

The Wages of Relief

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Eric Strikwerda

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CITIES AND THE
UNEMPLOYED
IN PRAIRIE CANADA,
1929–39

Eric Strikwerda



Canadian Committee
on Labour History

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Eric Strikwerda

Edmonton

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Introduction

James Gray called them the “Winter Years.” They were “Ten Lost Years” for Barry Broadfoot.¹ For the Canadians who lived through them, they were the Dirty Thirties, the Dustbowl Decade, the Depression. It was a time when hundreds of thousands of ordinary Canadians were “up against it” and depended in large measure on government relief for their survival. It was also a time when cities and towns across Canada struggled under the yoke of local responsibility, that centuries-old convention that held local authorities accountable for providing relief to the poor.

For the first few years of the 1930s, responsibility for administering all aspects of urban unemployment relief fell primarily to city governments. As of 1933, however, senior levels of government began to assume a larger role in the development, administration, and oversight of relief

policy. The shift was signalled early that year by the federal government's effective assumption of responsibility for the single unemployed. In addition, the federal government refused to continue funding urban public works projects as unemployment relief measures. Such changes in federal policy relieved municipalities of considerable burdens. At the same time, they undermined the degree of control that city governments were able to exercise over relief policy, thereby depriving them of a means to survive the Depression on their own terms.

This book examines how three Prairie cities—Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg—met the challenges associated with administering and delivering relief to their unemployed residents before they were eventually obliged to give way to federal and provincial relief policies that increasingly marginalized their activities. While in many ways the concept of local responsibility imposed an onerous burden on city governments, it simultaneously afforded municipal officials, at least through the first few years of the 1930s, considerable latitude, enabling them to pursue relief policies designed to lessen what they believed were the Depression's more dangerous effects as well as to cope with the economic crisis more broadly. At the same time, their scope of operation was constrained by federal and provincial agencies, on the one hand, and, on the other, by local business and community interests and the unemployed themselves. Local responsibility, in other words, forced municipal governments to mediate between forces both inside and outside their borders. These forces served at once to hinder and help municipal relief administrators in their efforts to carry out their responsibilities to the urban unemployed, while at the same time safeguarding their primarily middle-class conceptions of social order and the capitalist status quo.

This delicate balance between inside and outside forces began to break down in 1933, in the face of a newly evolving national approach to unemployment relief. Imperceptibly at first, municipal administrations were caught up in larger policy trends that ushered them into the modern federal system of social welfare. In the process, city officials who had initially wielded considerable influence over the nature and character of their local relief systems saw that influence diminish. No single change in policy at the federal level produced this shift in the locus of

responsibility. Instead, it was a series of legislative acts and program initiatives that took relief policy out of local hands and brought it under federal control. More than anything, the shift was prompted by the federal government's recognition that the Depression was no short-term emergency—that, more so than anyone had imagined at its outset, the financial crisis was the product of much deeper, structural problems in the economy. Inevitably, then, the severity of the Depression, together with its longevity and seeming imperviousness to local solutions, culminated in greater federal control over welfare policy.

Despite the centrality of municipal unemployment relief to the Depression experience, however, historians writing on the 1930s in Canada have paid it relatively scant attention.² As earlier studies demonstrate, given its dependence on international investment and a healthy export market, the Canadian economy was especially vulnerable to the severe global economic crisis. When, after 1929, investment dried up and export markets dwindled rapidly, the Canadian economy came crashing down.³ Exacerbating this bleak situation was the Smoot-Hawley Tariff Act, passed by the American government in 1930, which further diminished Canada's access to crucial export markets in the United States.⁴ Later examinations of the Depression in Canada focus on the experience of ordinary Canadians, describing the hard times they endured in both urban and rural settings.⁵ While these studies provide a wide sweep of the Depression experience, none of them deal in any detail with important trends at the provincial level—where, according to historian James Struthers, relief was “more intimately connected with the lives of the poor than national social security policies aimed at the general population”—much less the municipal one.⁶ Finally, historical explorations of the Prairie West have tended to focus primarily either on the dustbowl, crop rust, and grasshopper disasters facing western farmers or on the emergence of new and important political entities, especially the Social Credit Party in Alberta and the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation (CCF).

In what follows, I build on previous studies, but I place the city at the centre rather than on the periphery of my analysis. This study is the first concentrated effort to explore the Depression experience principally from the perspective of municipal governments rather than that of the

business community, the unemployed, or religious charitable organizations. This perspective is important, not only because cities were on the front lines of administering and delivering unemployment relief but also because the role of city governments in the Depression experience is largely absent in the literature, beyond the recognition that they were saddled with a responsibility that they struggled to meet.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF WELFARE POLICY: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Over the past half century, historians and other social scientists have viewed the development of welfare policies through a variety of theoretical lenses. Ultimately, their investigations have centred on one basic question: What forces drive welfare policy? Scholars have used at least six theoretical frameworks to answer this question. The first, which we might call the functionalist approach, argues that welfare policies emerged as inevitable products of industrialization, urbanization, and the rise of the wage earner.⁷ Industrialization and urbanization, in this view, isolated wage earners from kin networks on which they once relied during periods of economic instability. At the same time, these two processes, working in tandem, generally produced wealth and a bureaucratic structure, allowing states both to finance and to administer welfare programs that could fulfill the function that kin networks once served. As James Struthers points out, the functionalist approach does much to reveal the shortcomings of earlier Whiggish analyses of the welfare state that cast welfare policies as the work of benevolent social reformers.⁸ The theory also explains the combination of state-funded unemployment relief and bureaucratic forms of welfare administration that emerged in Prairie cities well before the onset of the Depression. What it does not account for, however, is the persistence of kin networks that helped individuals and families survive Depression-related unemployment during the 1930s despite the existence of state-funded unemployment relief.⁹ Nor does it explain the variation in the welfare programs that have developed in states that

have undergone similar processes of industrialization, urbanization, and the creation of a wage-earning class.¹⁰ The functionalist approach, in other words, cannot account for the different welfare trajectories of, say, the American and Canadian states.

For some critics, a viable alternative to the functionalist approach involves the consideration of a state's political culture. Understanding the development of social welfare policy, these theorists argue, requires an approach that takes national (or even regional) peculiarities into account and emphasizes the uniqueness of particular political cultures. For political culture theorists like Louis Hartz and Gad Horowitz, specific national cultures, much more than structural economic changes, determined the character of welfare programs and regulated both the pace of their development and the extent of their reach into civil society.¹¹ For example, a comparison of the character of toryism versus liberalism, or of corporatism versus individualism, in Canada with the forebears of these ideologies and politico-economic orientations in Great Britain clearly offers an explanation for the difference in welfare policy in these two industrial states. But while the political culture approach shows why one nation or another produces welfare policies of a particular character, it lacks the specificity required to explain the precise timing of particular policies or the changes in policy over time.

In response to this critique, other theorists have proposed the idea that organized labour or other social forces push states toward enacting welfare legislation at critical moments. This approach, referred to as social democratic theory, accepts the idea of a dominant national culture but emphasizes the potential (or real) existence of competing "intranational" cultures. One expression of this theory argues that Prime Minister Mackenzie King's fear of a left jab from the CCF prompted his governing Liberals to enact social welfare legislation during the early 1940s to an extent they otherwise would not have.¹² At that time, according to this view, Canada's leftist political culture, as articulated by the CCF, faced off against the centrist or even conservative political culture of King's Liberals. At its simplest, social democratic theory reduces the development of welfare policies to a polarized confrontation between pro-labour groups on the one side and the business-friendly state on the other. In the

Canadian context, such a labour-centred approach tends to neglect the role of farming interests, whether in the CCF or in other farmer-labour collaborations across the Prairies and in Ontario throughout the 1920s and 1930s.¹³ In more complex forms, however, social democratic theory can incorporate many groups that band together in political coalitions or blocs to lobby for social welfare legislation.¹⁴

Social democratic theory, then, is useful in exploring, at the municipal level, the relationships between unemployment relief policies and the recipients of that relief, whether politically organized or not. Policy-makers fashioned relief policy with their understanding of recipients' needs in mind. And although I take the view that this understanding was often at odds with both the recipients' actual needs and their own sense of what they needed, the Depression nevertheless bound policy-maker and recipient together in intricate ways. The relationship between these two agents was, in other words, more of a contest, a give and take, than a polarized, pitched battle among differing economic and political interests. The Depression compelled both policy-makers and recipients to take account of one another and respond to, if not necessarily acquiesce to, each other's experience.

A fourth approach argues that capitalist forces initiate (or support) social welfare policies in order to exert control over workers. Marxists and neo-Marxists, for example, argue that, despite a political rhetoric of serving the poor, welfare programs have actually served big business. Such programs function more to maintain the capitalist order than to better the lives of citizens; welfare policies in fact control and regulate welfare recipients and legitimize state power. American social scientists Frances Fox Piven and Richard Cloward, in an early and influential exposition of this perspective, argue that seemingly progressive and benevolent state interventions, through measures such as the unemployment relief implemented during the 1930s, constitute little more than attempts to maintain social control over the working population during times of mass unemployment. In Piven and Cloward's view, the maintenance of social order depends in large measure on occupational stability. "So long as people are fixed in their work roles," they argue, "their activities and outlooks are also fixed; they do what they must and they think what they

must. Each behavior and attitude is shaped by the reward of a good harvest or the penalty of a bad one, by the factory paycheck or the danger of losing it.”¹⁵ During periods of economic stability, then, private industry employment controls civil behaviour and maintains civil order. During such periods, some unemployment is not only acceptable; it is desired. After all, there are few greater threats to a worker’s job security than a lean and hungry jobless population waiting on the fringes for its chance to replace the employed. During periods of economic instability and mass unemployment, however, such checks and controls on worker behaviour evaporate. Private industry’s promise of a paycheque disappears, and the lean and hungry become more the rule than the exception. “Without work,” Piven and Cloward contend, “people cannot conform to familial and communal roles; and if the dislocation is widespread, the legitimacy of the social order itself may come to be questioned.” Once that legitimacy is questioned, a palpable threat of civil disorder looms, a threat that “may even overturn the existing social and economic arrangements.”¹⁶

Because this book is concerned in part with the ways in which city policy-makers used relief policy to promote specific roles among married men and to discourage the negative behaviours that they associated with single men, I draw heavily on this perspective. Leaving aside for the moment how the unemployed themselves subverted and otherwise contested city relief policy, the picture that emerges out of the urban Prairie Depression experience is one of municipal government–designed relief policies that aimed to control unemployed workers. From the perspective of the policy-makers’ ideal, rather than that of the much messier reality replete with compromise and contestation from myriad quarters, the social control approach at least illuminates policy-makers’ assumptions that underlie welfare policy. But relief recipients, business interests, local media, women’s groups, citizens’ organizations, church leaders, organized unemployment groups, unions, and other social forces played a role at least equal to that of policy-makers in influencing how welfare policy played out. Incorporating recipients’ (and anyone else’s) resistance and agency into the story is essential to producing a sharper description of policy development. Without taking account of the diversity of voices contributing to welfare policy, the social control model risks falling into

the governing-and-governed dichotomy so characteristic of the more simplistic version of the social democratic approach.

Bureaucratic autonomy theorists such as Theda Skocpol take seriously the roles of governments and, especially, bureaucratic administrators in the formation of public policy generally and of welfare policy in particular. In this view, governments and their agents are active participants in the articulation, promotion, and administration of social policy goals and activities. But they are at once enabled and constrained by the political and institutional structures of the government of which they are a part.¹⁷ The bureaucratic autonomy approach also emphasizes the reliance of policy-makers on institutional memories of past efforts to carry out welfare practices. Specific welfare legislation or policies, then, are signposts on a long and interconnected roadway of previous welfare policy development. This perspective explains in large measure the persistence, and the sometimes extraordinary influence, of concepts dating back to the poor laws of the seventeenth century—the principles of less eligibility, local responsibility, and the work ethic, for example—on the relief policies that emerged in Prairie cities (and elsewhere) during the 1930s. The theory also highlights the crucial importance of understanding the mechanics of relief administration during the Depression.

One of the most recent approaches to understanding the development of welfare policy relies on a gender analysis. This framework has proven especially fruitful in illustrating both the assumptions that policy-makers held about the social roles that men and women should play and the effects of these assumptions on welfare policy. These gendered assumptions, principally reflecting a notion of male independence and female dependence, have permeated the activities of private groups and individuals, public institutions, and governments. In this analysis, Depression-era municipal unemployment relief emerges as a tool to promote both a particular gendered social order (patriarchy) and a particular economic order (capitalism).¹⁸

The concept of gender, of course, is as much about men and their experiences as it is about women and theirs.¹⁹ Beyond that, however, at its most powerful gender analysis considers gender as relational—that is, as something expressed in relationships between men and women, or even

among different groups of men or different groups of women.²⁰ Only in the very recent past have some Depression studies been devoted to the effects of unemployment and relief on men in particular. Historian Lara Campbell, for instance, explores how the Depression's economic and social instability affected the family, with a focus on masculinity and the family economy.²¹ Similarly, Cynthia Comacchio examines the Depression's effects on fathers and husbands, arguing that "men whose self-identity hinged on their provider status experienced unemployment and public assistance as personal failure and dishonour."²²

Early scholarly analyses of masculinity emphasized a virtually universal sense of manliness that informed men's actions. Men, in this view, were strong, vital, proud, risk-taking, aggressive. But while this conception might offer a broad, and somewhat vague, idea of what it meant to be a man, it does not represent the diversity of men's past or present experience. Masculinities, to use sociologist Robert Connell's very practical term, are historically diverse and continuously contested and redefined. They vary not only among different social groups (classes, ethnicities, sexualities, generations, regions, nations) but also among individuals of the same social group, and even within individuals themselves in different situations and at different times in their lives.²³ These variations notwithstanding, however, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, a man's sense of self-esteem came increasingly to depend on his ability to support his family by earning a wage.

THE IDEAL OF THE MALE BREADWINNER

By the interwar years, the male breadwinner ideal had long been in ascendance in the industrial world.²⁴ According to historians like Ivy Pinchbeck and, later, Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, economic changes brought about by the Industrial Revolution in Britain "promoted increased dependence on male wages and male wage earners."²⁵ But the male breadwinner ideal did not emerge fully born out of the Industrial Revolution. Instead, its rise to the status of conventional wisdom by the late nineteenth century occurred in fits and starts.²⁶

Historian Anna Clark proposes a three-stage process that, by the first decade of the twentieth century, had fully embedded the idea of the working-class breadwinner in British society. According to Clark, during the period between the introduction of the New Poor Law in Britain in 1834 and the 1850s, the main breadwinner role “was a rare privilege and onerous *responsibility*, not a *right* of working men.”²⁷ In the next two decades, policy-makers came to view the breadwinner role as a “reward ordinary working men should be able to earn by proving their respectability.” All working men, in other words, could attain the “respectable” status of maintaining and protecting their own families through their labour without having to rely on their wives’ or children’s labours outside the home. It was not until British trade unionists, fearful that women’s lower wages would undercut their own, agitated for (and, in 1911, won) the introduction of unemployment insurance that a new era emerged in which the main breadwinner role was neither a rare responsibility nor a reward for respectability. Instead, it had become a right that all working-class men should expect.²⁸

This did not mean, however, that women’s waged work and their contributions to the family economy declined sharply with the transition from a pre-industrial to an industrial economy. Instead, as Horrell and Humphries show, the decline in women’s participation in the waged market economy throughout the first half of the nineteenth century was “neither continuous nor uniform across occupational categories.”²⁹ Still, beginning as early as the mid-1800s, the idea of the independent male wage earner and the female dependent slowly became ever more fixed in both middle- and working-class society. By the 1930s, the role of the married man as the main breadwinner appears to have been firmly established.

