupp, a Regina Liberal candidate in the 1956 provincial election, countered: "as an excuse for their [the CCF MLAs for Regina] failure to discharge their duty to the people of Regina they seek to place responsibility on the governing body of the university."¹⁸ Jupp was critical of the CCF

¹⁷ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 16 February 1956.

¹⁸ Leader-Post, 8 May 1956.

government, and especially of Regina's three sitting members, for their refusal to protest the University of Saskatchewan's decision not to expand the program at Regina College. He claimed Cooper, Williams and Fines were "directly responsible" for "a criminal waste" of young Reginans' academic ability.¹⁹ Jupp claimed that, if elected, he would make Regina College a full degree-granting institution. The Commonwealth responded that while the CCF sympathized with Reginans, the University Board of Governors and Senate were independent and should remain free from political influence. Cooper was particularly critical of Jupp for "committing the party to something that is not backed by the party."²⁰ The Liberal leader, A.H. McDonald, responded to such criticisms by arguing that it was the nature of the party to let each candidate express his own views on issues.

Cooper's handling of this issue is a perfect example of the spirit which animated her as a legislator. While she was in favour of raising the status of Regina College, she believed the best way to achieve this goal was through the proper channels. By letting the university study and consider the issue, she believed that the correct decision would be made. Cooper would never consider openly questioning the official CCF position in order to gain support in her home constituency.

In June 1959 the Forward Planning Committee of the University of Saskatchewan issued a report recommending the implementation of a full-three year Arts and Science program in Regina. The committee cited projections of increasing enrollment as the primary reason for its decision. Although the University Board of Governors accepted and implemented the report, pressure for complete autonomy for the new Regina Campus continued until it split from

¹⁹ Commonwealth, 16 May 1956.

²⁰ Leader-Post, 11 June 1956.

the University of Saskatchewan in 1974.²¹

Cooper believed that the post-secondary options which were available to people in Regina needed to be expanded. She reacted by studying the issue and speaking in favour of increasing the course offerings available at Regina College without actually interfering directly with the University of Saskatchewan's autonomy over the matter. Cooper also believed that people in Regina and southern Saskatchewan needed expanded health care facilities and that as an MLA it was her responsibility to advocate on behalf of her constituents and the people of the province.

In 1951 the Health Survey Committee released a report recommending a master plan for hospitals in Saskatchewan. The plan called for four types of hospitals - community hospitals or health centres, district hospitals, regional hospitals and base hospitals - each serving progressively larger and more sophisticated needs.²² The largest and most sophisticated hospital in the plan was the base hospital which would house a wide variety of specialists and draw from a large geographic region. Regina was identified as an excellent location for such a base hospital.

Cooper was the first MLA to introduce the idea of constructing a base hospital in Regina. Cooper cited research conducted by the government which suggested that this was more desirable than simply adding to Regina's existing hospital facilities. She argued that because of the large number of patients from outside of the city who used Regina's hospitals the cost of creating and maintaining a new facility should be borne by the province. Cooper stated:

There is a growing feeling that this situation imposes an unfair tax burden on our citizens of Regina, and I myself feel that a hospital that serves to such a large extent people from across the province

²¹ For a fuller treatment of the creation of a satellite campus of the University of Saskatchewan in Regina and its evolution into the autonomous University of Regina, see Hayden pp.233-288.

²² Mombourquette, p.107.

should be financed by the people as a whole through their government.... [Based on my] extensive research...from the United States and Canada in the field of hospital planning and hospital construction.., the trend is to smaller, more compact hospitals that are more flexible...and lend themselves better to more modern trends in hospital care.²³

Cooper's speech in the legislature gained considerable coverage in the Leader-Post. The paper reported that "Marjorie Cooper's bid" for a third hospital in Regina was backed by hospital spokespeople and fellow CCF MLAs.

The CCF-NDP government did not take any concrete steps towards constructing the South Saskatchewan Base Hospital prior to its defeat in 1964, but the issue did not disappear under the new Liberal government. Under the NDP, the Saskatchewan Department of Public Health commissioned hospital consultants G. Harvey Agnew of Toronto and Gerhard Hartman of Iowa City, Iowa to study Regina's future hospital needs. In September 1965, with the Liberals now in power, the final Agnew-Hartman Report was completed and made public. It was the Thatcher government which was left with the task of implementing the key recommendation of the consultants 1965 report, the construction of a third hospital in Regina.

The Agnew-Hartman Report stated that nearly all of southern Saskatchewan, an area containing approximately 400,000 people, made use of Regina's hospitals. Fully one-third of hospital patients in the Regina General Hospital and the Grey Nuns Hospital came from outside of the city. Both of Regina's hospitals had lengthy waiting lists and were overcrowded. The expansion and renovation of these facilities was deemed too costly and inadequate to meet the demands of modern medicine and the population of southern Saskatchewan. As such, the report recommended the "immediate construction of a third hospital to serve as a specialty hospital and referral centre

²³ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 21 February 1963.

for the city and the southern half of Saskatchewan."²⁴

In the face of mounting evidence that Regina needed a new hospital, Cooper continued to pressure the government to take action on the matter. In her role as health critic, Cooper attacked the Thatcher government for delays in starting construction on the base hospital throughout 1966 and 1967. In the 1967 budget debate Cooper denounced the government for its failure to proceed with this and other projects, stating:

Members of this legislature will recall that, when the Public Accounts were perused this year, we discovered that many projects that were announced in the previous Budget and announced with a good deal of fanfare and were printed in the estimates were not proceeded with....Where is that \$100,000 that was budgeted for the base hospital last year...but not spent?²⁵

Cooper brought up the base hospital as often as possible. As Allan Blakeney later recalled, "As for the then-proposed Regina base hospital...she spoke of it about as often as there are bricks in the Plains Hospital as it finally emerged."²⁶ Cooper's desire to see a third hospital in Regina eventually was fulfilled. The Plains Health Centre, as the South Saskatchewan Base Hospital was named, was originally set to open in November 1973. The opening was pushed back several times due to the dismissal of the executive director, the search for his replacement, a slow down in construction due to a labour strike, delays in road construction due to a shortage of gravel and heavy rains, and delays in obtaining medical equipment. The Plains Health Centre was finally completed in the spring of 1974.

