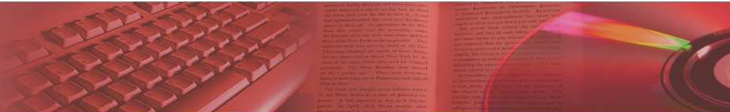

James M. Pitsula. *For All We Have and Are: Regina and the Experience of the Great War.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008. Illustrations. 364 pp. $26.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-88755-708-8; $50.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88755-185-7.

Reviewed by Jody Perrun (Royal Military College)
Published on H-Canada (November, 2009)
Commissioned by Stephanie Bangarth

The Great War in Canada's Prairie West

The Great War, ultimately, was as divisive an experience for Canadians as it was a formative one for the nation. How Canadians on the home front responded to the challenges of wartime is a subject that has lately been considered by a small but growing list of historians focusing on particular cities. James M. Pitsula's study of Regina brings some welcome attention to a western city, and indeed an entire region, that has hitherto received relatively little. Pitsula's Regina emerges as a city with residents who were by turns united by the war effort and pitted against each other by their inherent differences. A key question for a book like this one concerns the extent to which the city under study is either unique or broadly representative. Pitsula writes that "the politics of national identity, the rural myth, and social gospel progressivism lent a distinctive flavour to Regina's Great War" (p. 280). Under these broad terms, the author examines debates over the assimilation of "foreigners" in a province that defined itself as "British" although Anglo-Canadians were already in the minority; the resentment of farmers toward the "Big Interests" from eastern Canada that supposedly steered national politics and the national economy in directions beneficial to themselves but prejudicial to western interests; and the social reform movements that prompted, among other ideas, crusades for female suffrage and the prohibition of alcohol. But just how distinctive was the flavor of Regina's prairie gumbo?

Relations between social groups is a key theme of Pitsula's account. "The outbreak of war brought Regina together, crossing barriers of class and gender," he argues. "Less easily overcome were the ethnic differences" (p. 39). Pitsula clearly establishes the dominant position of Anglo-Saxon Protestants in Regina society, although it was a group that felt itself to be "under siege in wartime Saskatchewan ... threatened by the flood of 'foreign' immigrants into the province" (p. 75). The war brought stricter naturalization regulations and prompted the internment of enemy aliens, with adverse effects for many of Saskatchewan's Ukrainians and Germans. This is not a new story, but the author reveals how arbitrary can be the exercise of state power: "most of the interned Ukrainians were unskilled labourers who had been laid off in the 1913 recession. They were imprisoned because they were destitute, not because they were disloyal" (p. 41).

Ethnic tensions came to a head in the debates over education rights for religious and linguistic minorities. Since non-British ethnic groups made up more than half the province's population, schools became a key battleground where immigrants were to be taught English and the blessings of British democracy and citizenship. Assimilation could not be taken for granted when attendance in Saskatchewan schools was so low (in 1916, only 78 percent of school-age children registered, and in rural areas absenteeism hovered around 50 percent) and few immigrants got more than a third grade education. The schools question was, therefore, a struggle with significant political implications and, inciden-

tally, one that cost Premier Walter Scott his job in 1916 after he advocated mandatory tax support for separate schools. In December 1918, Scott's successor, William Martin, abolished the use of languages other than English in Saskatchewan schools–French was still permitted although it was greatly restricted. It was strong evidence of the power of the Anglo-Canadian establishment that this step was taken by a Liberal government with a history of supporting minority education rights, dependent as it was on "the 'foreign' vote" (p. 113).

The war offered other opportunities for the Anglo-Protestant elite to shape Regina according to its will. Church authority was a force in wartime Regina, influencing issues as diverse as military recruiting, minority education rights, and social reform. The author devotes special attention to the "intertwined and mutually supportive prohibition and female suffrage movements," which "enabled activist middle-class Anglo-Protestants to impose their values on the rest of the population" because the war allowed them to assume a position of "moral authority" that had not carried such weight before 1914 (p. 69).

On these issues–ethnic strife, education, the social reform movement, and their relation to provincial politics–Pitsula makes a sound contribution to the home front literature. The book has other strengths, especially the author's ability to condense into a few pages complex issues, like the war's outbreak, the importance of the school as an agent to "Canadianize" the "foreigner," the significance of the Social Gospel, or the crucial role of agriculture in Saskatchewan's economy. There are some nuggets of real insight; commenting on the moral reform mentality, he observes that "sacrifice was the highest ideal, especially when other people had to do the sacrificing" (p. 231).

Still, Pitsula's account is open to question in a number of areas. The author's treatment of the "rural myth" and the changing role of voluntarism for military and social service particularly stand out. Pitsula articulates the concept of a "rural myth" but does not fully explain its tenets or adequately test its validity. He adopts Richard Hofstadter's definition of "myth" as a "dominant cultural narrative ... that so effectively embodies men's values that it profoundly influences their way of perceiving reality and hence their behavior" (p. 7). Since the term "myth" has been variously interpreted by other scholars, some degree of theoretical analysis would be welcome as a way to help justify Pitsula's conceptualization of Saskatchewan in this period.

A central element of the rural myth was the opposition of farmers to the "Big Interests," a blanket term that Pitsula applies to eastern Canadian politicians, bankers, and businessmen. The adversarial relationship originally resulted from reaction to national tariffs that protected eastern manufacturers at the expense of western farmers, but it deteriorated in the wake of wartime controversies over profiteering and conscription. Perhaps, as Pitsula argues, "the psychology of sacrifice lent fervour to the condemnation of the Big Interests, who placed private gain ahead of the common good." But just who were these "bloated capitalists"? Who, exactly, interpreted the war "as the struggle of the 'people' against the 'interests,' democracy versus the privileged elite" (p. 217)? Many probably did, but Pitsula offers no explanation, no footnote, and no real evidence for the claim. He apparently bases this generalization on a couple of opinions expressed at a November 1916 Social Service Congress held in Regina, but we never know how widely representative such views were.