The consequence for working women was an increasingly marginalized role in the workplace throughout the last half of the nineteenth century. But this process, too, was marked by fits and starts. In her examination of the idea of the family wage in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America, for instance, historian Martha May argues that, even as late as 1895, budget analysts, progressive reformers, and academics intent on discovering scientifically the true needs of poor

families routinely counted the earnings of all household members in their calculations of family incomes. They thus recognized the importance of multiple earners to family survival and exposed the fallacy of the notion that a male breadwinner alone could earn sufficient wages to support his family.³⁰ In the early twentieth century, however, social reformers had stopped including women's and children's contributions to the family economy. They were convinced that working women (and children under the age of fourteen or so) damaged the "family's psychological health and welfare."³¹ Every hour that a woman spent at work, reformers argued, was an hour spent not in contributing to her family's survival but rather in neglecting her children.³²

By the 1920s, especially in the growing urban centres, men (and most women as well) viewed the man's proper role as that of breadwinner, while woman's proper place was in the home, looking after children.³³ As men accepted the mantle of breadwinner, women were increasingly cast (by themselves as well as others) primarily as mothers. Among women, this belief represented a full-blown "maternalist" ideology that would have tremendous implications for the social understanding of welfare. Political scientist Theda Skocpol argues that in the United States, where a good deal of debate has emerged on the subject of welfare's gendered implications, women of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries succeeded in influencing, guiding, and even directing public agencies toward the development of a maternalist welfare state that benefited women and children.³⁴ Maternalism, historians Seth Koven and Sonya Michel suggest, was reflected in a welfare state that operated using "ideologies that exalted women's capacity to mother and extended to society as a whole the values of care, nurturance, and morality."³⁵ Historian Nancy Christie has arrived at similar conclusions about Canada. She argues that the decades leading to the Depression were marked by social welfare policies (especially mothers' allowances) more or less based on a maternalist discourse, emphasizing women's role as mothers and, at least in practice if not in words, recognizing women's contributions to the nation through their reproductive work.³⁶

But while this ideal was widely accepted, most Canadians found it difficult to live the reality of such sharply delineated and prescribed

gender roles. As late as 1929, on the eve of the Depression, Canadian women made up nearly 20 percent of the paid labour force.³⁷ And yet, as historian Veronica Strong-Boag argues, “women’s increased presence in the paid labour force and their enfranchisement in the political system in the 1920s and 1930s did almost nothing to change [the] fundamental allocation of duties” that saw women primarily responsible for domestic work and men for breadwinning.³⁸ Despite these prescribed roles, women who stayed out of the waged labour workforce contributed heavily to their families’ economic survival, performing much of the work associated with taking in boarders, producing goods like knitted clothing for sale, and providing paid services such as child care and laundry.³⁹ As historian Gerald Friesen points out, it was doubtful that, in Prairie cities, “one adult wage-earner could provide more than the bare minimum in food, clothing, and housing for a family.”⁴⁰ Yet even though the paid work of wives (as well as older children) was critical to the family’s survival in most working-class households, their contributions to the family economy were viewed as secondary, which allowed the male breadwinner ideal to remain untarnished. Whereas men were regarded as wage earners, women’s paid labour (taking in laundry, cleaning other people’s homes, and so on) was subsumed under the category of “domestic duties” and thus rendered invisible—while, of course, their unpaid household labour left their husbands free to go out to work. Ironically, then, the ideal of the male breadwinner was to a large extent an illusion sustained by the work, paid and unpaid, performed by women.

The onset of the Depression finally challenged the ideal of the male breadwinner. When increasing numbers of family men no longer earned a wage, the breadwinner ideal became ever more difficult to sustain.⁴¹ The Depression’s challenge to the model of the male breadwinner had far-reaching implications for many newly unemployed men and their families. Cynthia Comacchio argues that the economic and social upheaval associated with the Depression broke down traditional gender and work roles and saw many men assuming the position of “voluntary spectator” inside the unfamiliar routines of life at home. Even as employment of the sort traditional to men became almost impossible to find, “women’s work”—jobs that would have jeopardized a man’s

masculinity, such as domestic service, child care, waitressing, or working in textile mills—remained available. Turning gender roles on their heads, some wives and daughters thus left the home to work, replacing their husbands and fathers as the chief breadwinners in the process.⁴² “Since the very essence of masculinity was deeply tied to this notion of the male breadwinner and head of household,” political scientist Margaret Hillyard Little suggests, “it is no wonder that many men were deeply troubled by events beyond their control.”⁴³ Without doubt, the onset of the Depression ushered in an era of severe social anxieties about the role of men, especially those who were married, and their relation to their work (or lack of work), their families, and their society.⁴⁴

Unemployed men, as we shall see, attracted most of the attention of relief policy-makers during the 1930s. In city council chambers and relief offices, unemployed men, whether single or married, were the subjects of great anxiety and concern. Single unemployed men left to their own devices, relief officials believed, would congregate in cities and cause trouble—panhandling at residents’ back doors, organizing and participating in protest rallies, committing crimes, and otherwise engaging in negative behaviour that threatened relief policy-makers’ ideas of civil order. Married unemployed men were also troublesome, but city relief officials were less concerned about their potential danger to civil order than about the danger to social stability they represented. Left without work for too long and unable to provide for their families, relief officials believed, married men would become despondent, demoralized, and even emasculated. In the end, their inability to maintain their breadwinner role would upset “natural” gender dynamics and threaten the sanctity of society’s very bedrock: the family. In a society that placed great emphasis on prosperity and progress, stable growth, industriousness, and efficiency, the Depression and its related unemployment problems were an aberration, as were unemployed men themselves. But, especially in the early 1930s, their situation was a fact, aberrant or not, that municipal relief systems tried to address. Those relief systems did not, however, operate in a vacuum. Unemployment relief recipients, business interests, provincial officials, and the federal government asserted their own visions—sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory—compelling city

administrators either to face down these alternate visions or to adapt their relief policies accordingly.

THE NORTH AMERICAN CITY IN HISTORY

The main protagonists of this story are interwar-era urban dwellers. It is therefore appropriate to reflect, theoretically and historically, on the nature of the city during that period. Through the early years of the twentieth century, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg were part of a North American phenomenon that saw increasing numbers of people moving from the country to the city.⁴⁵ Indeed, cities on the Canadian Prairies were latecomers to a transformative process that stretched back to the mid-nineteenth century, when cities like New York, Boston, Chicago, St. Louis, and Cincinnati were emerging as the titans of political, economic, social, and cultural America.⁴⁶ The transformation of the continental landscape from rural to urban was, as elsewhere in the industrial world, slow and uneven. Some cities, such as New York and Boston, emerged early as important port towns benefiting from the wealth generated by the transport of overseas and inland goods. Slowly—with the introduction and growth of extensive transportation, communication, and financial networks—such cities were able to extend their metropolitan influence over a wider and wider hinterland. Other cities, Chicago in particular, exploited their geographic position on the Great Lakes and served as important trading hubs between the St. Lawrence system and the continental interior.⁴⁷ North of the border, Toronto, Montréal, and Hamilton had become cities of growing economic, political, and cultural import by the late nineteenth century.⁴⁸ Through the early years of the twentieth century, notes historian Donald Wetherell, the city “exerted a powerful influence as the creator, vanguard, and leader of cultural, social, and economic life in Canada.”⁴⁹

By the late 1800s (in the case of Winnipeg) and the early 1900s (for Edmonton and Saskatoon), Prairie cities had already developed complicated forms of bureaucracy.⁵⁰ Drawing on the experiences of older cities to the east, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg set up elected city

councils to represent urban ratepayers and mayors' offices and to serve (at least in theory) the cities' interests as a whole. In turn, the city halls directed squadrons of (primarily) men of specialized skills: a team of city planners headed by a chief engineer, a sanitation and waterworks department, a city solicitor to buy and sell debentures and draft city bylaws, a medical officer of health, a chief of police in charge of city constables and detectives, various inspections personnel, boards of education, fire and transportation departments, relief and welfare officers, city commissioners, and clerks. These bureaucratic forms provided municipal leaders with considerable control over the development of their cities. Urban historian Jonathan Teaford charts similar developments in the late nineteenth-century American context in his book *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870–1900*.⁵¹ He argues that early American cities were typically able to offer their middle-class residents a consistently high level of services. At the same time, he notes, the working class and the poor enjoyed relatively few benefits of those same services. Alan Artibise brings the story of urban development in the western Canadian context into the twentieth century, outlining how an early booster mentality slowly succumbed to a more corporate outlook as urban bureaucratic forms grew ever more solidified in western cities.⁵²

Yet despite their level of bureaucratic organization, the cities were in no better shape to deal with the severe economic and social problems thrust upon them by the Depression (and by the concept of local responsibility) than they had been as villages or towns in their earlier days. The revenue generation available to them consisted of little more than property taxes and the sales of debentures. As the Depression wore on, both sources of revenue dropped off precipitously. Increasingly, especially through the early Depression years, worthless properties reverted to the cities in lieu of taxes, and debentures grew ever more difficult to sell on the open market. Simply put, Prairie city administrations did not have enough money to carry both themselves and their unemployed residents through the economic and social crisis facing them.

Nevertheless, all of this urban development meant that “the city” began to take on important meanings in the minds of both urban dwellers and rural folk. On the one hand, the city represented wealth, power,

prestige, and sophistication. On the other hand, it epitomized vice, debauchery, danger (especially for young single women), and alienation.⁵³ By the 1920s, western Canadian urban centres shared these conflicting attributes, though to a much lesser extent, with larger and older metropolises elsewhere. The city, of course, was more than a collection of ideas or a set of representations. On the Canadian Prairies, as elsewhere, cities served as transportation nodes for the grain traffic produced on surrounding farms and destined for distant markets. They also functioned as marketplaces, offering diverse goods for sale, from agricultural implements to retail articles to professional and trades services. They were hubs of labour exchange, where farmers could secure seasonal harvesters and lumber companies could find workers. With their universities, orchestras and theatre companies, and government offices, they were educational and cultural and political centres. And, during the Depression, they were perceived as safe havens in which to wait out the economic storm.

It is no coincidence that the three cities under study here are all located east of the Rocky Mountains and west of the Lakehead. This book is premised on the assumption that regional peculiarities made the Depression experience in western Canada distinct from that in the rest of the country. For one thing, western cities were much more heavily dependent on surrounding agricultural production than were cities elsewhere in the country. When the farms failed, especially after 1932–33, Prairie cities suffered deeply. Compounding this dependence on agriculture was the fact that, by the late 1920s, these cities had a much smaller, less robust industrial base than other Canadian cities, especially in central Canada.⁵⁴ This meant that Prairie cities lacked the stabilizing potential of more diverse economies, such as those of Hamilton or Montréal or Toronto. In addition, the Depression lasted longer in the western part of the country. While the economic crisis began to abate in central Canada in 1933, the recovery in the West did not begin until after 1937.

Otherwise, is there anything especially distinctive about Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg? Did their policy-makers do anything unusual or innovative during the 1930s that would set these cities apart from other municipal centres of comparable size? In a word, no. In fact, relief policy-makers in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg drew on

widely held views and common assumptions about how best to deal with Depression-related unemployment. And while the Depression experiences of these three cities differed in certain respects from those of other urban centres in Canada, cities across the nation were operating under more or less the same provincial and federal governmental strictures with respect to relief funding, and cities everywhere laboured under the yoke of local responsibility. In this sense, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg serve as examples, yielding insights into how urban relief policy functioned more broadly.

I

The Rise of the City Relief Machines

In respect to each group in need of care—the family, the single man, the unemployed woman—smoothly running machinery appears to exist to . . . meet that need at a reasonable minimum compatible with health and decency.

“Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934”¹

It is spoken of as an efficient piece of machinery. The men think that efficiency is not everything. The electric chair is also an efficient piece of machinery.

Unemployed man from Edmonton, on the relief system, 1936²

The onset of what would come to be called the Great Depression compelled municipal authorities in cities like Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg to confront a series of unemployment-related challenges the likes of which they had not encountered before. Increasing numbers

of families sought relief from city offices and private charities, making heavier-than-normal demands on local soup kitchens and bread lines, and stretching the resources of city relief departments. And the small armies of single men migrating into western cities seeking—but not finding—work after the harvest season’s close only exacerbated the situation.³ With winter bearing down in the late autumn of 1929, municipal officials in cities across the Prairies grew increasingly anxious. It was too early to tell whether the emerging unemployment problem was the result of an extraordinarily bad seasonal downturn or evidence of a more chronic and structural cyclical business recession. The New York stock market crash in October certainly hinted at the latter, but the abrupt drop in key economic indices like the Dow Jones Industrial Average on the floor of the New York Stock Exchange seemed worlds away from three smallish cities on the Canadian prairies.⁴ Closer to home, and much more problematic in the immediate term, was a combination of what Gerald Friesen calls a “disappointingly small” wheat crop and a sharp decline in wheat prices on the world market. The former was related to a drought that began during the important summer growing months, and the latter to production outstripping demand and to a series of European domestic price supports, embargoes, and quotas on foreign cereal grains.⁵

Whatever the causes of the growing numbers of unemployed, Edmonton’s city council felt that the emerging crisis was serious enough to warrant a meeting with the provincial government, something the council had not requested since the early 1920s. The *Edmonton Bulletin* agreed that a conference on unemployment was necessary, especially given that autumn’s poor harvest. “It has been apparent ever since the crop situation developed,” the *Bulletin*’s editors averred in early December, “that the coming winter would find more than the usual number of men unable to get along in the slack season without some measure of help.”⁶ The mood in Saskatoon was similar. In late December, officials from that city travelled to Regina, the provincial capital, to discuss an unemployment relief strategy with provincial officials and representatives of Prince Albert and Regina.⁷ Even in Winnipeg, which was older and more economically diverse and stable, unemployment numbers were causing

much worry. The city struggled with an influx of what local officials later coldly called the “natural ‘backwash’ of idle farm labourers, and casual workers from Northern construction, lumbering, and mining camps.”⁸

This was certainly not the first time Prairie cities had faced recessions in their short histories; they had confronted similar situations just before the Great War and again through the early 1920s. Neither was mass unemployment an unknown phenomenon prior to the 1930s.⁹ Unemployment and its associated problems had been chronic features of Canada’s urban and industrial experience for decades.¹⁰ And western cities had had in place at least since the start of the century relief apparatuses to deal with poverty and unemployment. But the unemployment crisis looming over the winter of 1929–30 was of a different order. Prairie cities had never before faced an economic catastrophe so severe or a social dislocation so jarring.¹¹ In subsequent years, especially during the dark winter months, the crisis would only worsen. “In the history of the Province,” Manitoba officials remarked in mid-February 1932, “the problem had never been as great as it was during the winter of 1930–31. And it should be made clear here that the winter immediately passed was worse still.”¹² Brian McKillop points out that Winnipeg “was hit with a particular vengeance. . . . By the fall of 1930 wheat was being sold on the Liverpool market at the lowest price since the seventeenth century.” Nor was wheat the only commodity critical to Winnipeg’s wealth in real trouble by the early 1930s. “Tractor purchases in the prairie provinces,” McKillop notes, “declined from 14,557 in 1929 to 762 in 1933. The gross value of manufactured products in Winnipeg fell between 1929 and 1932 from \$109.3 million to \$56 million. Eatons’s mail order slumped from \$22,027,000 of business in 1930 to \$17,139,000 by 1932.”¹³ Historians Graham Taylor and Peter Baskerville distinguish the 1930s from earlier economic downturns this way: “What made the depression of the 1930s ‘great’ was not just its severity but also its long duration and seeming imperviousness to remedial action.”¹⁴

Relief officials in Winnipeg were quick to recognize this distinction, and especially its implications for the administration and delivery of relief. The Greater Winnipeg Welfare Association recalled of that city’s first encounter with the Depression, “It may be said at once that it very

soon became evident that the existing Welfare Agencies, including the Churches, were not equipped to care for the new situation.” The city’s churches and private agencies, the association continued, “functioned under normal conditions and more or less met the needs of those normal conditions,” aiding Winnipeg’s poor through seasonal downswings in the economy as well as deeper cyclical recessions. But the Depression was different. “We feel this distinction cannot be too clearly or forcibly drawn,” the association said. The vast amounts of public money for relief purposes demanded by the Depression simply “could not be entrusted to either the churches or the private relief agencies for administration.”¹⁵

In their stead, policy-makers in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg developed what officials in Winnipeg called “relief machinery”: ad hoc relief administrations designed exclusively to meet Depression-related unemployment problems.¹⁶ Their main functions were to coordinate unemployment relief financing arrangements with the provincial and federal governments; propose, organize, and carry out urban work relief programs; and deliver direct relief to unemployed victims of the Depression. They concentrated their efforts only on those urban residents affected by unemployment, leaving poor relief cases with causes unrelated to the Depression to other welfare bodies and private charitable organizations. Of course, lines separating the unemployment-related poor and the remaining poor were often blurred, but the policy-makers in charge of the city relief machines nevertheless struggled to maintain the distinction for at least two reasons. First, most city relief machine activities were funded jointly by the federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Keeping unemployment relief monies separate from other municipal spending made accounting easier and allowed cities to charge any unemployment-related relief spending to agreements with the more senior levels of government.¹⁷ Second, distinguishing between unemployment-related and other relief expenditures reflected municipal thinking about the difference between those who were poor because they could not find work and those who were poor because they could not work at all (for example, widows, orphans, the elderly, and the disabled).

