

**A Unique Career in Canadian Journalism:
William R. Plewman of the Toronto Daily Star**

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Abstract

I first learned of William Plewman in late 1971 while researching at the National Archives and Library in Ottawa for my Masters thesis on the response of Toronto's daily newspapers to the 1919 Winnipeg general strike. There I read Plewman's five week, firsthand news coverage of the walkout as a reporter for the Toronto Daily Star. In early 1972 I corresponded with and then interviewed William Plewman's youngest son, Richard, and William Plewman's brother, Charles. Later in 1972, I was given full access to the Toronto Daily Star's microfilm and library records. This allowed me to review William Plewman's fifty-three year newspaper career as a Star reporter, columnist and editorial writer. Finally, in March 2005 I interviewed William Plewman's nephew, George Plewman, who provided photographs, correspondence and anecdotes related to his uncle's life as a newspaperman, alderman, author, and Bible school teacher. The purpose of this article is to review William Plewman's professional, public and private life and his accomplishments. It is divided into three parts: The Early Years 1880 – 1918, Reporting the Winnipeg General Strike, and The Veteran Journalist 1920 – 1963.

The Early Years 1880 - 1918

William Rothwell Plewman was born in Bristol, England on August 3, 1880 and moved with his parents and eleven brothers and sisters to Toronto, Canada when he was eight. Plewman's father was a well-known Irish commercial traveler in Britain, a keen debater and a close student of international affairs. Several of William's seven brothers made their mark in Canada: Richard was a judge in British Columbia, Edgar was a United Church missionary in China for thirty-two years, and Charles was involved with the YMCA, became head of Ontario Boys Work, and in 1932 founded Ontario's Camp Kilcoo. At thirteen William left school and went to work as a messenger boy and

proofreader at Toronto's Methodist Book Room. In 1885 he decided to become a lawyer and spent the next four years working in a law office. However at nineteen his career plans changed again. In order to marry his childhood sweetheart, Claribel Hocken, he turned to journalism.²

To interest Claribel in marriage Plewman joined the Toronto News in 1899 and eventually became the paper's city hall reporter. However, when the News changed ownership in 1903 Plewman decided to apply for a job at a morning paper, the prestigious Toronto Globe. On his way to the Globe for a job interview though a random impulse led him to another paper, the Toronto Daily Star. There he met its young publisher, Joseph Atkinson. Though the Star was struggling with a circulation of 28,000, the lowest among Toronto's three afternoon papers, the persuasive Atkinson convinced Orangeman and life-long Conservative William Plewman to join the "Independent Liberal" Star. According to Atkinson's biographer, Ross Harkness, Atkinson said to Plewman: "Every reporter and writer we have is a Liberal. You can keep us from being too one-sided."³

Within a month Plewman became the Star's cable and telegraph editor handling dispatches from all over the world. For example, between 1904 and 1905 Plewman edited all cables concerning the Russo-Japan War. Following the overwhelming naval victory by Japanese Admiral Togo over the Russian fleet at the Battle of Tsushima on May 27, 1905, Plewman wrote a front page story interpreting the event's significance and the rise of Japan as a world power. Without knowing it at the time, Plewman's experience as the paper's telegraph editor and his foray into writing were both preparing him for a larger stage: a national and international audience of thousands who would read his famous War

Reviewed column during both World Wars. In June 1904 Plewman finally married Claribel Hocken and over the next twelve years they had three children.⁴

By 1914 Plewman was known in Toronto newspaper circles not only as a competent journalist but also as a straightlaced and hardrock Methodist. Two examples testify to the latter reputation. In early 1914 Plewman decided to run for the vice-presidency of the Toronto Press Club. His election slogan was 'Plewman for Vice'. His opponents soon counterattacked with a placard stating: 'Plewman for Vice? Bah! What Does Plewman Know About Vice?'⁵ A second incident concerns the Orange Order's newspaper, The Sentinel. In late 1912 Plewman left the Star to edit the The Sentinel, which was owned by his father-in-law and mayor of Toronto, Horatio Hocken. However Plewman's editorship ended after fifteen months over a matter of principle with Hocken because Plewman was a non-drinker and non-smoker and his views on temperance lashed with Hocken's support in Ontario's July 1914 provincial election of Conservative candidates. These men, according to Plewman, "...would imperil the success of a great movement to wipe out 1,300 barrooms that are degrading the citizenship of this province."⁶ When shortly after the election, leadership passed to Sir William Hearst, a prohibitionist, Plewman returned to the Conservative fold. Within days of his resignation from The Sentinel in May 1914 and despite a serious back accident, Plewman returned to the Star.⁷ This time he would not leave until his retirement in 1955.

