

Chapter 1

Masters and Servants...1913-1943

In The Beginning

It was 1913, and the Province of Saskatchewan was just eight years old. The rallying cry for the Temperance Movement against the evils of alcohol and the workings of the devil was "Ban the Bar". Other women were organizing for universal suffrage, as they were still being denied their right to vote.

For the employees of this new provincial government, public employment was considered an elite field of work and many of these several hundred employees worked out of the Parliament Buildings in Regina (now referred to as the Legislative Buildings).

It was a cold Friday night on February 21, 1913, when a small group of civil servants from various departments in the Regina Parliament Buildings, just completed the year before, gathered in Room 219 of that building. They met to establish for the first time an "association" of Civil Servants.

The minutes from that meeting, still well preserved, reveal that they elected a slate of executives with Harry

Willsmer as the Association's first president. They then passed a motion that "the Association be called the 'Saskatchewan Civil Service Association (at the Parliament Buildings)' and that "the object of the Association be the promotion of social intercourse and sports among the civil servants in the Parliament Buildings."

Membership in the association was to be voluntary with an annual membership fee of one whole dollar. Mr. J. Brown was the very first member to pay his fee. The meeting instructed a "deputation" from the association to meet with the Minister of Public Works to enquire if the government would be laying out playgrounds in the area.

Membership in the association grew to between 200 and 300, was voluntary and included all levels of government including department heads and other senior officials. Subsequent meetings drew up a constitution and initiated social events and dances.

In these times, provincial government employees' wages and working conditions were governed by The Public Service Act, first passed in 1906. Under this Act the head of any department could grant holidays and sick leave, suspend, transfer or reassign his employees as he saw fit. And there was no right of appeal.

Despite their lack of rights, these humble beginnings in 1913 were very much a reflection of the attitudes of government employees. Government played a minor role in Saskatchewan affairs and provided few services to the public. With a population of 675,000, predominately rural, Saskatchewan had only 880 public employees. Government had been modelled on the British model and employees were expected to adhere to a long tradition of subservience to the Crown and the Sovereign State. Loyalty to their employer, considered synonymous with the people, was of the highest virtue. Such loyalty to "Queen and Country" made servants out of public employees and servants have few rights or privileges.

"no allowance or compensation shall be made for any extra services whatsoever which any clerk or employee may be required to perform."

Public Service Act, 1906

"Any application for increase in salary made by any member of the Civil Service or by any other person on his behalf with such member's consent and knowledge shall be considered as a tendering of the resignation of such member."

Public Service Act, 1913

An S.C.S.A. Social Evening - 1913

"The evening is to be divided as follows -

Whist drive from 8:00 to 10:00 p.m. sharp with doors open at 7:30 p.m.

Supper from 10:00 to 10:30 p.m.

Dancing from 10:30 to 12:30 p.m.

The price of admission is to be

For married folk - 75¢

Gentlemen - 50¢

Ladies - 25¢

Provincial Executive Minutes

March 14, 1913



Civil Service Sports

The Civil Service sporting organizations are all in a flourishing condition. The hockey team, which last year won the championship of the commercial league in Regina, this year won premier honours in the city league and afterwards defeated the winners of the commercial league. Many members of the staff have been practising indoor rifle shooting during the winter. The football club has organized for the coming season, and although no less than ten of its players are now serving their country at the front, expect to place a first class team in the field. The stamp collectors are still doing business, and at present a lawn tennis club is being organized, which bids fair to eclipse all others both in numbers and popularity.

Public Service Monthly
April, 1915

Civil Service Platoon - 95th Saskatchewan Rifles

A platoon of the 95th Saskatchewan Rifles is being formed by the members of the Civil Service, and drills will be conducted each Thursday evening at five o'clock in the Civil Service Association room under the supervision of Lieutenant Rattray, assisted by Company Sergeant Major Pragnell. As many as can attend are invited, as this is one means of affording drill to those who may go on active service later.

Public Service Monthly
January, 1916

The Motherwell Circle

The ladies of the Motherwell Circle, which is composed chiefly of those employed in the Department of Agriculture, are continuing their patriotic work by making comforts for the soldiers. The association as mentioned last month, has been formed for the purpose of carrying on Red Cross and other patriotic work. The funds of the circle have been considerably increased during the past month by the sale of a pure bred calf, "Elrick's Gift", donated by Mr. Alex Duncan, of Moffat, Saskatchewan, which realized \$150.