The city relief machines would remain at the front lines of unemployment relief provision and administration until mid-decade, when

the federal and provincial governments would take a more active and direct role in the provision and delivery of relief. During their period of ascendance, roughly between 1930 and 1933, the city relief machines formed the most important and immediate connection between the state and the unemployed, enjoying relative policy autonomy from senior levels of governments yet encountering serious and complicated policy challenges from local business and community interests, as well as from the unemployed themselves.

THE EMERGENCE OF AN URBAN WEST

Edmonton graduated from town to city status on 8 October 1904. One month later, the new city of more than eight thousand people was ready to celebrate. The weight of the region's past was not lost on the party's planners: fastened to the walls of the Thistle curling rink, the city's largest structure and the site of the day's celebrations, were thousands of dollars' worth of furs—muskox, beaver, buffalo—recalling the great fur trade that had attracted Europeans far into the interior more than a century before.¹⁸ The furs were set off by yards of colourful and imperial red, blue, and white bunting, giving the room a festive, official feel. The main stage at one end had been set up to resemble a trapper's cabin, and off to one side stood what a *Calgary Daily Herald* reporter called an "Indian tepee," representing the Cree people who had once dominated the area.¹⁹ But the distinguished guests arriving for the banquet and the speeches—mostly business, religious, and political leaders—would not have missed the organizers' nod to the future: brought into the rink especially for the occasion was mayor and motorcar enthusiast William Short's automobile, one of the first in the city. It was an auspicious start for the small town with big city dreams.

Less than a year later, Prime Minister Laurier's administration created the new province of Alberta and—much to the dissatisfaction of Calgary, the rival city to the south—named Edmonton its capital city. Still, Edmonton in September 1905 looked much like it had as a town only two years before. Its sidewalks remained little more than wooden

planks that, in the words of one local historian, “rose and fell as they followed the surface of the ground.”²⁰ The constant horse traffic on the unpaved streets kicked up terrific dust on dry days and created terrible muck on wet ones. The winters were cold. Those strolling through the city’s downtown would have seen mostly wooden buildings with false fronts—livery and blacksmith shops, stores and saloons and pool halls, several hotels, and banks.²¹ There were a few brick buildings, like the McKay Avenue School and the new Windsor Hotel, but by and large, the city’s rough-hewn look easily betrayed its frontier town roots.

Great changes were afoot, however, as a steady stream, and soon a flowing river of settlers passed through Edmonton’s Dominion Lands Office to claim their homesteads.²² Many new arrivals chose to remain in town. Some found work at one of the city’s several coal mines, lumberyards, or brick works, or—especially after 1902, when the Edmonton, Yukon, and Pacific railways met up with the Calgary-Edmonton Railway and linked to the Canadian Pacific—loading and unloading goods and agricultural produce at the city’s bustling rail yards. In subsequent years, with the introduction to Edmonton of the Canadian Northern Railway in 1905 and the Grand Trunk Pacific in 1909, the city would enjoy the traffic of three important railways. Some newcomers took up jobs on the many building sites scattered throughout the city.²³ Others came intending to start small retail businesses; establish law, real estate, and contracting offices; or provide other professional services for the growing city.²⁴

The paths to Edmonton were many, and for some, like future mayor Charles May, they promised wealth and social mobility. Born in Wellington County, Ontario, in 1858, May travelled west to Manitoba at age twenty-two to farm in the northern part of the province. Some time later, he moved to Winnipeg, where he worked as a carpenter and builder. In 1902, perhaps drawn by the boom town’s reputation, he arrived in Edmonton, where he set up a successful building and contracting firm, winning tenders to construct numerous buildings that would become city landmarks, including Edmonton’s main post office, the first station for the Canadian National Railway, two bank buildings, and the residence of Frank Oliver, founder of the *Edmonton Bulletin* and federal minister of the Interior. New arrivals like May fit easily into an already

established elite that, like its counterparts in Saskatoon and Winnipeg, had been busy constructing an architecture of political, economic, and social dominance over the city through powerful local associations like the exclusive Edmonton Club, the Chamber of Commerce, and the city council.²⁵ Edmonton's urban elite joined what Gerald Friesen describes as "the several hundred entrepreneurs, financiers, merchants, and government and church leaders who 'set the tone' or established the rules in the new society. They took up where the preceding generation had left off, asserting the rule of law, the power of the church, the influence of the school lesson, and the inevitable correctness of British traditions."²⁶

The influx of workers through these early years would leave an equally important mark on the city.²⁷ Like Winnipeg before it, Edmonton developed an increasingly stark geographical division along class lines. Members of Edmonton's well-to-do business and professional classes secured the west end of town to build their homes. On the east side were the city's working-class neighbourhoods. Still further east, the small cottages turned into rooming houses and cheap hotels housing growing numbers of single young men recently arrived from Central Europe and Great Britain.²⁸ On a visit from Winnipeg, J. S. Woodsworth reported on one east-end home: "In one house ten by twelve by nine . . . eight people [were] sleeping, where by laws of sanitation there should have been three." In the basement of another house, Woodsworth found eighteen sleeping, "each man paying \$3 a month for the privilege."²⁹ In 1906, the city had few unions, but in August of that year, organizers from the Canadian Trades and Labour Congress and the American Federation of Labor arrived and urged workers to organize.³⁰ The organizers evidently met with some success: that September, Edmonton workers marched in the city's first Labour Day parade.³¹ At the end of the decade, more than half of the city's population was engaged in four discrete trades: building, manufacturing and mining, domestic and personal service, and transportation.³²

Edmonton's boom town experience also added new ethnic dimensions to the city. Some 5 percent of the population in 1906 called themselves Germanic, while a further 5 percent might, in the words of one historian, be divided into "Slavic or other east European extraction

. . . Scandinavians, Jews, East Asians, and Dutch.”³³ Another 5 percent were French. Still, even by 1906, Edmonton remained solidly dominated by Anglo-Celtic peoples who traced their origins either to Ontario or directly to Great Britain, making up no less than 85 percent of the city’s population.³⁴ By 1910, the situation had changed, as more immigrants had moved into the city. In that year, immigrants from Eastern Europe made up approximately 15 percent of the city’s population, and another 8 percent counted themselves of Germanic or Scandinavian origin. But Anglo-Saxons, at 70 percent, still made up the vast majority.³⁵ In 1912, when the cities of Strathcona and Edmonton amalgamated, the collected population jumped to fifty thousand. It had been a busy start for an ambitious town. In less than a decade, Edmonton’s population had increased sixfold, three important railways had entered the city, housing and business-related construction had become a near constant, and the city had been named both the provincial capital and the site of the provincial university, much to the chagrin of Calgarians.

Changes no less dramatic were occurring over the same period five hundred kilometres to the east in Saskatoon. By the second decade of the twentieth century, Saskatoon had emerged as one of five dominant metropolises on the Canadian Prairies. In rapid and dynamic succession, the small and wholly unremarkable Prairie hamlet of the 1890s progressed to a commercial, cultural, and educational centre of growing economic and political importance by the end of the Great War. Founded largely on Methodist and temperance principles, Saskatoon began as a rather unlikely attempt to create a utopian oasis of sobriety where, in the words of the settlement’s founder, John Neilson Lake, “alcoholic beverages shall not be sold.”³⁶ During the summer of 1882, a party of thirteen had left Toronto in search of a suitable townsite on a forty-two by eighteen mile rectangular tract of land set aside for the Temperance Colonization Society. After a long journey by rail, trail, and boat, the small group settled on a spot between the Métis settlement of Batoche to the north and a Sioux reserve to the south, and spread on either side of the South Saskatchewan River.³⁷ But the harsh winter of 1882–83 and the severe isolation of the frontier hindered any real initial growth, despite the group’s best intentions. The small colony even abandoned its Methodist

and temperance principles, but this was largely because the members of the Temperance Colonization Society could not legally restrict access to the settlement to those sharing their beliefs.³⁸

It was not until 1890—when the Qu’Appelle, Long Lake, and Saskatchewan Railway and Steamboat Company built a branch line through Saskatoon connecting central Saskatchewan with the main Canadian Pacific Railway line at Regina—that the fledgling community had a sound basis for future growth and development. The railway eased the isolation of the frontier and offered a strong and necessary sense of connection with the rest of the young Dominion. Thereafter, the railway transformed Saskatoon into a shipping point for the emerging cattle range industry and a terminus for agricultural goods from the Battleford district to the west.³⁹ Saskatoon also functioned as a distribution centre for agricultural implements necessary for grain production in the surrounding area. In short, the coming of the railway, the development of an agricultural market, and, after 1907, the establishment of the provincial university ensured Saskatoon’s continued development and growth.⁴⁰

Although much smaller than the four other Prairie urban centres at the turn of the century, Saskatoon’s population grew from 113 in 1901 to an astonishing 25,739 only twenty years later, making it the seventeenth-largest city in Canada. Saskatoon’s net assessment value, a negligible \$2.5 million in 1906, stood at more than \$56 million by 1913.⁴¹ The city’s revenue jumped from \$226,000 in 1910 to more than \$927,000 only twelve years later.⁴² As remarkable as those numbers are, however, they hardly capture the sense of excitement, optimism, and frontier spirit of Saskatoon’s first decades. The wild dreams and visions of grandeur even led some commentators to count Saskatoon among the “great families of Western cities.” Saskatoon was unabashedly placed in the company of Cincinnati, St. Louis, Chicago, Minneapolis, and Winnipeg.⁴³ Nothing seemed out of reach; anything seemed possible.

Saskatoon’s boosters, that small core of local elite whose fortunes were tied to the city’s economic success, channelled that optimism into attracting large-scale immigration and investment. Manifested in a mad and fantastic real estate boom, the booster strategy contributed to a wave of unprecedented growth. A dealer from one of Saskatoon’s 267 real



Figure 1. A view of Saskatoon, 1902. Like other frontier towns in the West, Saskatoon at the turn of the twentieth century looked more like a movie set than a city. This would soon change as a flood of immigrants poured into the Canadian Prairies and transformed the region. City of Saskatoon Archives, 2011-181.

estate firms described the boom as a time when “you could sell anything anywhere to anyone at any price.”⁴⁴ Prosperity had finally descended on the Canadian Prairies, and western cities like Saskatoon and Edmonton benefited tremendously. By some accounts, land purchased for \$300 a front foot in 1909 sold for more than \$1,700 a front foot only three years later. Serious money could be made, often in the space of months, sometimes in mere days.⁴⁵ And serious money drew serious investment, not to mention large-scale immigration. The local elites’ relentless pursuit of “big city” status and the corresponding economic benefits drove Saskatoon toward incorporation (in 1906), significant boundary extensions, massive infrastructure works, and, of course, deficit financing.⁴⁶ The latter would return to haunt the city when the good times went sour just before World War I.



Figure 2. Bustling 21st Street, in Saskatoon’s emerging business district, 1912. By the second decade of the twentieth century, Prairie urban centres like Saskatoon had evolved into powerful economic, political, and social hubs. City of Saskatoon Archives, 2011-181.

Despite the immense capital investment, the increased borrowing power that came with city status, and the waves of immigrants pouring into cities like Edmonton and Saskatoon during the boom years, the cities accrued cumbersome debts, which were mostly the result of massive, though necessary, infrastructure works. Saskatoon’s per capita general debenture debt reached \$290 by 1917, the third highest in the country after Regina and Vancouver. Adding insult to the injurious climbing debt was Saskatoon’s steadily decreasing revenue flow after the boom ended in 1913. The collection of property taxes, one of the few means of revenue generation open to the city government, was increasingly replaced by the collection of properties in lieu of taxes from bankrupt property owners. In 1917, the city recorded a deficit, and it continued to do so intermittently for the next twenty years. In an

effort to counteract the debilitating loss of revenue, the city administration could do little but raise local property taxes.⁴⁷ Similar troubles emerged in Edmonton. In March 1914, the city's treasurer reported that \$1 million of the previous year's taxes had not been collected. Added to this was an additional \$250,000 in taxes that had failed to materialize over the past few years.⁴⁸ Yet the city's population continued to grow astronomically—from fifty thousand in 1912 to more than seventy-two thousand two years later, with corresponding investments in essential infrastructure and services.⁴⁹

Through this early period, Winnipeg was, in the words of Gerald Friesen, “the first city of the prairies.” It was, of course, the region's first urban centre, formed in 1870, but it was also first among all other Prairie urban centres in that it was the largest and most economically and politically important in the region. It would remain so until at least the mid-1900s, when the young upstarts, Edmonton and Calgary, surpassed Winnipeg in importance. But such an unhappy future would have been inconceivable to Winnipeggers of the late nineteenth century, when Winnipeg's star was rising. The city's population in 1891 was a commanding twenty-six thousand, more than six times that of Calgary, the nearest Prairie rival with a mere four thousand residents. The Canadian Pacific Railway passed through the city in 1881, remaking Winnipeg almost overnight into Canada's “gateway city”; indeed, the city was well on its way to becoming the “Chicago of the North.” By the end of the century, the tracks of other railways and branch lines converged in Winnipeg from all directions, among them the Canadian Northern, the Grand Trunk Pacific, the Midland, and Colonization branches. The railways established rail yards and shops, offering employment to the thousands of new arrivals to the city, including Britain- and Ontario-born Anglo-Saxons, Poles, Galicians, Jews, Germans, and Scandinavians.⁵⁰ By 1890, historian Jim Silver observes, “the city had become the headquarters of the Canadian grain trade, and had developed a sophisticated system of financial institutions.”⁵¹ By the turn of the century, Winnipeg had firmly established itself as an important economic, political, and even social centre. Most of the grain and cattle produced in the West passed through Winnipeg (and after 1899, all grain inspection in Winnipeg was made compulsory),

enhancing immeasurably the city's general wealth and prestige. In 1902, more wheat passed through Winnipeg than through Chicago.⁵²

Much more so than in either Edmonton or Saskatoon, Winnipeg's urban geography developed early along class and ethnic lines. In the city's north end lived Winnipeg's poor, where, as Gerald Friesen notes, "poor Jewish, Icelandic, and British immigrants with few or no skills to sell on the labour market lived in . . . shabby dwellings and endured such slights from the better elements as the suggestion that they fostered a 'Shanty Nuisance' and that their area was 'attaining an unenviable notoriety in police circles as the resort of criminals and half-breed prostitutes.'"⁵³ To the west stood the "modest frame houses of the respectable, but not wealthy citizens."⁵⁴ For the most part, these were many of the same Winnipeegers who would have viewed the Diamond Jubilee in 1897 as an opportunity to confirm and celebrate their allegiance to "their traditional cultural sentiments, centred in the British nation, the monarchy, and the empire" in the face of the north end's changing character.⁵⁵

The Prairies' second boom, roughly between the turn of the century and 1913, did not transform Winnipeg so much as continue the solid economic growth that had been evident since the 1880s. For the Winnipeg elite, the brief recession of the 1890s represented little more than a minor stumbling block. "The years of the great western boom," writes W. L. Morton, "saw Winnipeg rise to metropolitan stature, and realize in large part the aspirations of its founders." Building contracts in 1907 stood at \$12 million.⁵⁶ In 1910, Winnipeg's Development and Industrial Bureau reported that the city had 236 factories employing more than fourteen thousand people and producing some \$36 million worth of goods.⁵⁷ Two years later, city officials proudly called Winnipeg "the chief distributing, industrial, and financial city of the Canadian West."⁵⁸ But not all Winnipeegers shared in the wealth produced by the city's growth through these years. James Shaver Woodsworth's All People's Mission reported in 1909, for instance, that it had had "an unprecedented number of appeals for employment and clothing . . . which have not ceased yet, men still being unable to obtain work which yields enough to support their families."⁵⁹

When the boom finally ended in 1913, the dominance of at least five urban centres on the Prairies had been established. Winnipeg was a growing metropolis, while Edmonton and Calgary, in Alberta, and Saskatoon and Regina, in Saskatchewan, no longer viewed smaller Prairie centres as rivals, as they had at the turn of the century. The development of railways, the influx of newcomers and capital, and the growth of urban services such as sanitation and sewage systems, electricity, and other infrastructure in large measure illustrated their economic and political importance to the region. Increasingly too, beginning in the 1920s, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg looked northward for economic diversification opportunities and new markets.⁶⁰

THE IDEA OF UNEMPLOYMENT

The history of unemployment, it might be said, is the history of efforts to understand and define it. There have always been people who have been without work for a period of time, although, until quite recently, such people have not generally been deemed “unemployed.” Instead, as John Garraty explains, they were simply understood to be idle.⁶¹ Medieval serfs may have lived in extreme poverty and may have been without work during the winter, but they could not be considered unemployed in any modern sense. Their paternalistic relationship with the lord of the manor meant that they could not leave their work on the land of their own free will, nor could the lord dismiss them from the land they worked. Neither did artisans in medieval towns commonly experience anything approaching unemployment in the modern sense. They had, by the thirteenth century, organized themselves into guilds that at once protected them from want and regulated entry into their trades so as to ensure that all members had sufficient work.⁶² Even those on the margins of medieval society, who survived by whatever means they could, were described as beggars, outlaws, or vagabonds, not as unemployed. To the medieval mind, the “unemployed” simply could not exist, for according to the medieval world view, as Garraty points out, “work was available for all who would labor.”⁶³