At the outbreak of World War One, Joseph Atkinson asked Plewman to write an article explaining in simple language the reasons for the conflict. Plewman's article was published the day Great Britain declared war and was then followed for over four years with a daily column, War Reviewed. Almost always accompanied by personally drawn

maps, Plewman's work detailed and analyzed ongoing hostilities on the scattered fronts between the Allied and Axis forces. As the war continued Plewman's writing was characterized by increasingly precise assessment of trends and strategies and separation of fact from propaganda. For example, in January 1918 he accurately predicted that Germany would launch a great offensive and then surrender on November 11, 1918.⁸ On July 15, 1918 the Germans started what was to be their last great offensive of the war when they crossed the Marne against the French and the Americans. While many thought it would be the end, Plewman predicted that an Allied counter-offensive would be launched within the week. He was right! What was amazing about Plewman's understanding was that it was based on the absence of any formal military background other than a lieutenant's certificate in the Canadian Officers Training Corps. Nor was he familiar with textbooks on the art of war. Rather, his writing in *War Reviewed* was the result of an analysis of hundreds of dispatches from the war zones, an intuitive feeling for people and events, and wide reading of history, politics and biography.

Significantly, as the war entered its last year Plewman established a stature beyond his newspaper career. On the front page of the January 2, 1918 issue of the Star was his picture among the many "new faces" on Toronto's City Council. The voters of ward five had recently elected Plewman as their alderman and would re-elect him again in 1919 and 1922. In addition, in 1918 Plewman also authored the first of three books on World War One, My Diary of the Great War. The other two, The People's War Book and Pictorial History of the Great War, were published in 1919.

Reporting the Winnipeg General Strike

In 1919 Toronto had a robust daily press consisting of six newspapers: the Toronto World, Globe and Times were the morning papers, while the Toronto Daily Star, Evening Telegram, and Mail and Empire were evening editions. Other than the Star these newspapers traditionally had similar dispositions to social and economic issues. Also, with the exception of the Globe and the Star, the four other daily papers in Toronto usually favoured the Conservative party. In early 1919 even the historically Liberal Globe was committed to supporting the postwar federal Conservative-Union government of Sir Robert Borden. Thus Borden's administration had few enemies in Toronto newspaper circles among such powerful owners, publishers and editors of five of the city's papers as "Black Jack" Robinson of the Evening Telegram, William Douglas of the Mail and Empire, Billy "Bug Eyes" Maclean of the World, and William G. Jaffray of the Globe. Together with the Star's Joseph Atkinson, these men determined the editorial and news disposition, including specific stories, of their papers.⁹ Equally important, except for Atkinson, in 1919 widespread social and industrial discontent combined with the Red Scare, or fear of an international communist conspiracy, genuinely overtook Toronto newspaper proprietors and editors. Wartime hatred of dissenters, pacifists, and 'aliens' was compounded after the Russian Revolution by apprehension about socialists, anarchists, foreign agitators and revolutionaries. Strikes were occurring from Vancouver to Halifax and representatives of such radical labour unions as the Industrial Workers of the World – known as the IWW or 'Wobblies' - were suspected of being agents in the pay of Moscow. It was in this extreme atmosphere that Toronto's daily newspapers reacted editorially and in news coverage to the Winnipeg general strike.