Public Service Monthly
January, 1916

In addition to being a loyal servant, the pervasive image, however inaccurate, of government employees was that they were supposed to be a step above "commoners" and somewhat privileged. It is not surprising then that despite their lack of rights, employees combined only to promote social activities. In 1913, anything else would not only have been dangerous, it could almost be considered traitorous.

The last meeting of this group was held on April 24, 1914. Its activities were disrupted and suspended when war broke out in Europe and it wasn't to re-emerge until 1920. When it did, it was a different world and these were very turbulent times.

The Twenties

The First World War was thought of as "a crusade fought with religious fervour to save the world from authoritarian militarism. Early in the war, the Western democracies kept enthusiasm high on the home front with lavish promises of a better tomorrow, a world without strife, and a secure future free from want."¹

But the reality proved to be far different. As the troops came home, unemployment rose. Workers were the hardest hit as the economic growth of 1898-1912 didn't appear again after the war. "For their part, the employers were basking in the sun of big profits. Working class bitterness grew."²

This was particularly so in Western Canada as 1919 saw the rise of the One Big Union, symbolic of western labour militancy. The Winnipeg General Strike of 1919 saw sympathy strikes spread across the West, including strikes in Regina, Saskatoon, Moose Jaw and Prince Albert.

Employees of the federal, provincial and civic governments, despite their conservative heritage, weren't left untouched by this general social radicalism. "Municipalities were faced with the prospect of strikes by police and firemen, as well as civic labourers, and there was even a strike by teachers in Victoria. In the federal civil service, postal

workers conducted three illegal strikes between 1918 and 1924...In addition there was a movement favouring the affiliation of the Civil Service Federation (CSF - a federation of existing staff associations) with the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC)."³

Next door to Saskatchewan, the Civil Servants Association of Alberta affiliated with the TLC in 1919 and provincial employees in British Columbia considered a similar move.

In Saskatchewan, 42,000 war veterans arrived home and the provincial government gave them preference in new jobs, although only a limited number were accepted.

A meeting of representatives from various departments of the Saskatchewan Civil Service was held January 12, 1920, to form an association with a constitution. A new association was formally established March 4th and a new constitution adopted.

The aims and objectives set out in this new constitution made it clear that the association was no longer narrowly concerned with just sports and social activities.

Aims and Objectives

- a. To unite the members of the Civil Service into an Association for mutual improvement, socially, intellectually and physically to improve the efficiency of the service, and to promote a common interest of the members of the Association.
- b. To provide means to secure the best possible measure of joint action between the Government and its employees for the development of the service and for the improvement of the conditions and advancement of the status of all Civil Servants.
- c. To maintain the existence of the Joint Council, consisting of three (3) representatives appointed by the executive of the Association, as hereinafter provided for.

- d. To provide for the establishment of co-operative organizations for the benefit of the members of the Association, and for any other purpose that may be deemed advisable by the members of the Executive.
- e. In carrying out the objects of the Association the policy to be followed shall be determined entirely by action from within the ranks of the Association.



The Saskatchewan Civil Service Association

(AT THE PARLIAMENT BUILDINGS)

Regina

CONSTITUTION

Name and Object.

1. The name of this Association shall be "The Saskatchewan Civil Service Association" (at the Parliament Buildings, Regina).
2. The object of the Association shall be the promotion of social intercourse and sports among the civil servants in the Parliament Buildings.
3. (a) Membership shall be open to civil servants directly connected with any Department at the Parliament Buildings.
(b) Membership shall be of three classes: active, honorary and honorary life.

A letter was read by the secretary from E.G.D. McEachern requesting that the Executive try and obtain an increase in his salary. After some discussion it was decided that owing to the fact that Mr. McEachern was a physical wreck and that his position was largely a sinecure the Executive could not see their way to recommend any increase in salary...."

Provincial Executive Minutes
June 29, 1920

"Considerable discussion took place regarding the velocity of the wind and various other topics of the day, but no definite action was taken."

Provincial Executive Minutes
May 2, 1921

"Moved by Messrs. McDonald and Milne, that a communication be sent to the Civil Service Commissioner drawing his attention to the fact that there are married ladies employed in the Civil Service whose husbands are earning salaries while it is felt by the members of this Executive that they should be replaced by those who have unfortunately lost their positions. Carried."