Cooper also took a special interest in the adoption of the Woods Report concerning hospital privileges for doctors. Following the implementation of medicare and the doctors' strike, relations between the government and doctors

²⁴ Leader-Post, 10 September 1965.

²⁵ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 21 February 1967.

²⁶ Commonwealth, 26 September 1984.

remained strained. Many doctors who had worked in community clinics or who were known medicare supporters were unable to gain hospital privileges. They were rejected on the basis of improper completion of forms, inadequate qualifications, lack of sponsorship, or for no reason at all. In addition, the rules governing the granting of hospital privileges were constantly changing.²⁷

To investigate the matter, the province created the Royal Commission on Hospital Privileges under Justice Mervyn Woods in July 1962. The primary reason for the establishment of the Royal Commission was given in the report as follows:

The Minister...states that reports are being received that certain physicians recently registered as members of the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan have encountered difficulties in obtaining or retaining membership on the medical staff of hospitals or in the enjoyment of professional privileges in hospitals, and certain questions have arisen respecting the circumstances under which such difficulties have been encountered.²⁸

The Commission's terms of reference were to investigate the reasons why certain physicians were refused privileges and to inquire if there had been an adequate investigation prior to applications for hospital privileges being rejected. The Commission also questioned whether or not decisions were based on pre-existing by-laws of the College of Physicians and Surgeons. The Commission held public hearings in Estevan, Saskatoon, Regina and Prince Albert. It heard complaints from several community clinic doctors and investigated whether the rejection of their applications was justified.

The Royal Commission's findings were issued in the Inquires into Hospital Staff Appointments Report (commonly known as the Woods Report) in

²⁷ Mombouquette, p.158.

²⁸ Report of the Honourable Mr. Justice Mervyn Woods to the Lieutenant Governor in Council on Inquiries into Hospital Staff Appointments (hereafter cited as Woods Report), Regina: Queen's Printer, 1963, p.1.

December 1963. It found that the problems in the system were a direct result of divisions among doctors on the Medicare issue, though it couched this conclusion in careful language: "this Commission is satisfied that the problem in each case is attributable to the marked division of opinion among Saskatchewan physicians as to how medicine should be practiced."²⁹

In February 1964, during the Throne Speech debate, Cooper focused her attention solely on the Woods Report and its recommendations.

One of the most important of these recommendations is that a permanent appeal board be set up to settle disputes regarding hospital privileges and that the decisions of this board should be final and binding on all parties concerned. He [Justice Woods] suggests that the chairman of the board should be a judge and that the majority of the members should be doctors and that half...of the doctors should be appointed by the College [of Physicians and Surgeons].... The next recommendation deals with sponsorship...inability to find a sponsor should not bar a qualified doctor from obtaining hospital privileges and in such cases alternative methods of supervision should be provided.... The other recommendation is that when a doctor is refused privileges, he should receive written reasons as soon as possible. Again, a study of the evidence reveals that this is a fair, reasonable and necessary procedure³⁰

Cooper concluded her remarks by urging that all of this should be implemented as quickly as possible.

It might have been if the New Democratic Party had not lost the 1964 election to the Liberals. The Lloyd government had intended to establish a "Hospital Appeal Board," but its successor was cool to the idea and in any event the College of Physicians and Surgeons refused to nominate people for the Board. Instead, the new Liberal government made an agreement with the College that "hospital boards and medical advisory committees would not discriminate against doctors applying for privileges."³¹

²⁹ Ibid., p.99.

³⁰ Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 13 February 1964.

³¹ Mombourquette, p.160.

Cooper found this "solution" to be inadequate. In March 1965 she argued that an appeal board was necessary to deal with discrimination against doctors. She stood by the work of Justice Woods, reiterating that he had thoroughly investigated the situation and found that discrimination existed. Without a neutral appeal board, there could be no redress for victims of discrimination. Cooper stated that while it was true that the government could not legislate co-operation, "you can legislate to prevent flagrant discrimination and you can make it stick."³² Cooper brought up the issue again in April by criticizing the government for its failure to act on the Woods Report recommendations.

Liberal cabinet minister D.G. Steuart contended that the government's method of dealing with the problems addressed in the Woods Report was a success. Steuart argued that "We [the government] settled all the disputes," to which Cooper responded, "I'm afraid you can't support that by fact."³³ Whether or not this proved to be the case is a matter for further study.

In addition to calling for broad changes in education and health care Cooper was known to enjoy working directly with individual constituents in need of assistance. During the time that she and Allan Blakeney both represented the Regina and Regina-West constituencies they divided the workload. Blakeney stated: "She did the extensive casework associated with welfare recipients with diligence and sympathy." This work with constituents contributed to her belief in the need for welfare reform. Blakeney continued:

She spoke of the need for welfare reform, reform to help working families with low incomes and several children get money to supplement their income. This idea emerged – 10 years later – as the Family Income Plan.³⁴

The foundation for Cooper's political views was her Christian, social

³² Marjorie Cooper, Debates and Proceedings, 30 March 1965.

³³ Ibid., 27 March 1967.