The two main competitors for readership in evening editions were the Toronto Daily Star and the Toronto Evening Telegram. For years the Telegram, the uncompromising voice of Orange Protestant Toronto, had been ‘top dog’ in the city. However, by the end of World War One the underdog Star was seriously challenging the Telegram’s preeminence in both circulation and popularity. Part of the explanation for the rise of the Star since its start in 1899 was the promotional genius and series of crusades for social reform by its owner and publisher, Joseph Atkinson. He had gradually transformed the daily into a champion for the ‘little guy’ and so by 1919 the Star was a paper appealing not only to Toronto’s large working class but also its emerging middle class. Also, though not officially a member of the labour press, the Star was a strong supporter of the trade union movement. Therefore, when the general strike erupted in Winnipeg, Atkinson saw a golden opportunity. By providing saturation coverage of the dispute, he could not only cater to his regular clientele and continue to challenge the Telegram’s dominance, but also capture readers from the other five dailies and increase the Star’s circulation – and revenue. Finally, there was a political motive in providing comprehensive coverage of the strike. Atkinson realized that when ultimate responsibility for a settlement of the dispute was appropriated by the federal government and delegated to a staunch Tory, Arthur Meighen, that a debacle in the prairie city could undermine not only Meighen’s reputation, but also the prestige of Borden’s government. Furthermore, if enough political damage could be caused to both Borden and Meighen, Atkinson knew he could more easily lend the Star’s influence to public support of his close friend Mackenzie King as the next Liberal Party leader and ultimately Prime Minister.

When the Winnipeg general strike broke out on May 15, 1919, William Plewman was in Toronto fulfilling his dual responsibilities as the Star's special features writer and city alderman. Just before supper on Tuesday May 20, John Bone, the Star's city editor, phoned Plewman at home and relayed direct orders from Joseph Atkinson to board the 7:00 p.m. train at Union Station and go to Winnipeg to report on the Winnipeg strike.¹⁰ A few days earlier Atkinson had already redirected roving Star reporter and specialist in industrial relations, William "Main" Johnson from his current assignment in Sudbury.¹¹ Also, the Star had quickly employed its own Winnipeg stringer, Manitoba Free Press veteran John J. Conklin, to help out on the story.¹² Johnson and Conklin were to be the lead reporters on the strike until Plewman arrived, which he did on the afternoon of May 22. Ironically, one of the first people in Winnipeg William Plewman called upon was his younger brother, Charles, Boys Secretary of the Vaughn Street YMCA. Charles was at work when William came to see him.

...all of a sudden a tap came on the door and the first thing I knew here was my brother, unannounced...My brother himself was a humanitarian ... A great believer in the supreme worth of human personality. He was a man of pretty strong principles. I would say somewhat of a rugged individualist in his thinking. He was a very deeply religious man. He came to Winnipeg a great believer in trade unionism.¹³

William was soon sending back reports of the walkout to the Star. though because Winnipeg's telegraphers were on strike he had to journey by train across the American border into Minnesota to wire his dispatches.¹⁴ Within five days Main Johnson was recalled to Toronto and John Conklin was relieved of stringer duties. By May 27 Plewman was the Star's lone representative on the strike story.

From May 22 until June 27 Plewman conducted an extraordinary coverage of the strike. He sent the paper more than fifty by-lined reports, thirty-three appearing on the

Star's front pages. In total he wrote over 100,000 words about the walkout.¹⁵ During the five weeks of his strike coverage Plewman stayed in the luxurious Royal Alexandra Hotel, located directly across the street from the CPR train station and near the city's downtown. From the Royal "Alex" Plewman established his "beat": City Hall in front of Market Square on Main Street; nearby Victoria Park and the Labor Temple on James Avenue; the Industrial Bureau further south on Main at Water Avenue; the Provincial Legislature near the Assiniboine River on Kennedy Street; and the city's large immigrant quarter, the North End, due north of the CPR tracks. Richard Plewman recalled a humorous anecdote related to his father's news gathering when he was forced to use very unconventional means of travel:

"...Then he got 'Old Dobbin' which is a horse...So he got this old ploughhorse and dad had never been on a horse in his life ...he was not a farmboy in any shape, so he took the horse back to wherever he was staying and they tied it up and he put on the outside 'Union' to protect the horse."¹⁶