Later, especially during the seventeenth century, more and more people in Europe fell idle despite the enormous wealth generated by mostly European exploitation of colonial resources abroad. This increasing lack of work had several causes. First, the population was growing, putting heavy stress on food resources. Second, a series of devastating crop failures plagued the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, exacerbating the food crises and driving many to seek refuge in the cities and towns.⁶⁴ Finally, those two centuries were marked by long, brutal, and costly wars, causing tremendous social dislocation and widespread poverty. Yet despite the growing poverty and the steadily increasing numbers of idle beggars, vagrants, and vagabonds roaming across continental Europe and Great Britain, the concept of unemployment as we understand it today had not yet formed. After all, in such an age of empire, the problem was believed to be not a lack of available work but rather a lack of willingness to work. If some people could not find work where they lived, they could do so in the colonies, aboard naval ships, or, increasingly through the late sixteenth and into the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, inside the newly conceived houses of industry.⁶⁵

Rather than being understood in terms of unemployment, people without work were seen through the lens of poverty. Poverty, in turn, was seen as a consequence of the bad habits and practices of the poor, not of problems in the larger economic and national structures that caused people to lose their jobs and become poor as a result. Thus, following the introduction of the Elizabethan Poor Laws in 1601, the idea that the able-bodied poor should learn the virtues of thrift and self-sufficiency through sober hard work gained ground. The learning of such virtues, many believed, would single-handedly solve the problem of poverty.⁶⁶

Not until the end of the eighteenth century, however, did anything approximating a modern conception of unemployment emerge. Slowly, the idea that famine and wars and larger structural economic problems, rather than a lack of industry, lay behind people's inability to find work began to take root. Still, the concept of unemployment was understood much more literally in the early nineteenth century than it was a century later by the policy-makers of the 1930s. Prior to the 1850s, notes American historian Alexander Keyssar, the unemployed

were still seen as “those who were simply ‘not employed,’ who were idle or not working.”⁶⁷ This literal definition cast a wide net that included anyone, even children, without work, regardless of the reason. In the decades following the 1850s, and especially during the years after the depression of 1873, a distinction between two types of unemployed persons began to emerge: the voluntarily unemployed, whose ranks included “the sick and incompetent, the thriftless, the lazy and vicious, the willing paupers and the professional beggars,” and the involuntarily unemployed, who were “idle from no fault of their own.”⁶⁸ Reflecting this shift, in 1878, the influential American statistician Carroll D. Wright limited the definition of the unemployed to those “out of work and seeking it.” For the Massachusetts Bureau of Statistics and Labor, which Wright led, the unemployed were “those who had occupations but did not have jobs.” Wright’s instructions to local officials charged with determining unemployment rates in their districts were even more explicit, advising enumerators to count as unemployed only able-bodied adults “who really want employment.”⁶⁹ Thus, by 1900, Keyssar concludes, in both England and the United States (and undoubtedly Canada as well), “men and women who were jobless and in need of work were routinely described as unemployed.”⁷⁰

At the root of this new, narrower definition of unemployment were two interrelated shifts in the economic structure of the Western world. The first was the development of industrial urbanization, especially during the latter half of the nineteenth century, which gave rise to a much larger, more pronounced and concentrated working-class population than had hitherto existed. These were people largely dependent on wages for their survival, and the threat of losing their jobs entirely—particularly during times of illness, economic hardship, and recession—raised the spectre of unemployment more starkly than ever before. The second economic shift was the financial panic and ensuing depression of 1873, which in turn laid bare the reality of mass industrial unemployment and raised the equally devastating spectre of social dislocation and disorder. Efforts to minimize the damage caused by unemployment led to the development of policies to address the problem, and policy-makers began for the first time to distinguish between poverty caused by

industrial unemployment and other types of poverty, such as that among the infirm and the aged and among widows and orphans.

By the 1930s, then, urban relief policy-makers on the Prairies had a rich reservoir of thinking and acting on unemployment on which to draw. The distinctions between the voluntarily and the involuntarily unemployed and between poor people who were unable to work and those who could work but were unable to find jobs were already well established by the time the Great Depression began.

UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF BEFORE 1929

By the onset of the Depression, relief of the poor in Canada had long been considered a local responsibility, both by legislation found in most cities' acts of incorporation and by convention dating back at least to Britain's earliest Poor Laws.⁷¹ Canadian city governments, therefore, stood on the front lines of providing for the care and maintenance of those residents who, for a variety of reasons, found themselves without work or could not support themselves. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century in Canada, much of this early welfare provision took the form of what sociologist Mariana Valverde calls the "mixed social economy."⁷² The idea of the mixed social economy stands in contrast to earlier historical characterizations of the welfare state's development that described how privately organized and administered welfare practices prevalent in the nineteenth century "were slowly but surely left behind in the historical dust as 'the welfare state' rose in majestic splendour."⁷³ Valverde and others tell a more complicated story, one in which the public and the private were inextricably linked and where lines between state and non-state efforts to administer relief to the poor were blurred. Beginning in the mid-1870s, Valverde argues, Ontario funnelled financial support to private welfare bodies, including churches, and extensively regulated privately managed welfare services. Thus, the history of welfare provision is a history of the relationships forged between the state and civil society rather than of the latter abruptly being succeeded by the former. It is also a history in which the rhetoric suggesting that

“virtually all social services, from poor relief to orphanages, were privately funded and operated” did not match the reality. State financing and regulation—but not outright control—of private charities allowed governments to maintain the illusion of what Valverde calls a “self-sufficient civil society of hardy pioneers and charitable philanthropists” without having to establish costly “legislative machinery” (as a contemporary writer for the *Toronto Globe* put it) to administer relief to the province’s poor.⁷⁴

On the Prairies, municipal welfare efforts, much like private charities in Ontario, received financial support from provincial governments, particularly in times of recession. Presumably, this arrangement was made to allow provincial authorities in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba to escape having to establish expensive and precedent-setting relief administrations of their own. Well before the onset of the Depression, therefore, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg had in place welfare administrations designed to fulfill their responsibilities to the local needy while receiving contributions from the federal and provincial governments. The development of these cities’ welfare services followed two main paths, each highly gendered: the first dealt almost exclusively with women and their dependent children, while the second dealt entirely with male breadwinners.

The first path handled what Edmonton’s relief officer described as “ordinary indigents” covered under the various Town Acts, Mothers’ Allowances, Neglected Children’s Aid programs, and old age pensions.⁷⁵ Among the earliest expressions of this sort of relief in Edmonton was the Women’s Hospital Aid Society, operating from the 1890s and staffed exclusively by volunteers.⁷⁶ Edmonton’s chronically poor were looked after by other voluntary private aid societies, including the Salvation Army, the Beulah Mission Home, and the Bethphage Home. The city government generally provided these organizations with small grants. By 1912, Edmonton boasted its own Civic Relief Department providing food, accommodation, medical care, and burial services to the poor.⁷⁷

In Winnipeg, the city for which the most complete “ordinary indigent” records are available, the city council employed a city relief officer, who provided “public assistance to citizens in their own homes” until

1908.⁷⁸ The position was filled by a civil servant who had no formal training in professional social work techniques, and, according to an unemployment relief report produced in 1934, his work was carried out “in much the same more or less spasmodic and inadequate way as prevailed in most other large centres.” In 1908, in response to what was perceived as a disorganized and haphazardly applied system of relief, Winnipeg’s mayor, James Henry Ashdown, called for plans to develop a more rigorous and centrally organized relief system that would avoid overlapping of services and would “meet the needs of applicants more adequately.” The Associated Charities, organized shortly thereafter, was designed to meet these goals. Consisting of representatives from the city’s thirty-three charitable organizations, the mayor, the police magistrate, the relief and health officers, the school inspector, the commissioner of immigration, and the inspector of public institutions, the organization “assumed the responsibility of supplementing city relief from funds donated by interested citizens.”⁷⁹ It investigated all applications for city relief, established a city wood yard as a work test, and requisitioned from the municipal government any food and fuel it needed to carry out its responsibilities. But much like Winnipeg’s first city relief officer, the Associated Charities was directed and run largely by civil servants with no training in professional social work.

Gradually, the City of Winnipeg assumed more control over relief administration. By 1917, what had been the Associated Charities, now renamed the Social Welfare Commission, was financed entirely by the city. City Bylaw 9642, which brought the new commission into being, placed in the hands of a board consisting of eight aldermen and six citizens the responsibility for investigation, case management, mothers’ allowances, and the establishment of residence requirements for patients in public hospitals. Those charged with operating the new commission were plainly a mix of public servants, politicians, and citizens with no formal training in social work practices. Nevertheless, by 1917, Winnipeg could boast that it had “developed the most extensive public social welfare division in the Dominion.” Operating alongside (though entirely independent of) the new public system were myriad privately run organizations, including the Home Welfare Association, the Personal Service

League, district community centres, Goodwill Industries, lodges, fraternal societies, veterans' and military organizations, service clubs, and most of the city's religious denominations. But there was no longer a centralized and organized private unit through which all charities passed. The result, according to Winnipeg welfare officials, explained "the diversity, and the largely unrelated activities of private relief and of 'friendly visiting' of various types."⁸⁰ Sources for the history of welfare in Edmonton and Saskatoon are less complete, but both cities, by the second decade of the twentieth century, had developed relief departments organized and run by the city commissioners.⁸¹

While the first welfare path dealt solely with relief that was unrelated to unemployment—that is, looking after poor people who could not (or were not expected to) work—the second path dealt with the poverty caused by unemployment related to recurring, cyclical recessions and to seasonal work. Both types of unemployment were typically addressed through special ad hoc unemployment relief programs that emerged in response to short-term emergency situations and were disbanded when city officials decided the emergency had passed. The relief work given to the urban unemployed was small scale (cutting wood, breaking stones, cutting ice at the river, and so on) and was funded through tripartite arrangements among the municipal, provincial, and federal governments. It offered minimal aid to unemployed city residents in need and endeavoured to maintain the work ethic by requiring some form of labour in exchange for aid. In addition, it sought to avoid welfare dependence by employing the principle of "less eligibility." First articulated in Britain's Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, this principle sought to ensure that the living conditions of someone on relief would be less desirable (less "eligible") than those of someone working in even the lowest-paying private sector job, the assumption being that this would deter the able-bodied from applying for relief. Similar principles were later relied on by municipal relief officials in the autumn of 1929, and all of these early features of emergency unemployment relief persisted into the 1930s.

As the First World War drew to a close, the recession of 1913, which had been delayed by wartime production, reasserted itself and led to

the re-emergence of unemployment problems in Canadian cities. The steady immigration that had swelled the populations of Prairie cities through the first decade of the century translated into increased competition for fewer jobs after the war. At the same time, thousands of war veterans, whose travel fares to anywhere in the country were paid for by the Dominion government as part of a soldier resettlement program, descended on Canadian cities.⁸² Not only did the soldiers' return exacerbate municipal unemployment problems and increase competition for already scarce jobs, but it also made social stability as tenuous as economic stability. "Telegrams poured into Ottawa from the nation's largest cities," notes James Struthers, "warning of dangerous levels of unrest among returned men."⁸³ The men, municipal authorities emphasized, needed somewhere to go. And that somewhere was preferably not their cities.

The Dominion government's response was the creation in 1918 of the Employment Service of Canada (ESC), described by historian Udo Sautter as "a national network of labour exchanges jointly financed and administered by the federal and provincial governments." With the war still going strong in Europe, the ESC's first priority, in the spring of 1918, was to address agricultural workforce shortages by arranging for returned men to work on farms. As Sautter argues, the ESC worked for a "more efficient use of manpower and ultimately as a means to prevent potential, and to fight real, public unrest."⁸⁴ By November, the rapid demobilization of soldiers transformed the ESC's mandate from placing men where there were labour shortages to lessening unemployment. The ESC, then, aimed not only to help employers find an adequate labour supply but also to assist "the job seeking individual [who] had to fend for himself in an anonymous market whose dominating forces he was ill-put to understand and with whose intricacies he was not able to cope."⁸⁵ Despite these Dominion-wide efforts at rationalizing the labour market for the benefit of both employers and workers (by 1919, according to Struthers, there were eighty-eight employment offices across the country), responsibility for unemployment relief remained in municipal hands.⁸⁶ As the nation slid into recession, showing alarmingly high unemployment rates by the winter of 1920, the ESC lost much of its relevance. Through its

labour exchanges and employment offices, it could bring employers who needed workers and workers who needed jobs together, but it could not create new jobs. By February 1921, roughly a quarter of a million men were unemployed, representing 12 percent of the labour force.⁸⁷

Through the recession of the early 1920s, city officials in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg recognized an emerging unemployment problem caused by generally depressed conditions. That recession offers a useful illustration of how relief officials responded to unemployment before the Depression. In Winnipeg, authorities established a special Emergency Unemployment Relief Office staffed by ten people: a superintendent, four clerks, and five investigators who issued meal tickets, arranged for work at the city's wood yard, and provided sleeping accommodation at the city's Immigration Hall.⁸⁸ The staff members, mostly drawn from the ranks of the unemployed, were not experienced welfare workers. Still, according to Winnipeg's emergency relief superintendent in 1922, they "showed exceptional tact and ability and an utter disregard for what constituted a working day," working long hard hours processing as many as five hundred applicants per day. By the end of May 1922, when Winnipeg's emergency relief scheme ended, it had helped 12,680 men, women, and children.⁸⁹ As in Edmonton and Saskatoon, however, Winnipeg's emergency relief schemes operated only between November and May of any year in which policy-makers perceived an unemployment problem. This meant that whatever limited unemployment relief the jobless might access during the winter months became unavailable between May and October, mainly because policy-makers assumed that those unable to find work in the winter could easily find it on surrounding farms during the summer and autumn months.

The urban emergency relief measures clearly emphasized the work ethic. Saskatoon, for instance, made arrangements with the federal and provincial governments to provide \$4,500 worth of relief work over the winter of 1920–21.⁹⁰ Unemployed men laboured at such jobs as street sweeping, snow shovelling, brush work, and infrastructure repairs supervised by the city's engineering department. Winnipeg required unemployed men to work for their relief at the city's wood yard, quarries, sewers, pipelines, and street commissioner's department.⁹¹ During

the much more severe winter of 1921–22, Edmonton, with the help of the provincial and federal governments, made nearly \$45,000 worth of work relief available to some 450 unemployed men.⁹² Edmonton's unemployment relief body, the Public Welfare Board, comprised one municipal alderman, a provincial member of the legislative assembly, and two prominent citizens. Through its years of operation, dating at least as far back as before the Great War and lasting into the early 1920s, the board oversaw the movement of single men to lumber camps during the late autumn and winter, received delegations of unemployed groups bearing complaints, and coordinated public works relief with the city's engineering department.