Pitsula's analysis of wartime voluntarism is equally problematic. A familiar theme in Canadian home front histories is the gradual encroachment of government into areas previously left to the private sector as the state struggled to meet the demands of its war effort. Pitsula links government intrusion into the realms of military enlistment and voluntary war services in a chapter entitled "The End of Voluntarism." He argues that voluntary support for war charities, like the Canadian Patriotic Fund (CPF), was eroded as the war dragged on. Saskatchewan was one of a number of provinces and municipalities that voted for tax contributions to the CPF, and Pitsula suggests that taxation made people "less willing to give" after 1916 (p. 188). Perhaps people simply had less to give with higher taxes and the skyrocketing cost of living. Either way, the treatment of the CPF and war charities in general is too superficial to lead to firm conclusions.

A minor, but revealing, example is Pitsula's discussion of the role of CPF visitors–women volunteers who investigated the circumstances of families applying for CPF allowances to determine their need and worthiness of aid. Pitsula tells us that these women "saw themselves as friendly visitors, not mean-spirited inquisitors" (p. 189). There is no hint of the conclusions reached by other historians that the visitors used their authority to impose middle-class norms of morality. For example, Nancy Christie argues in *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (2000) that visitors dispensed advice on moral behavior, finances, the law,

and proper mothering techniques; and Desmond Morton's *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War* (2004) argues that because the CPF functioned as a private charity, its officers were able to impose certain standards of behavior. As Morton explains, a government agency could not discriminate against those whose behavior might classify them as undeserving but a private charity certainly could. CPF visitors accordingly investigated applicants to determine need and recipients to provide moral regulation. This was regulation with teeth: servicemen's wives who stepped out with other men in their husbands' absence could have their allowances suspended.

Other voluntary organizations, Pitsula argues, were "too poorly funded and disorganized to get the job done. Government had to take charge, put efficient organization in place, and tell citizens what to do" (p. 174). He also claims that donor fatigue was another factor requiring government to take over private philanthropy. Ottawa did not pass its War Charities Act until September 1917, however, and as late as March 1918 the Regina Board to Regulate Public Contributions was still operating without federal interference.[1] Moreover, if donor fatigue was a significant factor prompting the board's formation in April 1916, how do we account for the fact that the November 1917 Victory Loan was so largely oversubscribed? Saskatchewan's target was $12 million, but the province raised $21.7 million (pp. 190-191). People clearly were willing to get by with less, if sufficiently motivated.

Regarding conscription, there was a clear relationship between lagging voluntary enlistment after 1916 and Ottawa's 1917 Military Service Act. Pitsula offers some vivid descriptions of the pressure applied to entice recruits and public expressions of support for conscription, but he does not acknowledge the reactionary nature of Ottawa's response to lagging voluntary enlistment. There is no comment on the highly inefficient recruiting system imposed by Minister of Militia Sam Hughes, a consequence of which was the raising in February 1916 of a third Saskatchewan infantry unit, the 195th (City of Regina) Battalion, at a time when dwindling enlistment threatened the ability to maintain its two predecessors, the 28th and 68th battalions.

Some of the book's key arguments thus remain unconvincing, and the author's research methodology raises some concern. While Pitsula has carried out an impressive volume of research into the Regina newspapers of the period, there is very little explanation of his methodology except to say that "read critically, newspapers are a rich source of information for what people in the community were thinking and doing" (p. 20). The problem is that the vast majority of the book's content is based almost exclusively on newspapers, and there is not nearly enough critical reading of these sources. Too many chapters include masses of detail from the newspapers with weak transitions and little analysis of their significance. As for other sources, use of relevant secondary works is superficial at best. Chapters describing the role played by Saskatchewan's soldiers in the fighting overseas are based almost exclusively on Donald George Scott Calder's dated regimental history of the 28th Battalion–*The History of the 28th (Northwest) Battalion, CEF (October 1914-June 1919) From the Memoirs of Brigadier General Alexander Ross* (1961)–and include little more than sparse summaries relying on a few meaty quotations. To cite another example, a lengthy section on the Spanish influenza epidemic fails to note Esyllt Jones's *Influenza 1918: Disease, Death, and Struggle in Winnipeg* (2007), although her book is listed in the bibliography.

This omission is symptomatic of a larger problem. The failure to offer any meaningful comparison with other cities makes it impossible to determine whether Regina's war experience really was distinctive, as the author claims. Patriotic service, ethnic strife, and debates over conscription, female suffrage, and prohibition had an impact on Canadians across the country. The portrayal of "western" Canadian views on national questions might be the most valuable element of this account, but the problematic use of sources provokes doubt as to the accuracy of Pitsula's conclusions. *For All We Have and Are* makes a worthwhile contribution to the literature, but John Herd Thompson's *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (1978) remains the most useful work on this region during the Great War.

Note

[1]. *Statutes of Canada* 1917, ch. 38, s. 7-8 George V, RA. September 20, 1917, quoted in Rod Watson, "Charity and the Canadian Income Tax: An Erratic History," *The Philanthropist* 5, no. 1 (1985), p. 15n25.

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Citation: Jody Perrun. Review of Pitsula, James M., *For All We Have and Are: Regina and the Experience of the Great War.* H-Canada, H-Net Reviews. November, 2009.

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