How did Plewman report the strike? On May 31 Plewman used the balcony of his sixth floor hotel room to observe: "the cars of the Citizen's Committee scurrying down Main and Portage...25 large flags tugging at their poles...the noise of newsies floating up to me."¹⁷ From the same vantage point on June 12 he reported: "the cavalry exercising on Broadway ...near the Fort Garry Hotel."¹⁸ As the strike persisted he visited two North End public schools, Gray and Aberdeen, with large numbers of immigrant students, and he attended the Labor Church services in Victoria Park. He joined returned soldiers at marches and demonstrations to the Provincial Legislature and City Hall, and attended open air meetings at "Soldiers Parliament" in Victoria Park. Finally, Plewman risked his personal safety to be in the crowds during the June 10 violence on Main Street involving

horse mounted “specials”, as well as the June 21 riot of “Bloody Saturday” between strike supporters and RNWMP, special police and militia.¹⁹

Realizing the importance of providing Star readers with several opinions and viewpoints in the dispute, Plewman obtained interviews with key strike figures including Senator Gideon Robertson, Borden’s Minister of Labor; Abraham Heaps, a North end pro labour alderman and strike leader; Bob Russell, strike leader and Central Strike Committee member; and Reverend William Ivens, ousted Methodist minister and editor of the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council paper, the Western Labor News. Some of the employers he met were James Carruthers, the manager of Crescent Creamery; Alfred Ryley, manager of the Canada Bread Company; and Peter McIntyre, Winnipeg’s Postmaster. To obtain union views he talked with Lawrence Pickup (Postal Clerks), Ash Kennedy (Locomotive Engineers), Doris Meakin (Telephone Operators), A.J. McAndrew (CPR Maintenance Employees), and Herbert Lewis, editor of the Ontario Labor News. Unfortunately, like every other reporter, Plewman was unable to obtain interviews with members of the Citizen’s Committee of One Thousand.²⁰

On June 17, following the “midnight arrests” of eight prominent strike leaders, Plewman conducted an on-the-spot interview with Reverend James Woodsworth outside the ransacked Labor Temple. Plewman first asked the pro-strike Methodist minister for his opinion of the arrest of the strike leaders: “It is a stupid, high-handed move. Already the workers feel that the Government is not truly representative, that it represents only a section and not all the community.”²¹ Then Plewman posed another question: “Will the strike collapse now that the leaders are removed?” To this the future leader of the CCF Party answered: “Not at all. The Government can’t arrest thirty-five thousand strikers,

and if the strike were broken the people still would insist upon handling their affairs and securing the ancient right of Britons.”²² On June 21, forty-five minutes before violence and mayhem erupted on Main and Portage, Plewman secured a critical interview with Gideon Robertson and the spokesmen for the committee of striking veterans in which both sides expressed frustration that last minute talks had not avoided a planned silent indignation parade by pro-strike ex-servicemen from City Hall to confront Robertson at the Royal Alexandra Hotel.

To read the news reports of the other five Toronto daily newspapers during the strike, one could not help believing that Winnipeg’s labour disturbance was in reality a Bolshevik–One Big Union conspiracy to overthrow constituted authority in Winnipeg and replace it with a Soviet form of government, instead of an action by workers and their leaders over legitimate demands of recognition of collective bargaining, higher wages and better working conditions.²³ Plewman’s reports showed that he did not accept the Communist plot explanation. In his first dispatch on May 23 Plewman admitted: “the strikers have gone pretty far and they have made some mistakes, but they have not perpetrated Bolshevism”.²⁴ Plewman reported that a small proportion of the strikers wanted to use the walkout as a springboard to a new industrial order. He quoted Brandon, Manitoba’s radical social gospeler, Reverend A.E. Smith describing this new system as one based: “for use and not for profit, co-operative instead of competition”.²⁵ Men like Smith, Ivens and Woodsworth, Plewman observed: “argued that it is wrong that workers should have to go cap in hand to employers asking for the right to live and then getting at best only a bare subsistence when the country has stupendous resources”.²⁶ Plewman also believed that the majority of those who joined the strike did so because Winnipeg

employers refused to recognize legitimate labour grievances. In a May 27 story he explained:

“Just what did happen in Winnipeg? As nearly as the writer can determine, this in brief is what happened. Three weeks ago the Metal Trades workers in contract shops went on strike to enforce collective bargaining, as they have it on the railways. The building trades also struck to enforce the same principle. Twelve days ago, the Trades and Labor Council, which within a year has unionize all the clerks, waiters, food makers and distributors, and movie employees, called a general sympathetic strike to assist the fight for collective bargaining”.²⁷