³⁴ Commonwealth, 26 September 1984.

gospel values. Cooper's daughter said of her parents: "It was the teachings of Christ that made them into socialists." June Mitchell stated that it was the Coopers' Methodist background which inspired Marjorie to express her religion by helping people in need. While Cooper was devoutly religious, she was not all "fire and brimstone" and was willing to question elements of Christianity and the teachings of her church. For example, Cooper refused to recite the Apostles' Creed because she did not believe everything in it. When she was in her seventies, Cooper fell down the church steps one Sunday after the service. When the minister ran down to help her up she said: "I guess I should have said the Apostles' Creed."³⁵

Cooper expressed her religious views directly during various political debates. In 1965 she spoke out against permissive legislation which would allow municipalities to pass by-laws allowing commercialized spectator sports to be played on Sundays. Cooper opposed "the principle contained in this bill" arguing that it would prove to be "the thin edge of the wedge, another step in the direction of a completely open Sunday."³⁶ Cooper argued that maintaining Sunday as a day of rest was an important factor in strengthening spiritual and physical health and family ties.

Other MLAs who shared Cooper's view made similar arguments. They felt that the legislation went against biblical teachings, that it was one step further down the path to a less moral society and that it would force more people to work on Sundays. Those in favour of the legislation contended that it would not lead to completely open Sundays. They pointed out that these sporting activities were already going on and that allowing some commercialization would help to maintain the viability of athletic teams and leagues.³⁷

³⁵ June Mitchell Interview

³⁶ Leader-Post, 4 March 1965.

³⁷ Debates and Proceedings, 30 March 1965.

The motion to allow for an exemption from the Lord's Day Act was agreed to by a vote of 35 to 17 and sent to the Law Amendments Committee. The Act was amended and on 30 March 1965 the Act to Provide for Certain Exceptions to the Lord's Day Act was given Royal Assent. It was now lawful for municipalities to pass bylaws allowing commercialized sports to be played between 1:30 and 6:00 PM on Sundays if agreed to by a majority vote.

Regina was quick to take advantage of the new enabling legislation. On 23 June 1965 the city held a referendum on the issue of commercialized Sunday sports in conjunction with a vote on several other issues. The results demonstrated that the citizens of Regina supported the idea of more open Sundays: 10,019 people voted in favour of the by-law, while 5948 voted against it. City Council wasted little time moving forward. It passed a new by-law on 13 July 1965 that allowed for commercialized sports to be played on Sunday afternoons.

Cooper was concerned about many of the changes that were occurring in Canadian society, particularly changes in the status of religion and religious practices. She worried that the future of mankind was in jeopardy due to a loss of "moral and spiritual vigor." She expressed concern that "we are not sufficiently concerned with intangible things." Her solution: "The human race can survive only if the women of the world put their faith in a moral rebirth and in the great truth 'we are our brother's keeper.'"³⁸

Cooper believed that there was much to be gained from the mixing of religion and politics. In notes written for a speech, Cooper argued that Christ himself had played an active role in the politics of his day. She went on to write that while Christianity did not prescribe an economic program it laid out a blueprint for a standard of values which could be translated into action in many

³⁸ Ibid., 19 October 1957.

areas, including economics and politics. Cooper believed that this blueprint was outlined in the following values: "love thy neighbor, do unto others, help the poor, heal the sick [and] love the lost sheep." She argued that a "standard of values unless translated [into] action to support those values isn't worth much." In another speech, Cooper argued that Christ's teachings are "the only practical and realistic answer to the world's problems."³⁹

This blending of religion and politics was fairly common among CCFers in this period, especially among the women in the CCF. In 1958 the Commonwealth ran a series of articles entitled "Women in Politics." The contributors included Gladys Strum, Thora Wiggins and Marjorie Cooper. Every week a different woman wrote an article on various themes, such as getting women to vote, education, nutrition and international affairs. Many of these articles expressed the idea that "Christianity has come into its own in the socialist movement."⁴⁰

Throughout her twelve years in the Legislature Cooper made a sincere effort to implement the Christian social gospel values which initially had drawn her into politics. Much of her career was spent trying to meet the basic needs of those least able to care for themselves. There is no doubt that Cooper was motivated to participate in politics by a genuine desire to care for the spiritual, intellectual and physical needs of the citizens of Saskatchewan. As such, while never holding a cabinet post, Cooper was an effective MLA and her efforts contributed to advances in the fields of penal reform, housing, education and health care. At times, these efforts were very progressive. Cooper expressed innovative opinions in the fields of mental health and penal reform. However on the question of liberalizing access to alcohol and open Sundays, Cooper was

³⁹ Marjorie Cooper, speech notes, nd, Cooper Papers.

⁴⁰ Commonwealth, 19 March 1958.

less "progressive." Her desire to improve the lives of the disadvantaged outweighed concerns for individual freedom and personal choice.

It is difficult to identify the precise impact of the career of an individual MLA. In spite of this, it is fair to say that Cooper was an able and effective MLA. She was willing to deal with the individual concerns of constituents while keeping an eye on and playing a role in larger matters. She pushed the issues which she felt were important and those she believed important to her constituents. Cooper's work in housing, penal reform, health care and education undoubtedly contributed to changes in provincial programs. In fields such as liquor licensing and commercialized Sunday sports Cooper effected less change, or more accurately she was unable to prevent change. But even in these instances she at least provided a well thought out, reasonable voice for those who shared her view.

Conclusion:

“Building the Future in a Steady but Measured Pace”

There was a great deal of continuity in Marjorie Cooper's volunteer and political careers. Cooper's interest in health, housing, education and social welfare grew during her time as a teacher, a wife and mother, and a community volunteer. She brought the knowledge she had gained through these experiences to her campaign in 1952 and maintained these interests throughout her time in public office and on into her retirement.