The insistence on exchanging work for relief was not new. As we have seen, its roots stretch back to the development of workhouses and houses of industry in Britain beginning in the seventeenth century. Work relief would, many believed, discourage people from seeking aid if they could get along without it. This was most evident in the principle of "less eligibility," which would reverberate through subsequent decades, right down to the eve of the Depression.⁹³ As the British Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834 stated, the "first and most essential" characteristic of all relief provided to the able-bodied was to ensure that their "situation on the whole shall not be made really or apparently so eligible as the situation of the independent labourer of the lowest class."⁹⁴ Work relief would also, it was thought, ward off the moral degeneration that many believed resulted from poverty and shiftless behaviour. A corresponding belief was that relief actually contributed to pauperism. As British historian Lynn MacKay writes of poor relief in early nineteenth-century Britain, "Many in the upper classes believed that it undermined initiative and the willingness to work hard, that it bred dependency, and that these moral failings were largely the cause of the ever-escalating levels of poor relief."⁹⁵ These ideas remained largely unchanged more than one hundred years later. "The method of relief without work has had a damning effect upon men who have come under my personal and intimate knowledge," Winnipeg's emergency relief superintendent warned in May 1922. "There is distinctly evident a complete change in the attitude of those applying for relief. During the past three years, this

has developed from bashful inquiry, to confident expectation, and finally to belligerent demand with the avowed intention on the part of a too large minority to secure, by misrepresentation if necessary, every possible nickel's worth of relief.⁹⁶

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND ITS PREDECESSORS

In the second half of the 1920s, with the return of moderate prosperity, seasonal emergency unemployment relief largely disappeared from Prairie cities. It was not until the early winter of 1929–30 that these urban centres once again faced emerging unemployment problems. The severity of the Great Depression set it apart from previous recessions. In Winnipeg alone, relief schemes from the early 1920s typically aided twelve thousand people over the course of an entire winter. In the early 1930s, that city aided more than three times that number over the course of just one month.⁹⁷ Just as dramatic was the rise in relief cases from 1928 (a non-recession year) to 1929. In Saskatoon, for example, twice as many families sought relief in December 1929 as had during the same month one year before.⁹⁸ Furthermore, the recorded number of families on relief often disguised a much larger unemployment problem simmering just below the surface. Saskatoon's chief engineer, for example, warned the city commissioner on 24 December 1929 that many more families were facing hard times but had not yet applied for relief.⁹⁹ With at least four months of winter ahead, the unemployment situation seemed unlikely to improve before spring, when private construction firms typically began their work season. A little more than one month later, Saskatoon's local situation more than confirmed the engineer's prediction: by the end of January 1930, the number of jobless married men on city relief in Saskatoon, a city of only forty-one thousand, had shot to more than nine hundred.¹⁰⁰ If single men had been counted, the number would have been much higher.¹⁰¹

Similar early warning signs appeared in Winnipeg and Edmonton. Through all of 1928, less than four hundred married men

out of a total Winnipeg population of 175,000 sought relief from the city. The following year, that number dropped to less than three hundred. By the end of February 1930, however, it had jumped to 1,306, twice the number of the previous two years combined—and that only two months into the year.¹⁰² This dire situation was compounded by the nearly two thousand single men unemployed and seeking relief from the city. Municipal relief expenditures told an equally worrisome tale. Edmonton's relief costs increased steadily through the first few months of 1930, from \$400 per day in early January, to \$600 per day in February, and then to \$800 in March.¹⁰³ An exasperated Mayor Douglas, nearing the end of his rope, pointed out in late March that "it is practically impossible for the city to continue with the present relief scheme much longer. It is costing us about 900 dollars a day."¹⁰⁴ Translated into annual expenditures, this would account for nearly 15 percent of the city's total annual budget.¹⁰⁵

Figures such as these set cities like Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg within a larger unemployment-related crisis emerging throughout the industrial world. Its effects were uneven, its causes complicated, but what is certain is that Canada was especially hard hit. Its close economic ties to the United States brought the Canadian economy down swiftly after the stock market crash in New York in October 1929. Thereafter, with the general deterioration of industrial economies worldwide, together with the debasing of export markets for its staple goods, Canada's economy suffered further erosion. Finally, high tariff barriers such as the Smoot-Hawley tariff in the United States all but stopped Canadian exports to the United States. Within Canada, the Depression's effects were likewise uneven. While its human costs are difficult to measure, historians have suggested that people working in unskilled and semi-skilled trades, as well as people relying on export staples for their livelihood, suffered most.¹⁰⁶ By 1933, some 30 percent of the nation's entire workforce was unemployed, but unemployment did not hit all regions with the same force. The Depression hit the Prairie provinces harder than it did other regions of the country. Between 1929 and 1933, per capita incomes in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba fell further than incomes in any other province (see table 1).

Table 1. Average per capita income by province, 1929–30 and 1933

	1929–30	1933	% decrease
British Columbia	\$594	\$314	47
Alberta	\$548	\$212	61
Saskatchewan	\$478	\$135	72
Manitoba	\$466	\$240	49
Ontario	\$549	\$310	44
Québec	\$391	\$220	44
Nova Scotia	\$322	\$207	36
New Brunswick	\$292	\$180	39
Prince Edward Island	\$278	\$154	45

SOURCE: Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations*, 150.

Part of the reason for this was the near total collapse of the agricultural economy in the southern plains belt. A combination of oversupply and low demand caused wheat prices to plunge from \$1.24 per bushel in 1929 to just \$0.34 per bushel in 1932. As if that were not enough, western farmers faced unprecedented crop destruction. In 1931, grasshoppers, sawflies, and gophers devoured their crops. What little wheat remained on the stalks was subject to the swirling dust storms that carried away topsoil and crops.¹⁰⁷ The disaster besetting Prairie farmers deeply affected the cities that provided services to them. As William Cronon effectively illustrates with his description of Chicago's experience in *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*, western cities were highly integrated with and dependent on surrounding agricultural production. For cities like Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, therefore, the failure of the agricultural economy was devastating. Decreased traffic of goods that normally passed through all three cities and on which they depended caused unemployment in everything from retail trades, to construction, to packinghouse work, to the staples handling trades. Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Edmonton had emerged by the 1930s primarily as wholesaling, distributing, food processing, and service sector centres serving

regional markets that depended in large measure on wheat farming. Manufacturing in Edmonton and Saskatoon was geared mainly toward supplying light industrial goods for regional (mostly mixed-farming agricultural) needs.¹⁰⁸

Only Winnipeg had developed any significant export manufacturing, but even this was no match for the Depression and the city's reliance on wheat, a fact that city authorities ruefully acknowledged. "Though her more statesmenlike leaders for years had impressed upon the West, the danger of building so great a social structure upon wheat alone," Winnipeg officials claimed, "their counsels were submerged in the constant flow of 'easy money' in a prosperous world wheat market." That easy money—charming, almost blinding in good times—disappeared fast in bad times, leaving unfulfilled promises and disaster in its wake. "The world collapse of wheat prices, and recurring crop failures in such a large area of the West have therefore 'hit' Winnipeg harder than any other of Canada's larger cities," city officials asserted.¹⁰⁹ It was a problem that they believed peculiarly afflicted western cities: "Such rapid growth, dependent so largely on good grain crops, and a good world price, has meant recurrent periods of prosperity and recession." And the city's "very large Labor Market" made it "the focal point to which men and women drift in periods of unemployment." Municipal authorities further pointed out that the "climatic conditions" of southern Manitoba made Winnipeg's unemployment problems worse than those of large centres to the east because poor agricultural seasons drew farm labourers to the city seeking work.¹¹⁰

It was more than just increased numbers of people seeking relief that differentiated previous recessions from the one confronting city authorities in the autumn and early winter of 1929–30. Applicants for Depression-related relief were also, at least in the minds of relief policy-makers, of a different class and character from those in the past. These were not the sorts of relief cases municipal authorities and private charitable organizations had grown accustomed to through their cities' booms and busts, and through war years and postwar years: these were not the widows, the unemployable, the aged, and the disabled—in short, the anomalous but seemingly inevitable poor in any industrial society.

Instead, they were mostly families and individuals who, in normal economic times, had typically managed to make ends meet one way or another on their own and who only sought aid from public relief programs or private charities when bad times got worse.¹¹¹ A report on unemployment in Winnipeg produced in late 1932 called these the “thousands of citizens who never before had occasion to ask for such assistance but who, because of losing their gainful occupations found themselves in sore straits.”¹¹² It was primarily to this class that the city relief machines turned their attention.

THE CITY RELIEF MACHINES

“Relief Services are, and are designed to be a piece of relief machinery,” wrote the authors of 1934 report on family welfare commissioned by the Winnipeg Unemployment Relief Committee.¹¹³ Officials in Winnipeg drew on the image of the machine not because Winnipeg’s relief administration actually ran like one but because city relief policymakers wanted people to believe that it did. Neither was the machine image meant to evoke notions of bossism or patronage, as it had in other historical contexts, such as Boston or Chicago in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.¹¹⁴ Instead, it emphasized policymakers’ own ideals of efficiency and precision. Winnipeg relief officials took pains to emphasize that the city’s relief machine “did not function as part of the Civic Social Welfare Commission at all,” referring to the municipal body responsible for non-Depression-related welfare services.¹¹⁵ Each city created a special name for its unemployment relief delivery system to distinguish it from other welfare services offering aid to the urban poor. These relief systems employed their own staffs, answered directly to city council or to city council-appointed boards, and drew funding entirely from public sources.

In Winnipeg, relief officials called their machine the Civic Unemployment Relief Committee (CURC). Appointed by city council, the committee consisted of six aldermen, the mayor, the provincial deputy minister of Labour, and Manitoba’s superintendent of the

Employment Service of Canada. Sitting as an observer was a representative of the federal government. The CURC was “entrusted with the entire administration of family unemployment relief in and for Winnipeg.” It maintained its own headquarters and offices, first at the city’s wood yard and later in St. Boniface near the Assiniboine River. By the spring of 1932, the CURC was responsible for 8,100 families, as well as a number of single men and women, totalling roughly 37,000 people and costing \$3.5 million each year.¹¹⁶ The numbers even surprised Winnipeg’s relief officials. “Who would suggest, a few years ago, that it would be necessary to keep 5,000 single men in Winnipeg by opening dining halls and giving them two meals per day?” a report on unemployment relief asked at the time. “Out of a total [provincial] population of 699,841, Winnipeg City has over 37,000 individuals supported by direct relief.”¹¹⁷

The unemployment relief administrations in Edmonton and Saskatoon similarly coalesced into recognizable “machinery” by the early 1930s. The City of Edmonton developed the Special Relief Department as an adjunct to its more general Relief Department.¹¹⁸ The two departments operated out of separate offices and with separate staffs, though both answered to the city commissioners directly and exclusively.¹¹⁹ On a per capita basis, Edmonton’s Special Relief Department compared roughly with Winnipeg’s Civic Unemployment Relief Committee, dealing with, on average, approximately 2,200 families each month during the winter of 1932.¹²⁰ The department employed thirty-nine full-time people at a cost of nearly \$40,000 per year in wages.¹²¹ In Saskatoon, the city council alone made unemployment relief policy and addressed any problems directly through a special standing committee formed in early 1930. This lasted until early October 1932, after which the city council delegated all relief business to a new Civic Relief Board consisting of six members of the business community together with the city’s mayor. In 1934, however, the Civic Relief Board reverted back to city council control after the board proved extraordinarily unpopular among the unemployed.¹²² In November 1932, after the Civic Relief Board had begun its work, a typical week involved taking care of 1,270 families at an approximate cost of nearly \$10,000. The costs included groceries, milk, meat, bread, water, fuel, wages for relief department workers, and wages paid

out to married men working on relief jobs. The average weekly cost per family was about \$7.25.¹²³

In each North American city, a small group of local politicians and city managers held primary responsibility for sketching the broad contours of Depression-related city relief: the mayor, aldermen, city commissioner, city solicitors, relief officers, and city engineers. American historian Jonathan Teaford, writing in the context of general city administration in the United States, calls these the “technical experts vital to day-to-day operations.”¹²⁴ When it came to operating the day-to-day business of administering and delivering relief in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, the activities of these so-called experts, primarily men, were critical. The mayors and aldermen, together with the various board members drawn from the community, formulated local relief policy. The city commissioners acted as liaisons among the various city departments involved in local relief administration and advised the mayors and the city councils. The city solicitors made all legal arrangements for raising money, passing bylaws, and corresponding with ratepayers associations and municipal boards. The relief officers ran the relief departments according to instructions from relief policy-makers. The city engineers advised on potential public works and, together with contractors and occasional outside advisers, organized all work relief programs carried on in the cities.

The three cities’ relief machines operated in similar ways, distributing relief, organizing work relief schemes, and coordinating financing arrangements with the province and the federal government. In Winnipeg, applicants for relief applied at the CURC offices and stated their requirements. Staff then made a record of the application, and investigators “endeavoured to satisfy themselves as to the bona fides of the applicant and his needs.” Where investigators recommended relief, officials in the committee offices gave the applicant coupons, each having a fixed value for the purchase of specific relief articles, depending on his needs as decided by relief officials. The coupons could then be exchanged for goods at “any one of several designated stores.” The merchant supplying the goods “then presented the coupon to the proper civic authority and it was redeemed in cash.”¹²⁵ Work relief was likewise organized out

of the committee offices, where men were required to report for their instructions. They were inspected and, if deemed suitable for work, given a work card and told where and when to report on various work schemes in operation at the time of application.

Saskatoon's relief machine shared many of these practices. Applicants there visited special relief offices, stated their needs, and signed a relief card. Investigators then inquired after their bona fides, measured these against the applicant's statements, and, if everything checked out, recommended a course of relief allocation and work assignment. After October 1932, when relief administration in Saskatoon passed from the city council's standing committee on unemployment to the Civic Relief Board, the board itself dealt with questions of relief policy and made decisions on individual applicant cases brought before it by investigators from the investigation branch. The Civic Relief Board met each weekday to hear all questions *in camera*, refusing in all but the rarest cases to host delegations of the unemployed directly and allowing no appeal process to its final decisions.¹²⁶

Like relief practices in Winnipeg and Saskatoon, Edmonton's Special Relief Department made no effort to seek out needy cases, instead expecting the unemployed to make application for relief of their own accord.¹²⁷ When an applicant arrived at the department offices, an official commissioner took an affidavit, made out an identification card, and gave it to the applicant. The identification card thereafter acted "as a passport in the Department," ensuring smooth delivery of services, according to the department's director. Once the applicant had left the department offices, his affidavit went to an investigation branch for processing.¹²⁸ There, an investigator was assigned to the case. The investigator would take the affidavit, make some inquiries into the applicant's situation, and then report to the chief inspector and recommend whether or not the applicant's case qualified for city relief. The final decision was left to the chief inspector, who determined "on behalf of the City, whether the case is worthy of relief or not."¹²⁹ If everything checked out, the department informed the applicant that the case was successful, and relief "in accordance with the [relief] schedule" was administered. Thereafter, investigators—each of whom was assigned one territory "so that they become

familiar with all the avenues of information in that district”—called on each relief case at his or her home at least once every three months. Work relief instructions, if work was available, were issued “as the men come for relief and as their turn falls due.” If the department refused the application, the applicant had recourse to an appeals process of sorts: the same officers who recommended refusal the first time were again assigned the case and asked to review their earlier decision. If the officers stood by their initial recommendation, the department’s director made the final decision, although dissatisfied applicants did have one final recourse: to appeal directly to the city commissioners or the city council itself.

STRIKING A BALANCE AMONG IDEOLOGIES

In general, relief officials based many of their policies on a blend of what they viewed as “hard economics” and the particular moral and social order they wanted their relief policies to promote. The ideological currents that influenced local policy-makers imposed certain constraints—both ideological and practical—on their work through the early 1930s. State theorists have, since the early 1960s, developed a number of theories of state dynamics in an effort to explain why governments and policy-makers act as they do under various circumstances. Among the earliest of these theories are those of the New Left historians Gabriel Kolko and James Weinstein, both of whom describe the development of what they refer to as a “corporate liberal” state dynamic that animated much of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century political policy-making.¹³⁰ According to Kolko and Weinstein, economic elites dominated state (including local) policy making, accepting and even sometimes initiating state intervention in the economy, including welfare policies. They did this either because such intervention was in capital’s long-term interests or because it helped maintain the status quo in the face of challenges to their economic dominance. In the context of Prairie cities in the 1930s, the economic devastation of the Depression certainly qualified as a significant threat to the power of economic elites, and the response of city

governments to the Depression—namely, the creation of bureaucratic mechanisms to administer unemployment relief—looks like an effort to maintain the status quo. Yet, as later social scientists observed, the corporate liberal model depends on some questionable assumptions. First, it assumes that economic elites consistently act in unified, measured, and thoughtful ways. As we shall see in the following chapter, at least at the local level, this was not the case. Business owners, from those involved in the building trades to neighbourhood retailers, acted in anything but a unified manner. Second, the model overstates the degree to which economic elites are able to dictate policy decisions. City politics in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg did reflect a strong representation from the business community (in the form of Edmonton's Civic Government Association or Winnipeg's Citizens' Committee, for example, both of which billed themselves as primarily pro-business). Yet city councils in those cities also included members who were pro-labour or who were independents, and these members must have exerted a countervailing influence.¹³¹ The fact remains, however, that city relief policies, as illustrated in the following chapters, did tend to favour the status quo, and that status quo tended to favour the capitalist system as a whole.

Another theory—referred to as hegemonic competition—contends that the capitalist state maintains, of necessity, a position autonomous from business elites, allowing it to mediate between society's competing economic interests, both between and within classes.¹³² The state, according to this theory, is beholden neither to the various segments within the dominant capitalist class nor to the dominated non-capitalist classes. Instead, it occupies a moderating role and seeks to lessen capitalism's inherent contradictions by mediating between (and among) major corporate interests and smaller competitive-sector corporations, on the one hand, and working-class interests, on the other. Yet, as with the corporate liberal theory of state, the hegemonic competition theory relies on the assumption that one entity—in this case, the state itself—retains a consciousness of its role in capitalist society and works to mute perceivable contradictions as that society relates to its constituent parts. Again, in the context of local government operations in Canadian Prairie cities,

this is doubtful. The city relief machines—and the policy-makers who created them—operated under an array of constraints, including federal and provincial strictures, larger inherited societal assumptions and biases, and economic realities. Taken together, these constraints—all outside of direct relations with the business community—make it unlikely that local governments had anything more on their agendas than getting their cities through the crisis intact; performing any explicit mediating role among economic classes was probably far from their minds. Still, the actual operation of the city relief machines, and especially the attempts of the policy-makers to measure business interests against the interests of the unemployed, appears to follow the theory (even if the theory does not necessarily follow the reality).

