

COMPTES RENDUS/BOOK REVIEWS

EARL, Paul D. – *The Rise and Fall of United Grain Growers: Cooperatives, Market Regulation, and Free Enterprise*. Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2019. 349 p.

The United Grain Growers (UGG), almost from its origins, existed in a twilight zone between the cooperative movement of farmers in western Canada, on the one hand, and the private grain marketing sector on the other. Conceived initially as a farmers' cooperative that would market grain to retain money that was allegedly being lost to private merchandisers, it soon faced the might of the Winnipeg Grain Exchange that threatened to forbid its trading privileges if it paid patronage dividends proportional to deliveries. The UGG compromised by having farmers buy shares in the company, making them eligible for profits depending on share values. It went on a binge of purchase of grain elevators and in some ways appeared to be just another profit-seeking agribusiness operation. But after a few years of operation as a regular, if farmer-only, corporation, it developed a governance structure that reflected cooperative principles with representatives of local associations rather than shareholders serving as the governing board.

The die, however, had been cast. The UGG was a blend of a private, profit-seeking corporation and a farmer-owned cooperative. The result was that for many years the UGG stood out as a conservative institution within a radical farm cooperative movement. The three provincial wheat pools that formed in the 1920s were anti-capitalist and hoped to destroy the private firms that they regarded as parasites bleeding farmers dry. From the Great Depression onwards, they became the major voices for a government-run wheat board that would sell all the wheat that the co-ops gathered in their elevators. The UGG, by contrast, had far fewer quarrels with their private-sector competitors or the grain exchange.

Paul D. Earl writes an insider's account of the history of the UGG. He spent many years before becoming a business professor as a grain trader, and twice held key positions within the UGG. Earl is a strong defender of the hybrid UGG model, which he believes allowed farmers to influence the institutions that handled their grain while not placing the responsibility for collecting and marketing grain solely in the hands of the state. Earl puts the history of the UGG in the context of the history of grain trading generally and of agricultural radicalism in western Canada. He suggests that farmer protest, however, is too often presented as if all the participants were anti-capitalist. The history of the UGG, he points out, suggests otherwise.

The politics of the UGG varied over time. Earl suggests that shifts to the right and left in political thinking within society as well as the views of individual UGG presidents help to explain transitions in UGG thinking. In its origins, the UGG was the creation of utopian socialist farmers in Sintaluta, Saskatchewan, led by celebrated farm radical Edward A. Partridge. Partridge's support for full

cooperative principles led to his ouster when the members faced the ultimatum from the Winnipeg Grain Exchange. But Earl, though he does not particularly explore the assertion, suggests that most of the early members of the UGG were pragmatic cooperators and, as such, did not share Partridge's more idealistic views. Certainly, the first long-term president of the company, Thomas Crerar, was no opponent of capitalism; indeed, he was a defender of traditional liberalism. He and his successor, Richard Stanley Law, disagreed with the creators of the provincial wheat pools who wanted to create either a cooperative monopoly over the selling of wheat or the creation of a single state-run wheat board that would replace the grain exchange and provide farmers with guaranteed prices for their wheat and other grains.

The UGG did not join with the pools in pressing for centralized marketing of wheat during the Great Depression. But the general move to the left during and immediately after the Second World War within society at large caused the UGG to accept the creation of the Canadian Wheat Board in 1943 as a supposedly permanent monopoly wheat merchandising agency for Canadian farmers. It also joined with the pools in defending the low "holy Crow" rates that the CPR had promised the Canadian government in the 1890s for the shipment of wheat in return for finances to develop rich mineral lands that would earn the company far more than it ever earned from running a railway service.

In the 1980s, as neoliberal ideas replaced the collectivism common in the four preceding decades, the UGG, never a supporter of radicalism, similarly embraced neoliberalism. Viewing political issues more from the point of view of a business than a cooperative organization of farmers, it stood with the organizations of larger-scale farmers who supported market-based policies that would allow them to gobble up the land of the declining number of smaller-scale farmers who remained opponents of free market policies regarding the selling of wheat and the pricing of transportation for farm products.

The UGG may have stood alone among the coops as the Crow rate and then the Canadian Wheat Board were dismantled. But the same market forces that the UGG embraced put pressure on the pools to gradually shed their cooperative status and become corporations no different from the kinds of corporations that they had once been fighting to push out of existence.

Earl believes that the UGG model did represent a balance between strict market forces and farmers' desire for input into policies that would have an impact on their survival. Much of his book is given over to a careful debate on whether the UGG, which had become Agricore in its last years, could have or should have resisted the hostile takeover of the company by the Saskatchewan Wheat Pool in 2007. While he presents in detail the arguments of company directors who believed that their corporate duty to shareholders made acceptance of the Wheat Pool takeover impossible to resist, he provides equally detailed arguments about why Agricore should have resisted the takeover. That debate provides the greatest added value of this book to existing historical and business literature on the grain trade and UGG. Earl's careful accounting of the priorities and achievements or lack thereof of each of the presidents of the UGG is also of great value.

Ironically, while the book is in many respects a defence of a model that includes farmer input, farmers fail to emerge as social agents in the UGG history. The voices of farmers are mostly absent. There is a rather shallow analysis of the differences among the farmers who joined the pools versus the farmers who were loyal to the UGG. Earl is content to simply point out the ideological differences between the two sets of farmers. But he fails to provide any indication of what factors predisposed some farmers to each side of the argument. Furthermore, as farmer ideology shifts over time, there is little indication in this book as to why. Earl's insider involvement in the UGG and the grain trade causes him to be mainly interested in the views of corporate leaders. The arguments of farmer representatives on the Agricore board about why the company should be kept intact are interesting but vague. The book would have been strengthened with some clear examples in different periods of what difference the semi-cooperative character of the UGG made to farmers' lives as viewed by farmer members.

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COOK, Tim, and J. L. GRANATSTEIN, eds. – *Canada 1919: A Nation Shaped by War*. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2020. 338 p.

In the First World War, Canada mobilized more than 650,000 men and women, of whom 66,000 perished and 172,000 suffered lesser injuries—an impressive feat for a country of eight million, still a stripling among nations. The war also saw an unprecedented degree of state intervention in the economy and everyday life, and more than a few violations of civil liberties. But arguably as consequential as anything that happened during the war itself were the events of 1919, when wartime developments were accepted, modified, or outright rejected. In that year, Canada was no longer the country of farms and villages of the Laurier boom, but not yet the industrial powerhouse over which Mackenzie King was to preside. This collection of essays by established historians and emerging scholars, based on a 2019 conference at the Canadian War Museum, provides a richly detailed, if not quite comprehensive, portrait of Canada on the precipice of modernity.

The very process of repatriating Canadian troops from Europe, as Dean Oliver and William F. Stewart make clear in their chapters, was something of a bureaucratic bungle: soldiers were subjected to mind-numbing boredom and delays, culminating in the 1918/1919 demobilization riots in Britain. Their work nicely augments Desmond Morton's treatment of this topic. Serge Marc Durflinger forces a reconsideration of traditional thinking in his account of the thunderous reception offered the 22nd Battalion, the fabled Van Doos, upon their return to the City of Québec. Kandace Bogaert's chapter demonstrates that the federal government did build upon the rudimentary welfare state created in wartime for the benefit of soldiers