Cooper's decision to retire from politics was based on a number of factors. By 1967 Cooper had been an MLA for fifteen years, which she felt was long enough. She wanted time to pursue other interests, including traveling with her second husband. Her years in government, particularly those in Opposition, appear to have drained some of Cooper's enthusiasm and her confidence in her ability to bring about change through politics. In an interview in 1965 she stated:

As the years pass, you begin to recognize certain limitations and that many things must take as long as they do before they become effective laws.... It really isn't long before the stars leave your eyes and you realize you can't move mountains by yourself, no matter how good the cause is.¹

Although Cooper maintained some ties to the NDP, traveling with her husband was her main pursuit. Cooper and Wilf Hunt traveled throughout Europe, Mexico, South America and Africa. Cooper kept travel diaries which document her continuing concern for social justice. Her travel journals contain her observations on the living and working conditions of women and children, standards of health care, education and politics - the same issues which had dominated her political career. In Nairobi, Cooper observed that life was extremely difficult, particularly for

¹ Leader-Post, 4 February 1965.

women. She wrote: "women bent up double with loads of wood on their back, used as beasts of burden, donkeys. Men carry nothing if women around." In South Africa she found the attitudes of whites and the "Whites Only" signs "disgusting" and "extremely disturbing." She wrote that a taxi driver "tried to explain and justify apartheid - didn't convince me and Wilf was afraid I would get arrested for my remarks."²

In addition to her traveling and gardening, Cooper made time for politics throughout her retirement. In the winter months, while she was away, she rented her house to out-of-town NDP MLAs. Undoubtedly this would have kept her in tune with happenings in the caucus. Cooper's son-in-law Grant Mitchell, a long time civil servant and friend of Allan Blakeney, was given the task of rebuilding the civil service for the newly elected NDP government in the early 1970s. More importantly, Cooper herself remained directly active in the party until at least 1982 when she helped with the election campaign. In fact she was more active in the NDP after her retirement than she had been in the CCF prior to her nomination. As Blakeney later commented: "She offered advice and encouragement during our term in government from 1971 to 1982."³

One project which occupied Cooper during her final years as an MLA and into retirement was her work on the Provincial Women's Committee (PWC). Following its defeat in 1964 the provincial NDP began an internal reassessment which included an examination of ways in which the party could become more egalitarian. This work was spearheaded by the PWC which had been formed in 1965. Cooper was on the Committee along with other prominent CCF/NDP women including Anne Blakeney, Pemrose Whelan and Thora Wiggins. According to Georgina Taylor, the PWC was encouraged by the modern women's movement to educate the CCF about the role of women in society and in politics.

² Marjorie Cooper, *Travel Diaries*, Cooper Papers.

³ Commonwealth, 26 September 1984.

Through this committee the NDP began to deliberately train more women to take an active and equal role in the NDP.⁴

Cooper and other members of the Committee traveled the province organizing women's clubs into stronger networks. Pemrose Whelan recalled that the Committee's goal had been to help develop women's abilities and to strengthen the party "in an orderly way, a quiet way." While this sounds conservative, Whelan went on to state that "we were doing things that had never been done before."⁵ These women, along with others in the party acknowledged that too few women were following in the footsteps of the first CCF women who had been elected to the legislature.

The PWC began to fade in 1968. While it did not disappear entirely, Anne Blakeney stated that the Committee had been formed because of a feeling that there was something lacking. By the late 1960s the women's liberation movement was picking up momentum and younger women were working outside of the home in greater numbers. Women were gaining access to politics, education and the workforce in other ways. According to Anne Blakeney, the Committee simply started to feel redundant.⁶

Cooper herself questioned the usefulness of separate women's groups within political parties. She stated: "They'll simply get a nice pat on the back and nothing will get done."⁷ Undoubtedly influenced by her work for the Provincial Women's Committee and other experiences with the CCF, Cooper argued that women should seek direct access to power.

With her colleagues from the Provincial Women's Committee, Cooper presented a brief to the Royal Commission on the Status of Women when it visited

⁴ Taylor, "The Women...Shall Help Lead the Way: Saskatchewan CCF-NDP Women Candidates in Provincial and Federal Elections, 1934-1966," p. 153.

⁵ Pemrose Whelan, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁶ Anne Blakeney, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

⁷ Leader-Post, 24 June 1973.

Regina. The Royal Commission was created in 1967 and following lengthy hearings eventually submitted a comprehensive report in 1970. The Committee spent three days in Regina hearing from various women's organizations and individual women. Topics addressed included pay equity, maternity leave, day-care and women's self-image. For her part Cooper discussed the role of women in politics. She reiterated her long-held belief about gender discrimination:

It is not at the polls you run into discrimination, it's at the nominating conventions. If you can get yourself nominated you stand an equal chance with the men. If there's a hopeless constituency, the men will be quite willing to let you have it.⁸

Cooper's work with the NDP, her travels and her family kept her active until near the end of her life. In April 1984 Marjorie Cooper was hospitalized in the Pasqua Hospital after being diagnosed with cancer. In spite of the radiation treatments which left her burned, her spirit remained strong.⁹ On 12 September of that same year, Cooper passed away in the hospital. Her funeral was held at Knox-Metropolitan United Church and her long-time friend and colleague Allan Blakeney gave the eulogy. He praised Cooper for, among other things, being "a voice of conscience without conveying the slightest suggestion of being holier-than-thou."¹⁰

Both the Commonwealth and the Regina Leader-Post noted the passing of this well-known community leader. The Leader-Post's death announcement commented that the Regina "MLA spent much of her career establishing a place for women in the male dominated world of politics."¹¹ An editorial later in the week repeated this theme: "As today's women display an increasing desire to make their presence felt in something more than just a supporting political role, Marjorie

⁸ Ibid., 30 April 1968.