A third perspective on the role of the state, developed by Theda Skocpol and Fred Block, is state autonomy theory, which regards the state as an independent agent, capable of pursuing its own agenda regardless of the demands of specific social and economic interests. Assuming that the state is concerned with the long-term survival of capitalism, as is generally the case in industrialized Western nations, it will naturally tend to create policies to further this goal. For its part, the business community shares the state's investment in the fundamental structures of capitalism; however, businesses (no matter what their size) are focused almost exclusively on the growth of short-term profit. According to this theory, then, during the Depression years, the autonomy of the US government enabled it to implement New Deal policies—policies that it believed to be in the best interests of capitalism's survival in the longer term—despite considerable opposition from the business sector.¹³³ How closely did the city relief machines cooperate in the effort to safeguard the capitalist order? Given the manner in which these machines operated, it appears that, on balance, policy-makers shared a bias toward the status quo. In most instances, their efforts to address unemployment and provide relief were grounded in the conceptual assumptions of their nineteenth-century forebears. These included a preference for work relief over a system of “doles,” so as to reinforce the work ethic, the use of the principle of less eligibility to discourage any but the “genuinely” poor from seeking relief, and the concomitant desire to avoid creating welfare dependence.

In this sense, the relief officials might properly be conceived of as “holding down the fort” during capitalism’s greatest crisis. Whether they were engaged in a thoughtful and sustained effort to protect capitalism behind the shield of their relief policies, though, is less clear.

Skocpol and other state autonomy theorists later modified their ideas, arguing for a more pluralistic approach to state development and taking account of different institutions and interests in the fashioning of public policy.¹³⁴ For Skocpol, paramount to understanding federal welfare policy development is an examination of state structures, political culture, and organized politics, as well as of wider societal interests and their perceptions, suggestions, and complaints about the emerging welfare state.¹³⁵ This appears to explain how relief officials developed relief policy at the local level: they believed that helping business through hard times was important, but, as we shall see in subsequent chapters, they also routinely took account of the interests and views of the community, the unemployed, professional bodies, and private citizens.

One final critical perspective that helps to explain how Prairie cities (and cities more generally) functioned is the theory of city boosterism. Donald Wetherell defines “boosterism” as “the promotion and encouragement at the local level of social cohesion and purpose around the goal of economic growth.”¹³⁶ Scholars exploring the development of a local, regional, or even national ethos through the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries argue that the booster mentality served several important purposes. By appealing to broad and often vague notions of the common interest, city elites attempted both to draw business and industry to their cities and to dampen ethnic, class, and gender tensions. Indeed, efforts to draw people and industry to their cities, and especially to create environments friendly to potential newcomers and industries, were among the top priorities of city councils. In their view, what was good for the city economically was good for the city more generally. In Prairie cities, real estate dealers, the local business elite and the media, and city councils together developed a powerful ideology that emphasized the common sense of shared interests. And this ideology, although most certainly not reflective of societal divisions, nevertheless informed relief policy-makers’ approaches to welfare

programs. In the final analysis, the city relief machines operated in accordance with many of the same ideological assumptions that had governed other welfare initiatives in the past, assumptions that were fed in part by city officials' fears of a deteriorating work ethic and welfare dependence among recipients. Officials in Winnipeg, for instance, assessed the "social implications" of relief, pointing to a "dependency problem" among recipients and to a "blunting of personal initiative and to the mental attitude that they do not need to worry since they are bound to be cared for."¹³⁷

The publicly funded and municipally controlled city relief machines by no means displaced or replaced private or public/private charities and welfare services. Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, like other urban centres, sported all manner of charities offering aid to the urban poor, from the secular to the religious, and everything in between. Winnipeg had thirty-seven different private welfare bodies operating through this period; Edmonton had at least thirty-two, including the Salvation Army, the Canteen Club, the Canadian Legion, the Canadian Red Cross, the *Edmonton Bulletin's* "Not Forgotten Fund," the *Edmonton Journal's* "Sunshine Fund," the Elks, the Royal Society of St. George, the Order of the Royal Purple, and various churches. These private charities persisted into the 1930s, becoming increasingly integrated into sociologist Mariana Valverde's "mixed social economy," which was marked by a collaborative public/private effort at welfare financing, service delivery, inspection, and regulation. As early as 1913 in Winnipeg, for instance, all charities seeking public funds to support their activities were made to undergo "examination of their bona fides and characters" by a civic charities endorsement bureau run by the city council. The endorsement bureau further required every charity to show that it had "responsible and satisfactory local management," that its administrative body met at least four times per year, and that it was "rendering services commensurate with the money expended."¹³⁸

In short, the city relief machines were not simply a part of broader and ongoing local welfare systems. Instead, they addressed only those unemployment cases directly caused by the Depression, leaving more general, chronic welfare problems to existing relief organizations, private charitable bodies, and churches. Illustrating this distinction was

the fact that each city's relief machinery operated out of offices separate from other, more general welfare departments such as aid programs for unwed mothers, abandoned children, the aged, and the infirm. City relief machines also employed their own staffs, answered directly to city council, and drew funding entirely from public sources. The relief machine's main job was to provide unemployed single men and unemployed married men and their families with what city officials considered basic necessities—clothing, shelter, fuel, food, and, more rarely, cash—and only for so long as the Depression was causing the unemployment. Relief machines were also charged with organizing and carrying out work relief programs designed to provide unemployed men with work on public buildings and bridges, sidewalk and sewer works, and other odd jobs such as street sweeping and snow shovelling.¹³⁹ Finally, the relief machines coordinated their responses to unemployment-related problems with provincial and federal relief efforts. This made economic sense because, beginning in the summer of 1930, municipal relief was funded through legislative arrangements with the provincial and federal governments, each typically funding one-third of direct relief costs and sharing various proportions of work relief costs. The city relief machines did not, of course, appear from nowhere fully formed and functioning. Instead, relief efforts meandered along in an ad hoc fashion, with city councils and city commissioners making policy decisions only as situations required. In subsequent chapters, I explore more fully the machines' operations and argue that, despite Winnipeg officials' insistence that their "general plan, set-up and operation . . . appeared to operate with precision and efficiency," the reality was often far more complicated.¹⁴⁰

2

The Anatomy of City Relief

In general, policy-makers' class and gender assumptions flowed from and favoured a capitalist and patriarchal society. But, as historian Linda Gordon argues in the American context, their goals were "fragmented and inconsistent." Most welfare policies, Gordon insists, "represent the jerry-built compromises which are the artefacts of political and social conflict."¹ Depression-era welfare policies were not simply imposed from above by a ruling elite and accepted without question or complaint by those below; they were compromises fashioned through complex arrangements among different interests. The character of the city relief machines was likewise influenced and directed both by policy-makers, with their "fragmented and inconsistent" goals, and by external forces, including the senior levels of government, local business interests, community groups, and the unemployed themselves.

All of these elements of urban Prairie society affected, in various ways, the functioning of the relief systems by attempting to bend them to their own advantage. Yet in the end, the city relief machines maintained considerable control over both the direction and the character of unemployment relief in Winnipeg, Saskatoon, and Edmonton. External forces were able to stretch and strain and bend them, but the machines' basic features as constructed by city policy-makers remained intact.

That relief and welfare administrations of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were gendered is well known. Historians like Theresa Healey, Alice Kessler-Harris, Nancy Christie, and Linda Gordon have shown how welfare policies, in particular, as well as efforts to deal with unemployment and poverty more generally, distinguished between male and female recipients.² But relief systems also categorized men. The city relief machines studied here employed qualitatively different relief policies for single and married men, revealing a deeper layer of the gendered welfare system. This distinction illustrates the different ways in which policy-makers imagined the jobless man. The unemployed married man represented stability, maturity, and responsibility, and he tended to move in more or less the same circles as he had when employed. The unemployed single man, in contrast, represented shiftlessness, youthfulness, and potential danger; he was restless—riding the rods, living in makeshift jungles, or begging on back doorsteps.³

These distinctions—both in how city policy-makers imagined married and single men and in how city relief policy was applied to them—are characteristic of “two-track” welfare programs, in which different welfare policies and practices are applied to different categories of recipients.⁴ According to Linda Gordon's explanation of the two-track system in the United States from 1890 to 1935, the first track included old age pensions and unemployment insurance programs that “disproportionately serve white men” and were less stigmatizing and more generous than second-track programs. Second-track programs, made available to women and minority men, followed more closely the old British Poor Laws tradition of stigmatization and low stipends that keep “recipients below the poverty line and are not designed to allow them to

attain a respectable working-class standard of living.”⁵ Suzanne Mettler explores this effect through her analysis of unemployment insurance and aid for dependent children during the Depression in the United States. Unemployment insurance grew ever more “fortified and elevated” and eventually “became regarded as an earned ‘right.’” Aid for dependent children, primarily aimed at helping single mothers and children, in contrast, “became stigmatized as it grew to resemble the sort of ‘relief’ programs its framers had tried to avoid.”⁶ In similar ways, and as we shall see below, the relief that city relief machines offered to married men tended to be more generous and less stigmatizing than that offered to single men. Married men’s relief was explicitly set up to help them maintain their self-respect and pride. When it came to single unemployed men, the city relief machines were more concerned with the potential danger and disorder, as well as the “wasted youth,” that they represented, and the relief policies reflected this concern.

ACCESSING RELIEF: THE RESIDENCE REQUIREMENT

One of the first and most important policy problems the city relief machines had to contend with was deciding who was entitled to relief. City governments soon discovered the difficulties in determining who among the unemployed were city residents, and therefore entitled to city relief, and who were not. Ambrose Bury, a Conservative MP representing Edmonton-East and the former mayor of Edmonton, put his finger on the nub of the problem. “In the case of unemployment the chief factor is the drift of the unemployed from municipality to municipality and from province to province,” he pointed out in December 1929. “And neither the municipalities nor the provinces have any power to prevent this movement.”⁷ Bury set the migration problem squarely at the feet of the federal Liberal administration’s immigration policy of the 1920s. “So long as the immigration laws and procedure are exclusively matters of federal control and neither the provinces nor the municipalities have any power over the volume or quality of the tide

of immigration coming into the country and no power over the movements of immigrants once they are in the country,” he charged, “it is in my judgement illogical unreasonable and dead against facts to say the matter is entirely one for the municipalities and provinces.”⁸

In order to deal with the problem, Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, collaborating with their respective provinces, insisted on a residence requirement. Alderman Hair in Saskatoon, speaking to the Lion’s Club in late 1929, asserted that the city would not consider as a resident anyone who had been in the city less than six months.⁹ Shortly thereafter, with the Depression growing worse and the relief applications increasing, Edmonton and Winnipeg lengthened their residence requirements to one year.¹⁰ In establishing residence requirements, city relief policy-makers were drawing on a history of relief practice going back at least as far as the first Elizabethan Poor Laws of 1601. At that time, England introduced a parish-based relief system supported by public taxes to deal with the extreme poverty in some quarters. The Poor Law commissioners believed that establishing residence in the parish before accessing relief was crucial to maintaining the integrity of the relief system. Without a proof-of-residence requirement, nothing could stop recipients from receiving relief from several parishes at once.¹¹ Such a policy was similarly critical to Depression-era cities with tight budgets and spiralling relief costs. “We cannot take care of [migrants]; we are financially unable,” Edmonton’s Mayor Douglas flatly reported to Premier John Brownlee in the spring of 1931.¹² The hard rule was that non-residents could not expect relief in Edmonton, Saskatoon, or Winnipeg.

But a residence requirement could hardly stop unemployed migrants from *seeking* relief from western cities. Regardless of the strategies that city administrations used to discourage destitute families and individuals from entering their cities, the people kept coming and, more importantly, seeking relief. Responding in December 1930 to repeated complaints from Mayor Douglas about migrants, Premier Brownlee suggested that “some very drastic affidavit be drafted as to where these people have been in the last year so that action can be taken against any who falsely register as residents of the City of Edmonton.”¹³ Whatever the outcome of the premier’s suggestion, the situation had changed little

by the following summer. "Whenever the notion gets into the minds of some of these people that they are going to get something to eat," Mayor Douglas reported in 1931, "they stick with it and become our residents mighty quick." Migrants, he wrote, were a "national problem. It is not the fault of the City of Edmonton . . . that these people are destitute at the present time, and I am quite convinced that we have been paying for people, all last winter, that were not our charges."¹⁴

Although residence requirements did not discriminate among single or married, male or female applicants, city authorities were much more likely to encounter single male migrants than single female or family migrants. A typical case was that of a man recently arrived in Edmonton from Calgary "with no fixed abode and penniless." The city relief office refused to support the twenty-nine-year-old, pointing out that "we meet with innumerate cases just like this."¹⁵ This story was repeated on a much broader scale. In 1930, Winnipeg refused relief to some 10 percent of all single male relief applicants under its residence ruling.¹⁶ Early in 1931, Edmonton relief investigator Harold Gutteridge reported to the city commissioner that of a hundred single men living in boxcars at the edge of town whom he had recently interviewed, only twenty-seven could "claim some semblance of city residence." Of these, Gutteridge wrote, "there are five men who satisfy me that they are bona fide city residents."¹⁷ Edmonton's city commissioner, David Mitchell, was convinced that "a very large percentage of single men making application for relief were not the city's responsibility."¹⁸ The city's comptroller agreed, estimating in January 1931 that as many as "twenty percent of single men applying for relief produced residence qualifications which would not be substantiated upon investigation."¹⁹ In December, Daniel Knott, the mayor of Edmonton, wrote Premier Brownlee insisting that of the twenty-four hundred single unemployed men who had congregated in the city, fully half were non-residents and therefore not his city's responsibility.²⁰ In Saskatoon, city officials faced the same problem. Residence requirements could not keep single men from migrating into the city, especially at the close of harvest season. "It is very clear," the mayor wrote to prospective aldermen just before municipal elections in November 1930, "that single men are starting to flock into Saskatoon and

it is also very evident that there are agitators of the worst type trying to create trouble amongst the single men.”²¹

The approach to the much rarer migrant family was different. In Saskatoon, for instance, the provincial government agreed to pay all relief costs for migrant families that met certain provincial specifications, provided that the city administer the relief “on exactly the same conditions as your board would administer relief to a resident family similarly situated.” Saskatoon’s Civic Relief Board had “authority not only to determine the amount and kind of relief to be given to the family, but also whether any steps might be taken to get the family off relief by returning them to their place of domicile in any other way usually adopted by your board in the treatment of relief cases.”²² One family from Fish Creek, well to the northeast of Saskatoon, applied for city relief after only two months’ residence. The Civic Relief Board granted the family temporary relief while it tried to get them back to Fish Creek.²³ A Cree family from the much closer municipality of Cory, located just outside the city’s western limits was, however, refused outright on the grounds that they were not city residents. A city relief investigator located the family’s tent “after considerable difficulty” and “explained through an interpreter to [them] that the City could do nothing for residents of Cory,” advising them to contact officials of that district instead.²⁴ Edmonton likewise treated migrant families differently from migrant single men. The city relief officer reported to Mayor Knott early in 1932, “Owing to the disorganized state of the country districts where little, if any, sympathy is extended to necessitous families, they are obliged to come to the City.” Edmonton, together with the province and the federal government, paid for their relief.²⁵ Apparently, migrants occasionally had help in making the move from one city to another. Regina, city officials in Saskatoon complained to Premier Anderson, had paid some of its own residents enough money to allow them to live in Saskatoon for six months. At the end of the six months, and much to the chagrin of Saskatoon relief officials, the newly minted Saskatoon residents applied for relief in “their” city.²⁶

City officials in all three cities were convinced that a good number of the migrants fell into the particularly vexing category of the “foreigner.”²⁷ How cities determined what constituted a “foreigner” was

never exactly clear, but relief policies typically attached a longer residence requirement to them than to “non-foreigners.”²⁸ Most cities, for example, insisted that this class of relief applicant show residence in the city for at least two years.²⁹ Edmonton’s mayor in 1931 had his own ideas on how to deal with the problem. “The great bulk of these fellows who are demanding food to-day are foreigners,” he pointed out to Premier John Brownlee, “and I can see no remedy for it whatever, except to deport them.”³⁰ The province’s Department of Municipal Affairs agreed with the mayor’s assessment. “Aliens in the Province are receiving relief on the same basis as Canadians,” one department member wrote in a memo to the province’s relief committee in June 1931. Their numbers, he warned, “provide our agitators with a following making unreasonable demands on the municipal and the provincial governments. They do not hesitate to express their desire to institute Soviet rule.” The department counselled deportation.³¹ Officials in Saskatoon insisted that all recent immigrants applying for city relief “sign forms agreeing to deportation before giving them relief.”³² Manitoba’s Public Works minister informed the federal Labour minister in 1930 that Winnipeg was “carrying a very large share of the burden of the immigrants who are not established and there is probably some justification for the feeling that local authorities are already carrying too large a share of the expenditure.”³³ Winnipeg’s mayor, Ralph Webb, was already “conducting some negotiations with the Hon. Minister of Immigration looking towards some solution.”³⁴ Deportation was at the top of his list. All of this municipal discussion, of course, relied entirely on co-operation from the federal government, since immigration matters fell exclusively under federal jurisdiction.