When 2000 returned soldiers marched to the Provincial buildings on May 31 and occupied the legislative chamber, Plewman reported that the veterans’ leader, Jack Moore, a former sergeant in the Canadian Expeditionary Force and member of Premier Norris’ Alien Investigation Board, emphasized that if collective bargaining were granted the strike would be settled at once. Plewman quoted Moore: “The Citizen’s Committee has been talking about English and Scotch anarchists, and they’ve got to be stopped, and you can do it Mr. Premier...All we want is living conditions. Some of our comrades are working 74 hours a week for \$ 55 a month...We want collective bargaining as they have it on the railways”.²⁸ In the days following the arrest of the strike leaders, Plewman concentrated on the reactions of the strikers to the government’s move. His account of “Bloody Saturday” was essentially factual though he did report the apparent indecision by authorities to call out the troops. In one of his final reports to the Star Plewman once again cast doubt on the Soviet conspiracy theory. When a report on June 23 by Winnipeg authorities hinted at evidence “to support the theory that a widespread movement is afoot to overthrow democratic institutions and substitute for them a Soviet form of government”, Plewman commented: “Needless to say, if evidence of this sort can be brought out Canada is in for a genuine sensation”.²⁹

By sending William Plewman to cover the Winnipeg strike, Joseph Atkinson ensured that Star readers would receive comprehensive, daily and uncensored dispatches from an informed source. As well, Plewman's news and views strongly reinforced Atkinson's Star editorials, giving them eyewitness verification and a foundation of facts. Plewman's contribution to the story of the Winnipeg general strike was outstanding; in fact, no other Canadian or American correspondent was able to match the remarkable quantity and quality of his front-line reporting. Indefatigable, he overcame considerable challenges to gathering and sending the news and continuously supplied readers in Toronto with a full, frank and intelligent explanation of the conflict in Winnipeg. Finally, the Star's coverage of the strike indeed appeared to bring many new readers to the paper (circulation increased during the strike from 88,000 to over 93,000) and further closed the gap with the Evening Telegram.³⁰

On Thursday June 26 at 11:00 a.m. the forty-three day strike was officially called off by the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council. Two days later and after more than a month covering the event, William Plewman checked out of the Royal Alexandra Hotel, walked over to the CPR station and boarded the express train to Toronto.

The Veteran Journalist 1920 – 1963

From late 1919 to the outbreak of World War Two in 1939 the Star continued to work towards one of Joseph Atkinson's main goals: to make the Toronto Star the highest circulation English language daily in Canada. Before the Winnipeg strike Atkinson assigned Plewman to develop close contact with the three farmer members in the Ontario Legislature. Thus when the farmer-labour coalition won the provincial election in 1919,

the Star had its own representative close to the new government of Ernest Drury. Following Drury's defeat in 1923 Plewman became an editor then joined Atkinson's team of senior editorial writers. Known for his quiet and dignified manner, Plewman continued to live by his strong views on smoking and drinking. Fellow journalists and visitors to the Star easily recognized him by his ever present wingtip Hoover collar and wire-rimmed glasses. Between 1923 and 1939 Plewman solidified his reputation as a conservative journalist within a paper that was moving steadily into the Great Depression as a left leaning publication in support of welfare legislation, labour unions and liberalism.

On September 1, 1939, two days before the United Kingdom, France and Canada declared war on Germany, Plewman wrote his opening War Reviewed column for the Second World War. Under the heading, "The Crisis Explained", he wrote: "It is a mistake to think...that modern fortified Lines cannot be passed by the slow pounding of bombing planes and amassed artillery, or by the sudden dash of mechanized forces..."³¹. As the supposedly impregnable Maginot Line collapsed under the Nazi onslaught, Plewman's first forecast became ominously true. Before the evacuation of over 330,000 Allied troops was completed on June 4, 1940 at Dunkirk, Plewman predicted that the Germans would strike at Paris within five days. He was close as the Germans did so on June 14. By the summer of 1940 Time magazine was acknowledging the author of War Reviewed: "Plewman is Canada's only first-rate public military analyst. His integrity is legendary"³². Often Plewman would be alone in his assessments. In late 1944 when many other military analysts stated that the Germans would not chance an offensive in the Ardennes because it was strategically wrong, he disagreed claiming that such an attack would be

psychologically appropriate for them. On December 16 the Germans launched Operation *Wacht Am Rhein*, soon known as the Battle of the Bulge. The fighting from this conflict resulted in over 160,000 casualties for both sides and pushed the American forces back over fifty miles.