⁹ Mitchell, "Marjorie," Mitchell Papers.

¹⁰ Commonwealth, 26 September 1984.

¹¹ Leader-Post, 14 September 1984.

Cooper Hunt will provide a lasting inspiration."¹²

The challenges faced in examining and assessing the public life of Marjorie Cooper are similar to those found in most other biographies. In the absence of diaries and letters inferences must be made concerning how Cooper felt and why she acted the way she did. It is also difficult to judge to what extent the subject of the biography is typical or atypical. Perhaps the greatest challenge is found in appraising the impact of an individual on history. This is an especially difficult task when the subject, like Marjorie Cooper, is a secondary historical figure.

In spite of these challenges, this study of Cooper's public life actually reveals a good deal of information about various aspects of Canadian history. It contributes to our knowledge about the experience of middle class women in volunteer organizations in the 1930s and 1940s. It draws attention to the growing presence of women in the public sphere in the 1950s, as reflected in the need for women to sit on government boards. The thesis also sheds further light on the experience of women in the CCF and Saskatchewan politics in the 1950s and 1960s. And finally, this study of Marjorie Cooper demonstrates several of the ways in which Canadian women expressed their feminist goals from the 1930s through to the 1960s.

Cooper began to make her presence felt in her community as a volunteer in the 1930s and 1940s. During her time as an active member of the RCW, the YWCA and other organizations Cooper helped to improve the quality of life for many citizens of Regina. For example, projects such as the YWCA rooms registry helped people in Regina to deal with the housing shortage. Work in these organizations gave Cooper and many other Canadian women the opportunity to improve their community as well as the chance to gain various abilities that allowed them to function effectively in the public sphere.

¹² Ibid., 15 September 1984.

Cooper contributed to the ground-breaking work of implementing the CCF's labour policy through her presence on the first provincial Labour Relations Board. The provincial government's decision to ensure that women were represented on its boards, including the Labour Relations Board and the Public Service Commission, gave some women greater access to traditionally male spheres of power. Cooper's work with volunteer organizations and government boards illustrated that women could play an effective and competent role in the public sphere without losing their ability to be "lady-like." As such, women's participation in these fields became more acceptable to the general public. This participation also opened up more possibilities for women by creating the public profile and the skills necessary to pursue a career in politics.

The impact of Marjorie Cooper's career on the role of women in Saskatchewan politics is impossible to quantify, but her electoral success appears to have had some effect in Saskatchewan. Due to the success and length of her political career Cooper was able to demonstrate that voters, in Regina at least, were willing to cast their ballots for a female candidate. She demonstrated that women could be active, effective and well-respected politicians. In this role Cooper was certainly more successful than the two women who came before her in the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly.

In 1982 the Leader-Post was correct in commenting that "if nothing else, she [Cooper] led the way for the new generation of female politicians."¹³ In 1952 Cooper was the only female candidate in the province, in the 1956 election she was one of four. Of the other candidates, Mary Batten, a Liberal, was elected to represent Humboldt in the provincial legislature. By the 1960 election there were 7 female candidates representing 5 political parties. In this election Cooper and Batten were re-elected and joined by a third female MLA, Gladys Strum. Yet

¹³ Ibid., 12 June 1982.

surprisingly it appears that the NDP did not take any greater advantage of this than its rivals. After Cooper's retirement it would be 1986 before another NDP woman would hold a seat in the legislature. That year saw the election of three NDP women, Pat Atkinson, Louise Simard and Anne Smart, and the re-election of two Progressive-Conservative women. The change in the 1991 election was even more significant with the election of eleven NDP women and one Liberal woman (see Appendix A, Tables Eight and Nine).

Not only have more women been elected to the Saskatchewan Legislature in the 1980s and 1990s than ever before, they have also begun to occupy seats around the cabinet table. It is worth noting that it was not the New Democrats who were the first to appoint a woman to the cabinet, but the Progressive-Conservatives. When Grant Devine became Premier in 1982 he chose two women, Joan Duncan and Patricia Smith, to serve as cabinet ministers.¹⁴

Marjorie Cooper would have been an ideal candidate to serve as Saskatchewan's first female cabinet minister. She was an intelligent, experienced and committed member of a "progressive" government. The CCF government and the people of Saskatchewan likely would have been accepting of Cooper as a cabinet minister, particularly in a field such as education. Yet it is not that extraordinary that she never sat at the cabinet table. While attitudes about the role of women were changing throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, these were socially conservative times in Saskatchewan. People in Saskatchewan, specifically those in the CCF, saw a limited place for women in the public sphere. They appear to have been most accepting of those women who did not stray too far from the socially favourable image of wife and mother - acceptable feminists like Cooper. This contributed to Cooper's success, and may also have contributed to her remaining a backbench MLA by either her own decision or that of Premiers

¹⁴ James M. Pitsula and Ken Rasmussen, Privatizing a Province: The New Right in Saskatchewan, Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990, pp.40-41.

Douglas and Lloyd.

Cooper's treatment by the press further illustrated the public perceptions of women in politics. Cooper's gender appears to have granted her special treatment, temporarily at least. While in certain respects the newspapers (and indeed members of the opposition too) acted with more benevolence towards Cooper than towards her male colleagues, she was often patronized. The press enjoyed portraying Cooper as a fetching novelty, particularly during her first term as an MLA. Although this type of portrayal would have enraged some women, Cooper took it in stride. While she would have preferred to be treated like just another MLA, perhaps she was aware of the benefits of her gender. Her status as "Saskatchewan's only woman MLA" likely protected her from some harsh criticism. It is important to note that once the novelty of having a woman in the house waned, Cooper's special treatment also diminished.