Although many counselled deportation in response to the “migrant” situation, that solution carried its own problems, at least according to Saskatoon’s medical officer in charge of relief cases: “Probably all of those deported carry back to the Old Country a bad report, condemn Saskatoon, and discourage immigration. The cost of their deportation and maintenance is a small part of the damage they do, because harm from their unfavourable advertising is a great deal worse. Letters from deported persons have been received complaining of their treatment and not speaking very favourably of this country.”³⁵ Leaving these migrants in

the cities, however, raised other problems. In January 1930, for instance, the same medical officer noted that “immigrants form a considerable percentage of the unemployed here in winter.” Of 443 unemployed single men registered at the end of January, he pointed out, nearly half were immigrants. “This is exactly as one would expect,” he suggested. “Persons coming from foreign countries, not accustomed to our ways of living and working, and in some instances not understanding the language, are handicapped to a considerable extent, but it would appear that even after the first year a number of these men do not profit by the lessons to be learned after a year’s residence in this country.”³⁶ Saskatoon’s city relief officer, Frank Rowland, agreed that foreigners behaved differently than non-foreigners. Foreigners, whom he described as “people from Central Europe and Russia,” were “not interested in farming, preferring the city life and the present form of relief.” He also pointed out that 95 percent of applicants seeking to take up land as part of a land-settlement scheme were Anglo-Saxons: only 5 percent were foreigners. Immigrants were “crowding into the city,” he warned, making Saskatoon “more or less their headquarters, especially in the winter when employment is scarce.”³⁷

While western city administrations typically refused to accept single men who migrated across city borders as legitimate relief recipients, municipal officials nevertheless often made some small emergency relief available to them. These emergency relief programs were designed to limit the amount of time that migrants spent in the cities and ultimately to hasten their departure. Migrants were given a few meal tickets and perhaps a bed for the night, and then were actively encouraged to leave town. In part, this was because municipal authorities were anxious about the potential threat to social order of masses of tired, hungry, and frustrated single men. “The best possible is being done to limit demands,” Edmonton’s relief officer told the city commissioner in May 1931, “while at the same time, having due regard to the peace and order of our City, which might readily become disturbed due to the large number of unemployed in the ranks of the single men, who are moving aimlessly about.”³⁸

The practice of offering limited emergency relief was not entirely limited to single men. Cities offered some small relief to single migrant

women with children, though relief departments considered them neither a family proper nor a danger to social order. One woman came to Saskatoon in October 1932, after her husband died in an accident on their farm, which was located near the rural district of Cory, just west of Saskatoon. In this case, city officials said nothing about residents of Cory being ineligible for help and instead placed her and her nine children on weekly relief.³⁹ In an unusual case in November 1932, another woman, who had been living on an Alberta farm for the past year and a half, returned with her six children to Saskatoon at her own expense after her husband died. When she applied for city relief, Saskatoon's Civic Relief Board refused her application, offering only to pay her way back to Alberta.⁴⁰

City relief authorities, though, were typically careful not to go too far down the road of offering some small emergency relief to unemployed migrants because it could very well have the opposite of the intended effect, actually drawing single men into the city. "If Calgary and Edmonton keep giving relief to single men, we are going to have a problem here," Edmonton relief officer McKee confided to the city's commissioner. "In order to protect ourselves we are no longer registering single men, but we do still provide transportation if men have a job somewhere."⁴¹ Offering overly generous relief to emergency cases, moreover, sometimes raised the ire of provincial authorities. In 1935, Alberta's superintendent of charity relief, A. A. Mackenzie, told Edmonton's city council, "I would point out that the City granting relief to cases that are definitely a responsibility of another district makes it difficult not only for this Department but for your city relief. Allowing people to defy constituted authority creates a precedent which is used by the unemployed organizations to encourage other people to insist upon relief being given irregularly."⁴² Alberta's premier, John Brownlee, reminded the Edmonton city council that unemployed workers' wages "should be kept in line with the policy of the Government and other municipalities, otherwise, it would lead to difficulties."⁴³ Just what those difficulties might be, the premier did not say, but it seems likely that Brownlee wanted to avoid situations where one municipality's work relief wages were more generous than another's because this would draw unemployed men seeking

work relief to the city with the highest wages. After all, two years earlier, the premier had remarked in a letter to Calgary's mayor that "there is already a great transient movement to and fro from Province to Province which will be attracted to any centre seeming to offer special consideration."⁴⁴ Manitoba's minister of Public Works offered the same warning to city officials in Winnipeg. Writing to the chairman of the Civic Unemployment Relief Committee in June 1931, the minister pointed out that "it would be very dangerous for us, in Manitoba, to adopt regulations which would be more favourable than in other parts of Canada."⁴⁵

With thousands of the unemployed on city relief, some non-resident applicants inevitably succeeded in accessing relief by lying to investigators about the length of time they had been in the city. But wherever city officials found evidence of recipients who had "unlawfully obtained supplies by misrepresentation," they took serious action, pressing criminal charges with penalties of jail time, fines, or a combination of both. In April 1931, for example, Edmonton's relief officer informed the city council that his department had successfully prosecuted two men accused of relief fraud. One man was sentenced to three months in prison and ordered to return the \$32 he had received in relief, while the other pled guilty and was sentenced to two months in jail.⁴⁶ City officials in Winnipeg and Saskatoon were similarly concerned about fraudulent relief claims, and a good measure of their time was spent attempting to deal with the problem.⁴⁷

In the end, the whole migrant problem illustrated the heavy pressures put on cities by the wider concept of local responsibility, a yoke that municipalities found increasingly difficult to bear. And while organized national responses to employment management, especially the Employment Service of Canada, emphasized the movement of workers across the country, by the early 1930s, this was exactly what cities were trying to minimize. Without a national, or even provincial, system of relief (other than the movement of workers) to coordinate efforts on a much broader scale, city authorities could do little more than complain to the more senior governments, prod them into supplying more resources and cash, and continue to refuse relief to those applicants unable to satisfy their residence requirements. But how city governments

responded to migrants also revealed their primary concern that most were single men and that single men represented danger and disorder.

CATEGORIES OF RELIEF: GENDER AND MARITAL STATUS

All three cities under study here divided those potential recipients who satisfied the residence requirements into categories that they typically called married men, single men, and single women. Married men and their families were offered qualitatively different relief than single men and women. These divisions, based on sex and marital status, corresponded with and reinforced the kind of social relations policy-makers wanted to promote. One class of unemployed persons entirely absent from relief policy was married women.⁴⁸ City relief policy-makers simply assumed that married women fell under the authority and care of their husbands' relief provision. This stands in contrast to welfare policy earlier in the century, when, according to historian Nancy Christie, women made successful claims against the state as mothers, and the general welfare state was based on a "maternalist system of public provision."⁴⁹ By the Depression, however, women's status as mothers in the eyes of the state was on the wane and was increasingly replaced by welfare policy's concern with men as breadwinners. "Motherhood," Christie argues, "no longer constituted an independent claim on the state." Thereafter, women "were defined in public discourse and in concrete policies as mere dependents of men with no separate identity of their own."⁵⁰ This analysis accords well with how the city relief machines treated married women. Married men, however, had a duty and an obligation to look after their wives and children. "Undoubtedly, a man has a legal responsibility to take care of his family," declared the director of Edmonton's special relief office in 1934.⁵¹

Married men's relief typically consisted of groceries to stock their kitchen cupboards, fuel to heat their homes, rent payments to avoid evictions, and clothing for themselves and their families. Part of the reason for this effort at making their relief experience similar to their "normal"

routine was because married men represented social stability in ways that single men and women did not. Delegates to a conference on unemployment relief in Edmonton agreed with Calgary's mayor, Andrew Davison, when he reported to Premier Brownlee in June 1931, "We are not having very much trouble so far as the married people are concerned. Most of the agitation in Calgary comes from the single men, fostered of course by some of our communistic friends."⁵²

City relief officials soon discovered, however, that not all cases fit so easily into their categories. Married men's obligations were taken seriously by urban administrators, but in at least one case, they did not extend so far as a deserted man's obligation to his own child. The man had left Calgary for Saskatoon shortly after his wife left him and their son. Upon arrival, he approached the Civic Relief Board, seeking relief "so he can look after his child and not work." The board rejected the man's application, deciding instead that the child's female caretaker, a certain Mrs. McCurdy, "be allowed forty-five cents per day for the care of the child and that no relief be granted to the man."⁵³ The board evidently believed that a man staying at home with his child was not appropriate. In another case that defied the city's categories, Saskatoon's Civic Relief Board was willing to support a man and his common-law wife as a married couple, but when the man moved in with a different woman and her child, and asked for relief for the three of them, the relief board balked. The investigator in charge of the case informed the second woman that she would get relief for herself and her child only if she left the man and went "into a home approved by the Department."⁵⁴ The Civic Relief Board, of course, would henceforth treat the man as single.

As we have seen, city officials viewed single unemployed men as the most troublesome. Single men from families in Saskatoon were encouraged to stay with their parents; more troublesome were single unemployed men with no family in the city. Rather than offering aid that would enable these men to support themselves in their own lodgings, city relief offices provided them with café and rooming house tickets on an emergency basis until arrangements could be made for the men to go to relief camps or to work on nearby farms.⁵⁵ Single unemployed men were typically offered two or three meal vouchers per day, which could be

redeemed at local cafés, but this relief was limited to the winter months. Thereafter, it was assumed that single men could find work on farms. This view of single men as transients held even when single men actually had homes. In October 1932, one single man applied to Saskatoon's Civic Relief Board seeking "fuel for cooking purposes." The man did not own a stove but wanted the fuel to use in his landlady's stove. The board nevertheless refused his application on the grounds that he was single.⁵⁶ The differential treatment for single men was carried to an extreme in the case of two Edmonton men who owned their own homes and qualified only for single men's relief. According to the United Workers' Council, an organization working on behalf of the unemployed, their inability to pay their property taxes or to buy food forced them "to leave their homes in order to go on single relief and obtain meal tickets and bed tickets."⁵⁷

While the relief offered to married men reflected the assumption that those men had homes, city relief policy related to single men was based on the supposition that they were transients who properly belonged outside the city or, at the very least, should be under provincial or federal control. By 1932, all three cities were still registering single men, but they typically forwarded the lists of registrants to the federal and provincial governments. In Edmonton, the police department assumed the job of registering unemployed single men, reflecting the anxiety that city officials felt about them. Saskatoon registered single men through the relief department and then forwarded the data "to the Provincial and Federal Governments urging immediate action for their care and maintenance." City officials in Saskatoon took the added step of inserting a news item in newspapers "advising that no relief will be given . . . to unemployed single men as it is considered this is a Federal responsibility and requesting single men to keep away from this city."⁵⁸

The city relief machines likewise treated single women differently than men, regardless of men's marital status. Single women were, ideally, expected to find relief in the homes of their kin or in private homes as domestics. Winnipeg relief investigator Margaret Kee, for example, tried to "induce many of the unemployed girls and women to consider the work of domestic service on the farm," but it seems that she had little luck. "There is a strange attitude towards this proposed work," she wrote

in a letter to the assistant deputy minister of Public Works. "A spirit that appears almost defiant is shown by some. Very careful observation has led me to believe there is an undercurrent at work that is hindering the success of this work, but just what it is," she added mysteriously, "I am not yet prepared to say."⁵⁹ Relief officials in Edmonton reported similar attitudes among single unemployed women. In a letter to the city's commissioner in early September 1931, one relief officer claimed, "All women and girls applying for assistance are being sympathetically met, patiently listened to, and the best service permitted and possible extended to them." He admitted, however, that the applicants "seem indifferent about getting jobs, fail to keep their appointments, do not turn up at places referred to, refuse to go on farms at \$10 per month or even \$15 per month."⁶⁰

Single women had several reasons for their reluctance to take domestic farm work, one being the low pay. A young woman speculated in a letter to the editor of the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, for example, that some single women refused the work because farmers were taking advantage of their vulnerable situation. "It is a shame," the woman wrote, "the way some farmers are capitalizing [on] this unemployment situation. Just because there are girls without number looking for work, they think girls should jump at the chance to work for \$5 a month and expect a girl to milk and help with work outside the house as well as do the housework." The writer went on to describe her personal experiences on a farm. Upon arrival, she was told to look after an eighteen-month-old child, cook meals for four people, milk five cows each morning and each evening, and do all the churning and separating, as well as the laundry. When she left after serving one month in the home, the "lady of house" told her that "it served me right if I starved for the rest of the winter."⁶¹ Another woman, "a good strong girl who came from the farm," reported that all that farmers do is "work you to death for 5 dollars per month." Perhaps a little too candidly, the same woman revealed that she was "going to try and play off sick so she will be able to stay in the city" and draw direct relief.⁶² Some single women who were considering domestic work feared that farmers "would not be good to them." Others had family responsibilities in the city and could not simply pack up and go to the country. One single mother, for instance, would take work as a

domestic on a farm only if she were allowed to take her sixteen-year-old boy along, while another refused to leave her children alone in the city. Another possible reason for the women's rejection of farm work, according to a former chambermaid, was the hard work involved. She declared that she would not "split wood, carry water and scrub floors."⁶³

ON THE DOLE: DETAILS OF URBAN RELIEF DELIVERY

Although the development of urban relief machinery was an ongoing process, certain general features emerged early and remained fairly consistent into the early 1930s. These features reveal the different ways in which officials in each city negotiated the sometimes rocky and complicated terrain of relief delivery and administration.