Plewman's routine in preparing War Reviewed was very regimented and, amazingly, accomplished amidst the constant noise of the newsroom. At 8:45 a.m. he would sort out the hard facts from dozens of war related cables; by 10:00 a.m. he was writing; at 10:30 a.m. he had produced enough copy for the first edition; from 10:30 to 11:30 a.m. he proofread and reviewed more cables; by noon he was completing the column for the main edition at 12:30 p.m.; finally, at 1:00 p.m. he made his last revisions. For 1,815 publication days of war he not only adhered to this schedule but at the same time integrated into the column his own hand drawn maps with pincer movements and retreats. Once the Star's telegraph editor, James Kingsbury, jokingly asked Plewman if he maintained a set of toy soldiers at home. "He was not amused," Kingsbury commented.³³ When the Star honored Plewman in November 1945 for all his work, he was presented with twenty-four bound volumes of War Reviewed containing over 3,500,000 words!³⁴ It was estimated that in the ten years of the publishing this column, his work appeared over 3000 times.

As hostilities in Europe expanded into the Pacific with the attack of Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, Plewman's column became a source of information about the war for a wider variety of readers. In Toronto alone it was rumored that during the war over 30,000 Evening Telegram readers bought the afternoon Star each day just to read the War Reviewed column. Canadian troops were also interested in Plewman's analysis as men on

leave in London from the European front asked for back copies of the *War Reviewed*. Plewman's work was also kept on file in many army camps in Canada. According to Professor Maurice Careless, former chairman of the history department at University of Toronto, when the liner *Gripsholm* docked in New York in June 1944 with repatriated Canadian prisoners of war: "The first thing one of them wanted when we landed in New York was Plewman's column to see how the war was going".³⁵ Another unlikely source was German prisoners of war interred in Canada.³⁶ Even the US Army demonstrated an interest in *War Reviewed*. On October 1, 1942, Plewman received a letter at the *Star* from Major J.R. Bogue of the Eleventh Armored Division at Camp Polk, Louisiana. In part the letter read:

"The *War Reviewed* column was brought to my attention about six months ago and it has been eagerly received and carefully studied since that time. The subject matter of the column and some of the numerous charts accompanying it have been favorably discussed informally. Many of us marvel at your rich and accurate sources. Particularly is this true in regard to unit identification, strategical and tactical capabilities, and the deductions drawn there from... would you have available on a loan basis, any information concerning the organization, tactical employment, supply or training of a German Armored Corps? ... I appreciate that requests such as the above sometimes are a nuisance. In this case, however, considering the times, and the use to be made of such information, I feel that your interest and my interest might be one and the same."³⁷

However not all attention and reaction generated by *War Reviewed* was positive. At times Canadian government war censors clashed with Plewman over *War Reviewed*. They warned him that if he continued writing about Allied disasters, they might have to stop his column. When censors tried to prevent war correspondents from reporting that Germans had attacked Allied shipping "in a river", Plewman publicly defied the censors by stating that "the river" was the Thames.³⁸ Following Plewman's writing about the Norway fiasco in April 1940 and the subsequent fall of France, a Canadian veterans'

organization accused Plewman of being a Nazi and his wife of being German, and many Star subscribers in protest either cancelled their newspaper subscriptions or boycotted his column.³⁹ Commenting later on this backlash Plewman said:

“...some people couldn’t understand how I could write so cold- bloodedly and laconically about our defeats. What these people didn’t know is that I had to punish myself to write the material that the news dictated. I never believed we would lose the war. I regarded it as an incident in the age-long struggle between evil and good in which God Almighty couldn’t be neutral. That saved me from black pessimism.”⁴⁰

As an epilogue to his War Reviewed column, in 1951, together with Claribel, Plewman toured twenty-two European and Middle East capitals and major military bases and through a series of Star stories appraised the prospects of peace or effective defence against Communist expansion.