Provincial Executive Minutes
December 27, 1921

"Moved by Mr. Wilson - We the members of the Civil Service of Saskatchewan here assembled on this, the 2nd day of October 1923, beg to bring to the attention of the Ministers and Members of the Government the necessity of immediately putting into operation a scheme of Superannuation for Civil Servants of this Province, to partially provide for those who have given long and faithful service to the Public interests."

Seconded by Mr. Oliver.
Carried Unanimously

The effect of rising inflation following the war and the lack of rights or benefits had forced employees to organize to seek "the improvement of the conditions and status of all Civil Servants." But they did so in the manner consistent with the "Civil Servant" tradition. Trade unionism was never considered and actively discouraged by the association.

"It is not the desire or aim of the Executive to consider the Association as a kind of Labour Union or to 'hold a club over' anyone in order to enforce demands. We wish to right wrongs, if any exist, but do not care to be at the 'beck and call' of anyone who may 'have an axe to grind.'"⁴

Despite this conservative approach, the association was able to persuade the government to change some conditions. One of their first concrete accomplishments was the establishment of a Joint Council in 1920. The Council consisted of three association and three government representatives. Its mandate was to deal with specific grievances brought to its attention. The government, though, had the final say in any decisions made by Council.

Through this medium the association sought changes in vacation and sick leave, life and liability insurance, pensions (which were non-existent), grading, promotions and the occasional individual grievance. Salary increases were never promoted on a general basis.

While they received "consideration from the Government on these matters," they rarely achieved anything. Some of their successes included the government granting association members the "privilege" of advances of salary to purchase coal for the winter, a half-day off in summers for a civil service picnic (which would become a major traditional event for many years), early leave on Saturdays in summer, and "clarifications" of various government policies—*not* exactly smashing advances for their members.

In 1925, the Saskatchewan Civil Service Association (SCSA) changed its name to the Saskatchewan Government Services Association (SGSA), apparently

to reflect its broader membership base, though it was to effectively remain a Regina organization for many years. This name change was to be one of many over the years.

One of the most important concerns of the SGSA was the securing of a pension for its members. From 1920 to 1926 the association researched, studied and appealed to the government to pass a Superannuation Act as was being done federally and in other provinces. Finally in 1927, the Government passed The Public Service Superannuation Act which was to be one of the association's major accomplishments for many years. A superannuation act for Telephone employees, also SGSA members, followed in 1928.

The first issue of the association's magazine, *The Dome*, was also published in 1927. Ever since then, *The Dome*, in its many varied forms, has served to communicate Association affairs and concerns to its members.

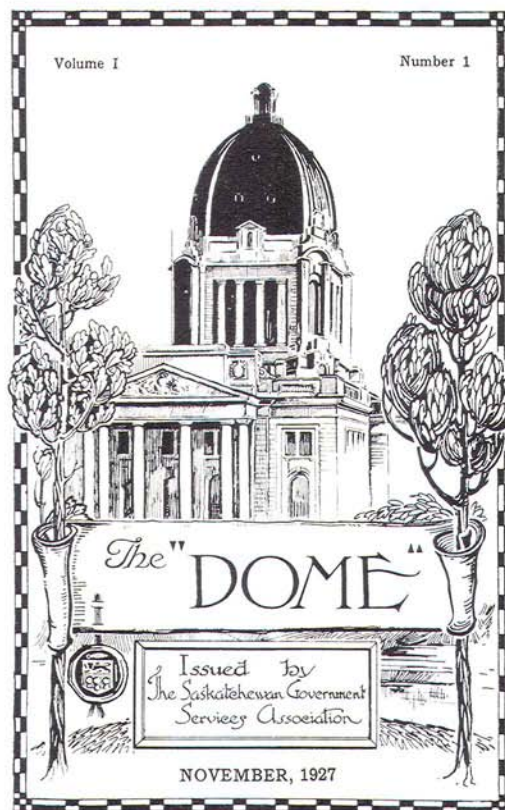
Since the founding of the Province in 1905, the government had been run by the Liberal Party. The Liberals, under James Gardiner, had acquired a reputation for converting the civil service into a machine for political patronage and for using civil servants as political workers. For the most part this patronage was confined to the upper echelons of the civil service but it was that same level which influenced the association's leadership.

One of the platforms of the Conservative Party under Dr. J.T.M. Anderson in the 1929 provincial election was the reforming of the civil service to make it non-political. So when Anderson was proclaimed Premier (leading a Co-operative Government of Conservatives, Progressives and Independents), the government established a Public Service Inquiry Commission chaired by M.J. Coldwell (later to become leader of the national Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) Party.