It is not surprising that Cooper did not aggressively pursue a cabinet post. She was always conscious of the need to balance her career with her family. All of her important career decisions were made based in part on the effect they would have on her family life. This is not meant to imply that she did not value her career or that she lacked ambition. The events following the death of her first husband attest to that. After his sudden heart attack Cooper did not withdraw from the election. She took the time that was necessary to deal with this difficult event in her life, then she carried on. This event truly demonstrated to the people of Saskatchewan that a respectable woman could manage to care for the needs of her family and maintain a successful career.

Cooper's impact on other aspects of Saskatchewan's history is more difficult to determine. It is always difficult to assess the exact role and impact of a backbench MLA. Cooper's case is certainly no exception. There are no minutes from caucus or committee meetings. There are no records of meetings or

correspondence with constituents or fellow MLAs. As a result, it is necessary to determine her impact through less direct methods. Newspaper accounts and oral histories can be used to discern what contributions Marjorie Cooper made to Saskatchewan's history. When asked by a reporter what she felt she had accomplished as an MLA, Cooper responded, "it is hard to say what you achieve. You work towards some things and you get your way part of the time."¹⁵

In spite of the difficulties associated with the study of a secondary political figure, there is value in it. Cooper's career can shed light on the role of women as candidates and politicians. She demonstrated that women could perform effectively as candidates. More importantly, she proved that, contrary to popular opinion within the CCF, women candidates could be acceptable to the voting public, particularly in multi-member constituencies. Electoral results show a negligible difference between support for Cooper and for her male colleagues in all four of her election campaigns (see Appendix A, Tables Four, Six, Seven and Eight).

An examination of Cooper's career can also expose the role played by backbenchers in the Douglas and Lloyd governments. As an MLA Cooper believed she contributed to decisions made by the caucus. She represented her constituents with enthusiasm and commitment. She played a part in raising awareness of various social issues, including the challenges confronting deserted wives and their children, the lack of adequate housing for low-income families, inadequacies in the treatment of the mentally ill and problems in the penal system. Cooper played a role in the creation and implementation of Medicare. She was a vocal advocate for other improvements in the health care system, particularly in the treatment of the mentally ill and the construction of the Plains Hospital in Regina. Cooper provided a voice for those who shared her concern about open

¹⁵ Leader-Post, 12 June 1982.

Sundays and liberalized liquor legislation.

Cooper's work as a community activist and an MLA provides a clear example of the ways in which women promoted change between the two waves of feminism. Her life and career demonstrate that feminism did not die in the 1920s only to return in the 1960s. Feminism survived during these intervening decades, but not as a unified, coherent movement. Cooper herself wrote: "women's organizations have political power but they need to talk with one voice."¹⁶

In the absence of a unifying cause, such as suffrage, feminism took new forms. In Cooper's case, her feminist goals were expressed through her social activism and her socialism. Alison Prentice argues that the post-1919 women's groups were rooted in the first women's movement and "contained the seeds of significant reform."¹⁷ Cooper as an individual had roots in first wave feminism and her life and work formed a bridge to the feminist movement of the 1960s. While it is easy to see her work in the community as simply "good works," for her it led directly to politics.

While Cooper was a respectable feminist, this was a reflection of the times. Had she been part of her mother's generation she would likely have spoken in favour of female enfranchisement and been called a radical. Had she belonged to her daughters' generation she would likely have questioned the notion that only women were capable of staying at home and raising children and sexist portrayals of women in the media. Cooper, like many other women of her generation, particularly those in the CCF, believed in "building the future in a steady but measured pace."¹⁸

In her study of the political career of Canada's first female senator, Franca Iacovetta makes a meaningful statement that could be applied to all "respectable

¹⁶ Marjorie Cooper, speech notes, nd, Cooper Papers.

¹⁷ Prentice et al, pp.203 and 411.

¹⁸ Pemrose Whelan, Oral History Tapes, SAB.

feminists," including Marjorie Cooper.

Wilson presented the Canadian public with a model of respectable feminism. Although that image would often be unfairly used against more radical women, it also played an important role in making feminism and the presence of women in public positions acceptable to Canadian women and men.¹⁹

Marjorie Cooper's ability to be what Canadian society in the 1950s and 1960s considered to be a good wife and mother while pursuing a career was vital to her success. Cooper did not defy the values of her society. She was able to reconcile gracefully the demands of family life with the challenges of a career in public life between the two waves of feminism in Canada.

¹⁹ Franca Iacovetta, "A Respectable Feminist: The Political Career of Senator Cairine Wilson, 1921-1962," in Beyond the Vote: Canadian Women and Politics, Linda Kealy and Joan Sangster eds., Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1989, pp.63-85.

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Appendix A:

Saskatchewan Provincial Election Results and Female Representation in the Legislature