Following the war Plewman returned to editorial writing at the Star and began work on a book about Sir Adam Beck, the founder of Ontario Hydro. The lengthy (494 page) biography on Beck was published in June 1947. In the book’s forward, Plewman wrote:

“The author has been on guard against his own proneness to hero worship in order to show Beck the man as he really was and not one or the other mythical figures conjured up in the minds of extremists who idolized him as the peerless Paladin of the People, unblemished and unafraid, or hated him as a veritable fiend incarnate. He hopes that the public spirit shown by Adam Beck and the greatness of his sacrifices for the common good will be an example in patriotism not lost upon the youth of Canada and of other lands and that any of his personal failings revealed in this volume will be forgiven because of Adam Beck’s unsurpassed services.”⁴¹

In addition to the cause of publicly owned and inexpensive hydro, Plewman also supported the building of the St. Lawrence Seaway. As a result in 1954 he wrote a series of articles in the Star in a column titled Build It Now in which he campaigned vigorously

for the project. When the Seaway project was begun he stated: "It's like seeing a life's dream realized to see work starting on the St. Lawrence now."⁴²

On January 3, 1955, after more than fifty years with the Star, William Plewman retired. About his retirement he said: "It's a new life and I'll have to learn to live it...I may do a little writing on the side, but I haven't decided its character yet."⁴³ Then he offered an optimistic reflection:

"I have always believed in the ultimate triumph of good. Through two wars that belief sustained me. I believe the Almighty will never forsake his own; I don't believe He has left man to his own devices, and I think the Golden Age may be closer than most people think. In my opinion there is almost an even chance that the suicidal power of modern weapons will bring the era of war to an early end, if indeed that has not happened already."⁴⁴

Upon retirement Plewman continued to contribute to the Star as a book reviewer and foreign affairs commentator. As well, he maintained his volunteer work teaching Bible Classes at St. Clair United Church.⁴⁵ He lawn bowled at the Toronto Cricket and Skating Club and spent time at home on photography and his garden.⁴⁶ In June 1963, his second wife, Edith (Dafoe) passed away. They had been married five years during which they enjoyed international travel together. At the beginning of September 1963 Plewman entered Toronto General Hospital. He died a few weeks later, at 83, on September 24, 1963.

Endnotes

1. I would like to express my gratitude to the Toronto Daily Star and the members of the Plewman “family” who have helped me in the preparation of this article. I am especially grateful for the enthusiastic assistance and cooperation of George Plewman without whom this writing would not have been possible.
2. Claribel was the daughter of Horatio Hocken, the owner of the influential Orange Order paper, The Sentinel. Hocken would later become the mayor of Toronto (1912-1914) and a Senator.
3. Harkness, Ross. J.E. Atkinson of the Star. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963. p.219.
4. Elsie was born September 4, 1906; William, September 12, 1908; and Richard, July 27, 1916.
5. The Toronto Star, November 10, 1967.
6. The Toronto Star, September 24, 1963.
7. George Plewman, interview with author, 15 March 2005. Apparently in June 1914, William was participating in an election related temperance parade down Toronto’s Yonge Street when someone opposed to the demonstration threw a huge block of ice from a second floor window nearly breaking his back. As a result of this accident, he would later be refused into the Canadian Expeditionary Force on medical grounds when he volunteered for military service.
8. The Toronto Star, January 2, 1918.
9. According to the authoritative work on Canadian journalism by W. H. Kesterton: “Where the proprietor is also publisher, as in the case of single, non-chain newspapers, it is, of course possible for the owner to determine editorial policy in pretty direct fashion, even with regard to specific news stories and editorial comment.” Kesterton, W.H. A History of Journalism in Canada. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967, p.84. In 1919 all six Toronto were single, non-chain newspapers.
10. Richard Plewman, interview with author, 26 February 1972. Richard Plewman described his father’s sudden departure: “I remember my mother, all that she put together was a pair of shoes and a shirt, one pair of underwear; that was it because he was only going to go out there and be back tomorrow...he was shoved out of Toronto very quickly.”
11. In 1919 William ‘Main’ Johnson was a roving reporter for the Star. Starting on April 26 he had been traveling with and reporting on the sittings of the Mathers

Commission investigation into industrial unrest in Canada as the eight man delegation crossed the country from west to east. When the Winnipeg strike began on May 15, Johnson was covering the Mather's hearings in Sudbury. On orders from Atkinson he boarded the train and arrived in Winnipeg on May 18.