The issues that the Commission pursued prompted the SGSA to make submissions to it through their Classification Committee. Special meetings held to

"Without undue boasting the Association can lay claim to having been an influential, if not a determining factor, in securing the passage of the Superannuation Act. It has obtained from the Government the privilege of coal advances for members in winter. It has been successful in having a sports ground set aside in these Buildings' grounds for the use of the various Services sports clubs. It lends encouragement and support to the allied Civil Service Clubs. It is persona grata with the Government and the Civil Service Commissioner with whom it maintains constant and cordial relations.

First Issue of *The Dome*
October, 1927



"The Editor of the Dome

Sir The Executive of the Government Services Association, through the medium of the Dome has asked for suggestions which would be beneficial to the members of the Association and to the Civil Service. I take this opportunity of pointing out, what to my way of thinking is an absolute necessity, the formation of some system of Sick Benefits, whereby a member when sick would not be haunted and retarded in recovery, by that nightmare, "How can I pay the Bill?"

There are members of our Association, with small salaries struggling along to pay hospital and doctor bills up to \$500.00. What this means any member will easily realize with our present large membership surely some thing might be done to at least lessen the burden of those unfortunates enough to need the services of a doctor or to have to go to a hospital with the resultant heavy expense. Let some of the other members say what they think of this suggestion.

*Letter to The Dome
March, 1928*

"Mr. Malek ... endorsed Mr. Martin's statement that subscription lists had been sent round. (He) stated that in the Public Health Department in 1925, the then Deputy Minister instructed someone to take round list asking subscriptions to the Liberal party. The impression was conveyed to members of the Public Health Department that unless substantial subscription was given, that the amount of donation would be considered when increases were being given."

*From Minutes of Special Saskatchewan Civil Service Association Meeting
November 22, 1929*

discuss the issues urged actions on effective classification to remove inequities, promotions based on merit and seniority, not patronage, cumulative sick leave and job security. The association stayed clear of implying actual patronage before the Commission despite evidence of its existence.

The Public Service Inquiry Commission recommended many of these proposals to the new government and in 1930 a new Public Service Act was passed which appeared to clear up some of the worst excesses of structure which promoted patronage and inequalities in hiring and promotions. A general classification system was included, outlining positions and salaries. The Joint Council was also institutionalized in the new Act. However, many of these matters, especially cost items, were never effectively implemented.

By 1930 the SGSA had a voluntary membership of close to 1,000. Management, including the Public Service Commissioner, were members. They also tended to exert control over the organization, ensuring that the traditional conservatism of public employees was continued and that "privileges" were begged for rather than rights demanded.

Lacking either the structure or the inclination to aggressively protect their members, the association had to rely on the good grace of governments to bring about change and bestow upon their employees the meager gains the employer, in an era of relative prosperity, deemed fit to award. But the economic boom that developed in the 1920s came to an abrupt end. Hard times were ahead and neither the Conservative Anderson Government nor the SGSA would be able to effectively respond to them.

"The Dirty Thirties"

Of all the provinces, Saskatchewan was probably the hardest hit by the Depression. Across Canada hundreds of thousands of workers were unemployed. Wage earners and farmers were to bear the brunt of the economic crisis.

The Depression years saw impoverishment spread across Saskatchewan. Relief camps were set up under the Department of National Defence for the thousands of young unemployed workers. Attempts by workers to organize against the Depression were met with repression. The bitter Estevan coal miners' strike for union recognition ended with three miners being killed by the RCMP, and when unemployed workers from the West on the On-to-Ottawa Trek reached Regina, the police stopped them with force, thus marking the historic Regina Riot.

Saskatchewan was hit hard by drought and shrinking markets for farm products, causing the average Saskatchewan per capita income to fall 72 percent. Government revenues dried up at a time when rural and urban poverty required immediate relief.

In January, 1931, Conservative backbenchers in the Legislature called for reductions in civil service salaries and personnel. Although it was initially rejected, the SGSA set up a committee to "counteract any agitation for decreases in the salaries of Civil Servants." The summer was dry and in September the government proceeded to cut public employees' salaries by 5 percent on their first \$1,000 and 10 percent over that.

As well, wide-spread layoffs took place, often in an unfair manner with no reference to seniority or ability. There were few principles guiding re-hiring either. The "privilege" of coal advances, touted by the association as one of their accomplishments, was dropped. Pay reductions continued throughout the early '30s, often on a departmental basis as some department budgets were severely starved.