**Table One : Women Candidates in Saskatchewan Provincial Elections,
1917-1964**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Constituency</u>	<u>Result</u>
1917	Zoa Haight	Non-Partisan League	Thunder Creek	Defeated
1919 (By-election)	Sarah Ramsland	Liberal	Pelly	Elected
1921	Sarah Ramsland	Liberal	Pelly	Re-elected
1925	Sarah Ramsland	Liberal	Pelly	Defeated
1934	Gladys Salsbury	Farmer-Labour	Saskatoon	Defeated
1938	Gladys Strum Gertrude Telford	CCF CCF	Cannington Pelly	Defeated Defeated
1944	Gladys Strum Beatrice Trew	CCF CCF	Cannington Maple Creek	Defeated Elected
1948	Beatrice Trew Isabel Paxman	CCF Social Credit	Maple Creek Weyburn	Defeated Defeated
1952	Marjorie Cooper	CCF	Regina	Elected
1956	Mary Batten Lillie Bowman	Liberal Progressive- Conservative	Saskatoon Saskatoon	Elected Defeated
	Marjorie Cooper Kay Moffat	CCF Liberal	Regina Moose Jaw	Re-elected Defeated
1960	Mavis Adams Mary Batten Marjorie Cooper Norah Jarbeau Lauren Kolbinson	Liberal Liberal CCF Communist Progressive- Conservative	Regina Humboldt Regina Willow Bunch Watrous	Defeated Re-elected Re-elected Defeated Defeated
	Olive Oliphant Gladys Strum	Social Credit CCF	Elrose Saskatoon	Defeated Elected
1964	Jean Benson	Progressive- Conservative	Weyburn	Defeated
	Marjorie Cooper Sally Merchant Elizabeth Paulson Betty Sear Gladys Strum Alice Turner	CCF Liberal Liberal Liberal CCF Progressive- Conservative	Regina West Saskatoon Wadena Regina West Saskatoon Touchwood	Re-elected Elected Defeated Defeated Defeated Defeated

(Source: Provincial Elections in Saskatchewan, 1905-1983, Chief Electoral Office, Province of Saskatchewan, Regina, 1983.)

Table Two: Results of Saskatchewan Provincial Elections, 1948-1964

<u>Year</u>	<u>Premier</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>CCF Members</u>	<u>Liberal Members</u>	<u>Other</u>
1948	T.C. Douglas	CCF	31	19	1 Liberal- Conservative 1 Independen
1952	T.C. Douglas	CCF	42	11	0
1956	T.C. Douglas	CCF	36	14	3 Social Credi
1960	T.C. Douglas/ W.S. Lloyd	CCF	37	18	0
1964	W.R.Thatcher	Liberal	26	32	0

(Source: John Archer, Saskatchewan: A History, Saskatoon: Western Producer Prairie Books, 1980, pp. 356-7.)

Table Three: Election Results by Party - City of Regina, 1948-1960 and Regina West, 1964

<u>Year</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Number of Candidates</u>	<u>% of vote</u>
1948 (2)	CCF	2**	53.7
	Progressive-Conservative	1	21.9
	Liberal	1	21.7
	Social Credit	2	2.7
1952 (3)	CCF	3***	58.5
	Liberal	3	36.7
	Social Credit	3	3.1
	Independent	1	1.2
	Labour-Progressive	1	0.5
1956 (3)	CCF	3***	50.1
	Liberal	3	26.2
	Social Credit	3	23.4
	Labour-Progressive	1	0.3
1960 (4)	CCF	4****	42.7
	Liberal	4	30.0
	Social Credit	4	13.8
	Progressive-Conservative	4	12.7
	Independent	2	0.6
	Communist	1	0.2
1964 (2)	CCF	2**	47.6
	Liberal	2	40.2
	Progressive-Conservative	1	12.2

*Indicates elected candidates.

(Source: Chief Electoral Office, Provincial Elections in Saskatchewan 1905-1979, 1979.)

Table Four: 1952 Election Results by Candidate - Regina Constituency

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Number of Votes</u>	<u>% of Vote</u>
C. C. Williams	CCF	25,774	20.0
Clarence Fines	CCF	25,018	19.4
Marjorie Cooper	CCF	24,706	19.2
Garnet Menzies	Liberal	16,232	12.6
Harry Walker	Liberal	15,833	12.3
John Knowles	Liberal	15,328	11.9
George Jupp	Independent	1,542	1.2
William Gamelin	Social Credit	1,446	1.1
Nick Iannone	Social Credit	1,329	1.0
Anthony Kovatch	Social Credit	1,259	1.0
William Beeching	Labour-Progressive	579	0.5

(Source: Chief Electoral Office, Provincial Elections in Saskatchewan 1905-1979, 1979.)

Table Five: 1952 Election Results by Candidate - Regina Constituency
Sample Polls

a. Liberal Majority

	Lakeview School	3004 Albert St	2859 Retallack St.	Davin School
Charles C. Williams	121	45	70	79
Clarence M. Fines	107	43	61	75
Marjorie Cooper	105	41	58	73
Garnet M. Menzies	142	146	135	158
Harry G.R. Walker	138	143	141	157
John C. Knowles	124	131	136	148
George A. Jupp	20	12	15	15
William C. Gamelin	6	1	3	8
Nick Iannone	4	1	2	3
Anthony E. Kovatch	5	1	1	4
William C. Beeching	2	0	2	0

b. CCF Majority

	4738 Dewdney Ave.	401 Cornwall St.	Serbian Hall (928 11th. Ave)	Labour Temple (1915 Osler St.)
Charles C. Williams	163	158	183	135
Clarence M. Fines	153	158	173	126
Marjorie Cooper	149	158	177	127
Garnet M. Menzies	95	35	77	91
Harry G.R. Walker	83	35	75	90
John C. Knowles	82	35	81	88
George A. Jupp	15	0	5	1
William C. Gamelin	2	0	9	11
Nick Iannone	3	0	9	12
Anthony E. Kovatch	2	0	13	13
William C. Beeching	6	0	7	5

(Source: Chief Electoral Office, Vote Summary by Polling Division, 1952.)