12. In 1919 John James Conklin was an editor with the Manitoba Free Press. Conklin did stringer (freelance) work for several Canadian daily papers during the strike including the Montreal Star, Vancouver Sun and Halifax Herald.
13. Charles Plewman, interview with author, 18 April 1972. Charles worked for the Winnipeg YMCA from 1917-1921.
14. This situation continued until the second week of June and accounts for Plewman's stories carrying the transmission point as Thief River Falls and Noyes, Minnesota from May 23 until June 9.
15. Plewman's reports were by-lined 'By W. R. Plewman'. It is worth noting that Plewman had apparently earned the right to his own by-line, a privilege rarely given Star reporters by Joseph Atkinson.
16. Richard Plewman, interview with author, 26 February 1972.
17. The Toronto Star, May 31, 1919. The Citizens' Committee of One Thousand was a volunteer group of Winnipeg's business and professional classes. It was organized along with its daily paper, the Citizen, to oppose the strike and its leaders. The Citizens' Committee also coordinated all volunteers for essential community services not provided because of the dispute.
18. The Toronto Star, June 12, 1919.
19. After the dismissal of Winnipeg's regular police force on June 9, the city hired over 1500 'special' police at six dollars per day for the duration of the strike. Many of the specials were unemployed returned soldiers.
20. The Citizens' Committee purposely kept secret all details of its operation, leadership and membership, including the names of reporters and editors of its paper, the Citizen
21. The Toronto Star, June 17, 1919.
22. Ibid.
23. The One Big Union or OBU was to be a giant industrial union including the entire labouring class. It was established by labour radicals at the Western Labor Conference, called the Calgary Conference, in March 1919

24. The Toronto Star, May 23, 1919.
25. The Toronto Star, June 16, 1919.
26. The Toronto Star, June 12, 1919.
27. The Toronto Star, May 27, 1919.
28. The Toronto Star, May 31, 1919. "During this same encounter between Norris and the returned veterans, Plewman reported an incident that showed the danger to newsmen who were perceived by some ex-servicemen as anti-strike: One man in the press gallery wore a Union Jack (to many an anti-strike symbol) on his coat. 'Take it off'. 'Take it off'. Cried the crowd. Finally one supposedly returned man jumped from the public gallery into the press gallery, 5 feet down and tussled with the flagwearer amid a hurricane of approval".
29. The Toronto Star, June 23, 1919.
30. Veteran Canadian journalist, George Ferguson, stated to the author in a March 6, 1972 letter: "The Toronto Star was in 1919 desperately fighting the predominant position of the Tely which had long been top-dog in Toronto (a fight the Star ultimately won, as you know). Special coverage of the strike was obviously one stage in that fight- and a damned sound one, at that."
31. The Toronto Star, September 1, 1939.
32. The Toronto Star, November 10, 1967.
33. The Toronto Star, November 9, 1967.
34. The Toronto Star, November 9, 1945. Over 250 friends, family members and colleagues attended this occasion honoring Plewman.
35. The Toronto Star, November 9, 1967.
36. The Toronto Star, September 28, 1963.
37. George Plewman interview with the author, 15 March 2005. Copy of the letter provided to the author by George Plewman.
38. The Toronto Star, September 28, 1963.
39. Ibid.
40. Ibid.

41. Plewman, W.R. Adam Beck and The Ontario Hydro Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1947.
42. The Toronto Star, January 3, 1955.
43. Ibid.
44. Ibid.
45. Plewman had previously taught at Bathurst Street United Church for forty years.
46. His first wife Claribel died in 1951 and he married Edith in 1958.

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