Many of the beneficial sections of The 1930 Public Service Act were watered down, revised or never

Since the last issue of The Dome made its appearance a momentous event in the history of Saskatchewan has taken place. The Liberal Government which, under different leaders, has been continuously in office since the creation of the Province, was defeated on a Want of Confidence Motion in the Legislature, whereupon Premier Gardiner tendered the resignation of his Government, and on September 9 the new Co-operative Government took office under the Premiership of Hon. J.T.M. Anderson.

So far as members of the Civil Service, and Government employees generally are concerned, we should view this change in just one way. We are servants of the Government of Saskatchewan, not of a Liberal, Conservative, Co-operative, Labour or Farmer Government, but the Government of Saskatchewan as representatives of the people of the Province. As is true in the case of the sovereign, we say: "The King is Dead; Long Live the King."

Editorial

The Dome, October, 1929

Proposed 1930 Yearly Wages (never implemented)

*Administrative Division - \$2,400-\$4,500
Professional Division - \$1,800 (Junior Class) - \$5,000+ (Senior A Class)
Clerical Division - \$840 (Junior Class) - \$3,000 (Senior A Class)
Public Service Act*



implemented, especially the section on classification and graded, uniform salaries. The Conservatives' commitment to non-patronage in the civil service was similarly suspect. In 1934, after the Co-operative Government was defeated and the Liberals returned to power "over one-tenth of the Public Servants either resigned, were dismissed or were under notice of dismissal, generally because they were alleged to be patronage appointments by the Conservatives."⁵

The Liberals proceeded to appoint their own people. While public employees were losing in wages, they were also unable to improve working conditions or benefits. Particularly notorious was the situation of mental hospital employees in Weyburn, Saskatoon and the Battlefords where the SGSA had locals. Mental hospital staff worked 60-hour weeks, received no overtime or extra holiday pay, were faced with sometimes violent patients at work, worked on statutory holidays and received low pay. The SCSA* appealed to the government throughout the 1930s for changes, especially a 48-hour work week, but to no avail.

Similarly, Liquor Board employees had for years sought to acquire a superannuation plan similar to the one covering other public employees, but went unheeded as well. Consistent presentations to the government by the SCSA on issues of cumulative sick leave, hours of work and other issues produced little, if anything, in this period. With the exception of a group insurance scheme established by the SCSA in 1934, civil servants could only claim social and sporting events as benefits to association members.

In the late 1930s pressure from the membership grew for association action on wages and working conditions. Often the executives' response to items such as requests and petitions from the locals for action was that it would be "unadvisable at the present time" or suggested that "present privileges would be lost" if they were to pursue any issue vigorously.

*In 1934 the SGSA reverted back to calling themselves the Saskatchewan Civil Service Association (SCSA).

They were all dyed-in-the-wool Liberals who stuck up for one another.

The Liberals were terrible, you know, terrible. I hated them. We all hated them. They had no sense of decency at all - it was all patronage."

Dorothy Hall

"When the Liberals came into power (1934), they favourably increased the salaries of the top echelons ... while clerks and stenos got nothing."

D.H. Anderson
former S.C.S.A. member

"In view of the salary decrease put into effect by the Government and particularly the hardship that this will entail on the lesser salaried members of the Service that we urge upon the Government the advisability of an early adoption of the Classification provided for in the Public Service Act and especially that immediate steps be taken to adjust the very patent inequalities that exist to the detriment of many employees.

Provincial Executive Minutes
August 26, 1931

Motion — "That a Christmas Draw be held by this Association and that the proceeds be used to assist members of the Public Service in distress who have been given indefinite leave or have, owing to economic conditions, been recently discharged."

Provincial Executive Minutes
November 6, 1931

"I had a raw deal and I went to the President (of Saskatchewan Civil Service Association) and asked if he could do something about it and he said ...

You have a raw deal - you have good reason to complain, but what can I do about it? If I write and complain I get in raw with the government and I have to look after my job.

I didn't belong to them again."
Dorothy Hall

"It was an indication of how much the government cared for its employees. — One day we got a notice we would be deducted 3% for the Relief Fund and they had the arrogance to call it a Voluntary Contribution. I went to one of the early Association meetings, early in the Thirties — and you must remember that at that time our membership was voluntary, management were members, could be members and tended to be the dominant factor in the Association in any branch — and I made a statement and used the word "If we were a Union" and I was told in no uncertain terms by the Chairman that "I'm not going to report this to the top this time, but if it gets to the top — you're fired!" For using the word "Union"!... "That will tell how much rights you had ..." There was a great deal of apathy and justifiably so The Association very seldom got anything."