Table Six: 1956 Election Results by Candidate - Regina Constituency

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Number of Votes</u>	<u>%</u>
C.C. Williams	CCF	23,771	17.6
Marjorie Cooper	CCF	22,389	16.5
Clarence Fines	CCF	21,658	16.0
Leslie Sherman	Liberal	11,984	8.9
George Jupp	Liberal	11,905	8.8
John Riffel	Liberal	11,612	8.6
Frederick Mullin	Social Credit	10,629	7.9
Leslie Hammond	Social Credit	10,588	7.8
Henry Hunt	Social Credit	10,455	7.7
Frederick Clark	Labour-Progressive	419	0.3

(Source: Chief Electoral Office, Provincial Elections in Saskatchewan 1905-1979, 1979.)

Table Seven: 1960 Election Results by Candidate - Regina Constituency

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Number of Votes</u>	<u>% of Vote</u>
C.C. Williams	CCF	23,425	11.1
Allan Blakeney	CCF	22,382	10.6
Marjorie Cooper	CCF	22,205	10.6
Edward Whelan	CCF	21,806	10.4
Frederick Johnson	Liberal	16,662	7.9
Leslie Sherman	Liberal	16,316	7.8
James Collins	Liberal	15,578	7.4
Mavis Adams	Liberal	14,589	6.9
John Leishman	Progressive-Conservative	7,944	3.8
Henry Hunt	Social Credit	7,652	3.6
Bert Iannone	Social Credit	7,206	3.4
Murdoch MacPherson	Progressive-Conservative.	7,194	3.4
G. Lindsay Bower	Social Credit	7,103	3.4
William Gamlin	Social Credit	7,058	3.4
Donald Bowman	Progressive-Conservative	6,358	3.0
Walter Schmidt	Progressive-Conservative	5,175	2.5
Leslie Hibbs	Independent	698	0.3
Herbert Cooper	Independent	624	0.3
William Beeching	Communist	345	0.2

(Source: Chief Electoral Office, Provincial Elections in Saskatchewan 1905-1979, 1979.)

Table Eight: 1964 Election Results by Candidate -- Regina West Constituency

<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>	<u>Number of Votes</u>	<u>% of Vote</u>
Allan Blakeney	CCF	9,076	24.7
Marjorie Coope	CCF	8,413	22.9
Alex Cochrane	Liberal	7,770	21.2
Betty Sear	Liberal	6,981	19.0
Don MacPherson	Progressive-Conservative	4,495	12.2

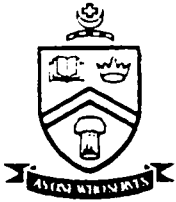
(Source: Chief Electoral Office, Provincial Elections in Saskatchewan 1905-1979, 1979.)

Table Nine: Women in the Saskatchewan Legislature, 1905-1995

<u>Year</u>	<u>Candidate</u>	<u>Party</u>
1919	Sarah Ramsland	Liberal
1925	Sarah Ramsland	Liberal
1944	Beatrice Trew	CCF
1952	Marjorie Cooper	CCF
1956	Mary Batten	Liberal
	Marjorie Cooper	CCF
1960	Mary Batten	Liberal
	Marjorie Cooper	CCF
	Gladys Strum	CCF
1964	Marjorie Cooper	CCF
	Sally Merchant	Liberal
1975	Linda Clifford	Liberal
	Evelyn Edwards	Liberal
1978	Joan Duncan	Progressive Conservative
1982	Evelyn Bacon	Progressive Conservative
	Gay Caswell	Progressive Conservative
	Joan Duncan	Progressive Conservative
	Patricia Smith	Progressive Conservative
	Jo-Ann Zazelenchuk	Progressive Conservative
1986	Pat Atkinson	NDP
	Joan Duncan	Progressive Conservative
	Louise Simard	NDP
	Anne Smart	NDP
	Patricia Smith	Progressive Conservative
1991	Pat Atkinson	NDP
	Judy Bradley	NDP
	Carol Carson	NDP
	Joanne Crofford	NDP
	Doreen Hamilton	NDP
	Lynda Haverstock	Liberal
	Pat Lorje	NDP
	Janice MacKinnon	NDP
	Susanne Murray	NDP
	Louise Simard	NDP
	Violet Stranger	NDP
	Carol Teichrob	NDP
1994-5	Anita Bergman	Liberal
1995	Pat Atkinson	NDP
	Judy Bradley	NDP
	Joanne Crofford	NDP
	June Draude	Liberal
	Lynda Hastock	Independent
	Arlene Jule	Liberal
	Pat Lorje	NDP
	Janice MacKinnon	NDP
	Suzanne Murray	NDP
	Sharon Murrell	NDP
	Violet Stranger	NDP
	Carol Teichrob	NDP

(Source: Saskatchewan Legislative and Executive Directory, 1905-1996, Saskatchewan Legislative Library.)

Appendix B:
Human Subject Ethics Review Committee Approval



UNIVERSITY OF REGINA

OFFICE OF ASSOCIATE VICE-PRESIDENT AND DEAN
FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

DATE March 19, 1997

TO C. Marie Fenwick
Department of History

FROM: G.W. Maslany, Chair
Research Ethics Review Committee

Re: **A Political Biography of Marjorie Cooper-Hunt**

Please be advised that the committee has considered this proposal and has agreed that it is:

1. Acceptable as submitted.
(Note: Only those applications designated in this way have ethical approval for the research on which they are based to proceed.)

2. Acceptable subject to the following changes and precautions (see attached):
Note: These changes must be resubmitted to the Committee and deemed acceptable by it prior to the initiation of the research. Once the changes are regarded as acceptable a new approval form will be sent out indicating it is acceptable as submitted.
Please address the concerns raised by the reviewer(s) by means of a supplementary memo.

3. Unacceptable to the Committee as submitted. Please contact the Chair for advise on whether or how the project proposal might be revised to become acceptable (ext. 4161/5186.)

/mm

cc: J.W. Brennan, supervisor

(Ethics2.doc)