Aubrey Ball
former President, SCSA

Discussion of unionizing in these times threatened job security and was difficult to do, since departmental heads who had authority to hire and fire attended association membership meetings. It's not surprising then that the association, dominated as it was by management, was not only timid in pursuing its members' interests, but often actively defended their employer's inaction. They often argued for "self-sacrifice" on behalf of its members and that "Public Servants should accept their salaries because they have the interests of the public at heart."

As the decade came to a close, national and international events were to once again have an effect on public employees in Saskatchewan and their Association.



The Early Forties

On September 10, 1939, Canada declared war on Nazi Germany. The drought in Saskatchewan was finally ending and increased prosperity was ahead. Nationally, industrial production expanded and a relative scarcity of labour would soon exist since manpower was being sent overseas. In the United States, a group of workers established the Committee for Industrial Organization (CIO) in 1935, within the American Federation of Labour (AFL), to organize workers by industry rather than by craft. But by 1937 the conservative craft unions and the new industrial union split, and the CIO became a new union central and proceeded to organize new workers in steel, automobile, textile and other industries. Canadian workers took up the challenge of industrial organization and organized new unions under the umbrella of the CIO. The Trade and Labour Congress of Canada (TLC) initially attempted to keep these Canadian CIO unions affiliated with the TLC, but under pressure from the American-based international craft unions affiliated with the AFL, the TLC eventually expelled the CIO unions in 1939.

Thus, in 1940 a new Canadian labour central was formed from the merger of the All-Canadian Congress of Labour (ACCL) and the Canadian affiliates of the CIO. The new central was called the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL) and was committed to building militant industrial unions and organizing the unorganized.

From 1940 to 1945 trade union membership more than doubled and its new organizational strength made possible improvements in their working conditions. Federal and provincial governments resisted this movement, and the Federal government's Order-in-Council 7440 established the 1926-1929 wage levels as the norm for "reasonable" wages. This proved to be very restrictive when the cost of living began to rise—inflation had returned.

Saskatchewan government employees were witnessing other civil servants and wage earners



receiving wage increases and cost-of-living bonuses while their own wages had yet to be restored to the 1935 level much less to their 1929 salaries. SCSA members began to agitate for an "upward revision of salaries" and for a cost-of-living bonus. In 1941 *The Dome* reported that "From many quarters have come criticisms of the Association for not pressing for a Cost-of-Living bonus,"⁶ and the three mental hospitals were "encountering much dissatisfaction amongst the employees because of the apparent lack of action by the Government to shorten their 60 hour work week."

The SCSA continued to make representations to the government but to little avail. Pressure from the membership increased and impatience was growing. "There has been much comment on the failure or presumed failure of the Association to achieve certain definite objectives during the past year."⁷ Indicative of how widespread this concern was is the report on the 1942 Annual Convention, usually a rather timid affair...

"All local Executives have submitted resolutions urging the Association to maintain its efforts to secure a bonus; and these must have overshadowed all else, for there is only one other resolution to come before the Convention..."⁸

That other resolution called for the reduction in working hours for mental hospital employees.

Such open concern by public employees was unprecedented and the association was hard put to deliver. Finally in 1942 the SCSA won their first cost-of-living bonus, though the SCSA executive considered that "the details of the Cost-of-Living bonus are strictly a matter of government concern." The bonus allowed \$10 a month for employees with children (except married women) and \$5 a month for single employees. This minor concession must have proved to be inadequate for in that same year "quite a number of employees are once again becoming 'Cost-of-Living' conscious."⁹

By 1944 the SCSA represented 1,800 members and had five branches, including Regina. Still fewer than 50% of all provincial employees were members.

Since its formation in 1913 as a social club to 1943 when, under pressure from their members, they reluctantly pressured the government for wage increases, the SCSA had assumed the "proper" role for itself...subservience. "Management domination" and "collective begging" are the most adequate terms to describe the character of the association.

Membership unrest in the early '40s shows that the SCSA's rank and file needed change but there appeared to be few alternatives. No public employees in all of North America had the right to engage in collective bargaining so there were few positive examples to follow.

The events following the election of the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF) led by Tommy Douglas June 15, 1944, were to provide the employees of the provincial government just such an opportunity.