Clothing Distribution

Clothing was clearly an important relief item, not only because of the cold winter months on the Canadian prairies but also because people on relief typically could not afford to replace worn-out garments.⁶⁴ Each of the three cities had its own means of distributing clothing among the unemployed. In Edmonton, the job was performed by the Special Relief Department, which, in the early 1930s, expended more than \$60,000 on relief clothing.⁶⁵ Recipients in need of clothing visited the department's clothing bureau carrying with them a voucher obtained from the department offices for specific items. The bureau was staffed by four people—a woman in charge of recording distribution, two men unpacking goods and filling applications for clothing, and one man attending to invoices, pricing, and inventory. Bureau staff checked each voucher for specific items of clothing against the applicant's previous record "so that the depot knows just what has been received by the relief case in the past," and then attempted to redeem the voucher.⁶⁶ Although it seemed a simple process, it was sometimes chaotic. "We have hundreds of calls from mothers and children who

are continually requesting shoes, stockings, underwear, dresses, and boys' shirts," Carl Berg, the bureau's director, informed the mayor of Edmonton, Daniel Knott, in June 1932. "Last Saturday . . . our place was completely filled with women and children who were clamouring for clothing." Children, the director explained, were "going to school with practically nothing on their feet and dresses and overalls which are all rags." The children's mothers had mended the family's clothes as best they could, but at some point, mending could no longer save old clothes. Married men on relief were also in dire straits, the director noted, with some having "no other clothing to work in than their only suit . . . when they accept a job to go out into a ditch or similar labor. Such men should at least be given a pair of overalls and a working shirt."⁶⁷ The situation had become so desperate by the following winter that Edmonton's United Workers' Council demanded that "the place be closed down and applicants be given orders on stores for their requirements" because applicants were not able to get the clothes they required at the bureau.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, Saskatoon's clothing depot, which was run by volunteers, relied entirely on donations of clothing and otherwise provided only shoe repair and tailoring services. This saved the city a good deal on relief costs; Saskatoon spent on average only \$3,000 per year in the period from 1930 to 1932.⁶⁹

The Greater Winnipeg Welfare Association, also a volunteer-run organization, handled Winnipeg's clothing issues until 1932. Thereafter, as a result of complaints from both unemployed recipients and the city council over how the association purchased and distributed clothing, Winnipeg's Civic Unemployment Relief Committee (CURC) managed its operation.⁷⁰ The change offered several advantages to the city administration. For one thing, the CURC was better equipped to make cheaper bulk purchases, buying all clothing through the "Provincial Government Purchasing Bureau directly from factories and wholesalers."⁷¹ For another, it was no longer necessary for city officials to supervise the voluntary Welfare Association; instead, they directed clothing distribution through the city's central offices.⁷² This meant that city authorities determined the requirements of recipients by sending their own investigators to their homes. As for quality, the CURC insisted that it could "give good

serviceable garments of a class which would ordinarily be bought by working people.”⁷³

The change from the Welfare Association to the CURC, however, made some city business owners wary. The Northern Shirt Company wrote to provincial officials one day after Winnipeg’s city council voted to set clothing relief in the hands of the CURC. “The Greater Winnipeg Welfare Association has been a heavy purchaser at competitive prices of goods produced by Winnipeg workmen in Winnipeg factories,” the company’s president wrote W. R. Clubb, the minister of Public Works. That arrangement, he reminded the minister, furnished “employment for many men who otherwise would be obliged to call upon the City and the Province for relief.” The company’s president hoped that the transfer of responsibility “will not result in any change in policy but that Winnipeg workmen, will still be given an opportunity to supply the demand for goods required by the Unemployment Relief Committee.”⁷⁴

Winnipeg retailers had similar business-related concerns, but theirs were about distribution, not production. Clothing distribution through a central office, they argued, hurt relief recipients, the city, and, of course, the retailers. If clothing and shoes were supplied through regular channels of trade, recipients “will not have to walk five miles or more to a Relief Depot,” where they would be handed a suit of clothes or a pair of shoes “by some office man who has no experience.” Instead, they would be able to “walk to the nearest clothing store or shoe store and be fitted by an expert shoe man or clothier who will hold himself responsible for the fitting to the recipient of Relief and for the wear to the Relief Department.” Furthermore, the city “will have a better check if anything goes wrong with the shoes or with the clothing simply because they will deal with each section separately.” The city would also benefit in receiving taxes from the retailers, who had been “finding it very difficult to carry on and pay their share of business tax to the city.” Finally, relief business would not only benefit the retailers themselves but would also prevent a “further lay off of help particularly during the months of January and February.”⁷⁵

Footwear was an important element of relief clothing distribution, and much like shirts and pants, sweaters and coats, the methods

of distributing shoes and boots concerned local business interests. On 16 December 1932, Edmonton businessman F. S. Wright alerted the city commissioner to the private sector's future prospects should municipal officials continue to operate a shoe repair shop out of the unemployment relief office. "I visualize a time in the near future," he warned, "when these officials, will also, in the 'cause' of economy go into other lines of business with the result that there will be no business at all excepting municipal and government business—everyone will be on relief."⁷⁶ However exaggerated his prediction, Wright nevertheless exposed some of the more paradoxical features of the city's increasingly active role in the delivery of relief services to Depression-era unemployed workers. First, as municipal involvement increased, so too did the tendency of some local entrepreneurs and industries to experience the city not as regulator or administrator, or even as booster of private enterprise, but rather as competitor for the limited local business. The introduction to the shoe repair business of so formidable a competitor as the city, with its use of relief workers who were paid in kind and its steady stream of relief "customers" receiving free services, certainly undermined private shoe repair businesses. Indeed, between January and November 1932, the City of Edmonton's shoe repair shop handled more than eleven thousand pairs of shoes, making no small dent in the local industry.⁷⁷

But, despite Wright's complaint, it made little economic sense for the city to leave shoe repair services to private operators, at least according to the city's chief engineer. After all, he argued in reply to Wright's letter, doing so would merely force the unemployed shoemakers working in the city's shop to find other relief work or else go on the dole, while at the same time necessitating cash payments to private sector shoe repair shops for their services to the unemployed. In the end, such a move would do little more than shift the unemployment problem from here to there without fundamentally ameliorating it. Furthermore, he continued, it was doubtful that private shoe repair shops lost much business to the city's operation. Paying from their own pockets for private sector shoe repair was probably not a high priority for unemployed men, given their already tight (or non-existent) budgets and lack of visible working prospects. But although such arguments may have made good economic

sense to the city, they offered little to the many shoe repair businesses struggling with the same depressed conditions affecting unemployed workers and their families.

Housing and Food Relief: Married Men and Their Families

In addition to clothing, provisions for food and shelter became a municipal responsibility. Whereas single women, either with or without children, were expected to rely on their kin to fulfill these needs or to find work as domestics, unemployed men received relief from the city in which they lived. Here again, policies guiding relief distribution differed according to marital status.

Unemployed married men could apply for relief to pay the rent, but the amounts offered varied considerably: some city relief authorities calculated twenty dollars per month, for example, while others believed that ten was sufficient. Until the spring of 1932, the City of Saskatoon paid only a single month's rent, and only if the tenant had been evicted. Not surprisingly, this was entirely unsatisfactory to some landlords. In May of that year, a delegation of landlords visited city council seeking a more expansive policy. "In many instances," they complained, "unemployed had occupied residences for months without contributing one cent." As a solution to this problem, the delegation suggested that the city ask the provincial and federal governments to contribute two-thirds of the cost of rent for qualified cases, with the city paying the balance.⁷⁸ In Edmonton, those in need of rent money applied to the Special Relief Department, which consisted of three staff members dedicated to processing rent requests. The staff processed each application and then decided whether to accept it based on an examination of the applicant's history card. If the application was approved, rent was paid to the applicant's landlord directly.⁷⁹ If it was rejected, unemployed families had little choice but to find some other way to avoid eviction. When one man learned that his household effects were to be seized for arrears of rent, he "moved them from the place of seizure" in order to protect them and subsequently faced a charge of theft.⁸⁰

As for food relief, married men and their families obtained groceries either from retail stores, using vouchers, or from central city-run

stores. Of the three cities, only Saskatoon experimented with the idea of a central relief store. Opening in June 1932, it was an attempt to centralize and make more efficient the distribution of food among family relief recipients. Before the introduction of the new central store, relief recipients had received vouchers that they could exchange for thirty-three specified goods at any city grocery store. At a council meeting in late March 1932, city councillors discussed abandoning the open voucher system and adopting the central store. Those in favour (only one alderman disagreed) pointed out that under the current system, considerable substitution in food items was taking place, in addition to which most of the business was going to “two or three large stores” rather than to smaller grocers.⁸¹ One alderman further noted that the city might save money by inconveniencing relief recipients. “If the store were centrally located,” Alderman Crimp suggested, “and the adult members of the family were obliged to go to the stores [of goods] and get the groceries, a lot of them might soon be buying their own.”⁸²

Switching to a central city-run store system did allow the municipal government significant savings. Buying bulk from wholesalers, rather than issuing vouchers redeemable at city grocery stores, enabled the city to acquire large quantities of food at bargain prices. Moreover, the relief store allowed the city to confine relief groceries “to certain items of high food value” and to ensure that store attendants could easily explain to recipients any changes to the relief diet prescribed by the city.⁸³ Ostensibly, trained dieticians could scientifically determine the precise proportions of specific foods required to keep a family healthy, while at the same time keeping a close eye on costs. Municipal officials were thus able to exert substantial control over the foods available to unemployed families. At the same time, while the central relief store supposedly ensured that unemployed families ate a healthy diet and did not splurge on foods that were neither essential nor nutritious, such municipal involvement implied that recipients could not be trusted to make responsible decisions on their own.

Many of Saskatoon’s storekeepers were unhappy about the city’s relief store. Some merchants lost much of the relief business they had enjoyed prior to the store’s opening, when the relief orders on which

they had counted simply stopped. “The Civic Relief Store is not in the best interest of the taxpayers and citizens in general, nor is it fair or equitable to those engaged in the lines of businesses covered by the operation of the Store,” Saskatoon’s West Side Business Men’s Association complained in 1934. “Any saving made is more than offset by the damage occasioned business interests of the city and the consequent loss of revenue in licenses and taxes, which will be more than ever apparent this year.”⁸⁴ Some storekeepers estimated that over the course of just one week, they lost nearly \$5,000 worth of grocery-related business to the city’s relief store. Merchants also complained that “the relief store was instrumental in . . . losing contact with some of their former customers,” severing the long-standing customer relations on which they relied.⁸⁵

But the original voucher system had had its own set of problems with respect to customer relations. Unlike cash, grocery vouchers limited customers to specific food items. Voucher holders could not substitute one item for another even when both items were of equal value. Some relief shoppers may have had sufficient (and maybe free) access to butter, milk, and eggs from family or friends living on nearby farms but needed goods such as coffee or sugar. Relief vouchers would not allow relief shoppers to exchange their butter, milk, or egg allotment for items not on the city’s list.⁸⁶ Clearly frustrating to recipients, the inflexibility of relief vouchers thus set up potentially damaging customer-relations situations for storekeepers. Merchants “cannot afford to refuse requests for substitutions,” the Civic Relief Board reported in 1932, “as the applicant may have been a good customer of theirs for years and probably will be again when he gets back to work.”⁸⁷ For some storekeepers, then, the risk of alienating their long-time customers prompted them to allow substitutions despite the voucher system rules.

In addition to dissatisfied relief recipients and the ambivalent merchant response to the relief store, municipal officials in Saskatoon had to contend with provincial government strictures. In 1933, Thomas Molloy, the Saskatchewan deputy minister of Railways, Labour, and Industries, advised the city of new federal and provincial policies dictating that all relief purchases “should be through the regular channels of trade and that wherever possible Canadian goods should be purchased

in preference to those from foreign countries.” These policies resulted from “pressure . . . brought upon the Governments by the Western Cattle Dealers’ Association and the Milk Producers’ Association.”⁸⁸ The source of beef and dairy products for Saskatoon’s central relief store is not known, but the province’s directive suggests that the city was not limiting its bulk purchases to local or even national products. Like most industries, the Depression hit cattle and dairy producers hard. In the cattle industry, the economic slump hindered sales that had already been in steady decline since at least the early 1920s. The situation went from bad to worse as cattle producers had to contend with new American protectionist tariffs, especially after July 1930, when President Herbert Hoover imposed a 30 percent levy on live cattle imported into the United States. Throughout the 1920s, cattle producers had been exporting 90 percent of their live cattle stock to the United States. The tariff’s effects were disastrous. In 1929, 160,000 cattle shipments left Canada for the United States; by 1931, that number had dropped to a paltry 10,000.⁸⁹ The combined effects of the Depression’s onset and the Smoot-Hawley tariff similarly threatened the Canadian dairy industry. Between 1920 and 1932, the price of Canadian butter fell from just under fifty-seven cents a pound to less than twenty cents a pound. After the 1930 American tariff took effect, duties on fresh milk increased from zero to three cents a gallon, and on cream, from zero to nearly fifty-seven cents a gallon.⁹⁰

Given the all-but-closed American market on which cattle and dairy producers had relied through the 1920s, it is not surprising that they turned their attention homeward after 1930. The emerging relief machines in western Canadian cities seemed an obvious market and a potential saviour from economic ruin. After Saskatoon opened its relief store in 1932, the city spent an average of more than \$800 on meat and \$1,000 on dairy products in a typical week.⁹¹ With orders as large as these, it is not difficult to see why the cattle and dairy producers were so interested in the local market. Provincial meddling in Saskatoon’s relief purchasing practices, however, was not in the city’s financial interest. Forcing the city to purchase Canadian goods whenever possible effectively barred Saskatoon officials from hunting out bargains south of the border.

Like local businesses, relief recipients also had problems with the relief store. Many were forced to travel greater distances and thus to spend more time getting groceries than they had previously using the voucher system, which had allowed them to shop at their local store. Travel to and from the central store with little transportation but their own two feet was no easy task for many of the unemployed, particularly for those who lived across town from the store. Saskatoon's icy prairie winters made the trek even more onerous for nearly half the year. When the Saskatoon Trades and Labor Council brought up the issue with city officials, seeking "free street railway transportation from the relief store to enable recipients of relief to get their goods home," the Civic Relief Board answered that the relief store would parcel recipients' goods into several packages, apparently making them easier to carry home, and would allow recipients to leave some goods at the store for pickup the following day.⁹² Relief recipients also complained about the poor quality of the store's products, as well as the diet list's inflexibility when it came to making substitutions.⁹³ One woman complained that her family's relief diet did not include enough butter, a commodity that her husband needed in greater quantities to sustain his strength while he worked on one of the city's work relief programs. After comparison shopping, moreover, some recipients claimed that prices at the relief store were higher than those charged by retail stores.⁹⁴

Neither Edmonton nor Winnipeg operated a central relief store, and city storekeepers and married relief recipients alike seemed content with those cities' grocery distribution policies. Winnipeg, for instance, used an open voucher system, allowing relief recipients to shop at any retail store in the city. As noted in a Winnipeg unemployment relief report for 1932, the result proved "satisfactory to recipients of relief as well as the merchants of the city."⁹⁵ But early on, Winnipeg officials identified some of the immediate problems. First, they believed that "people sought assistance who were not entitled to it." Second, they suggested that the use of this system offered relief recipients the "opportunity for a certain amount of trafficking in coupons."⁹⁶ City officials, however, believed that most such problems could easily be avoided by hiring more investigators. The Edmonton relief office also issued to recipients grocery

vouchers that were redeemable at any local grocery store. To some business interests in the city, this seemed only proper. As Edmonton businessman F. S. Wright pointed out, “City relief administrators showed good business acumen in seeing that the distribution of coal, milk, and groceries go through proper channels of business operation—that is through the retailer to the relief applicant. The benefit of this procedure as regards aiding business in slack time is obvious. It has kept many of the small merchants off relief.”⁹⁷

Initially, Edmonton families on relief could expect four dollars’ worth of grocery vouchers and one dollar in cash each week. The city’s relief officer, H. F. McKee, implemented this policy in April 1932 so relief recipients “could exercise their own initiative in making purchases.”⁹⁸ Although the policy proved popular among recipients, it did not survive the year. By December, federal and provincial opposition had compelled city officials to eliminate the dollar in cash; instead, recipients were to receive five dollars in grocery vouchers. Not surprisingly, the change elicited complaints from the unemployed. In mid-December, representatives of an unemployment group called the United Front Council appeared before city council demanding “immediate return of the dollar that was cut on the relief tickets.” Relief officer McKee replied that his department “was being subjected to criticism” from provincial and federal officials “in respect to the relief that was being given.” To compensate the unemployed for the loss, however, the city began providing them with a “free lot and means of growing their own vegetables.”⁹⁹

With regard to food distribution, Winnipeg’s relief officials believed that “in comparison with systems in force in other large cities,” theirs was “fair to the unemployed, yet sound from an economical point of view.” They admitted, though, that “the Unemployed Organizations, as is probably natural, are insistent that allowances are not sufficient.”¹⁰⁰ As a direct result of those complaints, the city, together with the province, initiated an investigation into its food distribution practices. In the main, this meant sending copies of Winnipeg’s food and diet schedules to dieticians and other welfare “experts” with a view to “receiving an unbiased report from authority of the highest standing.”¹⁰¹ Almost without fail, the experts, who were from across Canada and the northern United States,

assured Winnipeg relief officials that their efforts were well justified and that their food schedules were entirely sufficient.¹⁰² Many also offered advice on dealing with relief recipients' complaints. Lucy H. Gillett of New York City's Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor was among those who suggested educating families about food preparation and nutrition:

We find—as you say is true in Winnipeg—many who feel our allowances are insufficient, but trained nutritionists who go into the homes always find the complaints arise because the quantities of various foods provided differ from those to which families have been accustomed and they do not know how to plan meals for them. In the majority of the cases, our educational workers are successful in showing them how to make satisfactory adjustments in food habits. Usually the health of the family improves and when this happens its members are convinced that they can live on a diet that differs from that to which they have been accustomed.¹⁰³

Montréal's Child Welfare Association concurred with this advice, asking Winnipeg relief officials whether they were providing education about food choices and preparation: "From our past two years' experience, we have found that an adequate supply is only half the problem. This allowance must be accompanied by individual instruction in the homes by public health nurses, social workers, or nutritionists."¹⁰⁴ Most correspondents likewise approved of Winnipeg's voucher system as opposed to central relief stores. Marjorie Bell, director of Toronto's Visiting Housekeepers Association, commended Winnipeg relief officers on their voucher system, considering it "much more satisfactory than the central depot or warehouse. The latter diverts trade from natural channels, gives undue publicity to recipients of relief and entails long distance travel with supplies by clients, who are quite often unfit physically for the task."¹⁰⁵

Determining the quantity of food that families on relief should receive entailed keeping abreast of food prices. To that end, relief officials periodically dispatched a committee of women to "actually buy

the supplies.” In addition, the Civic Unemployment Relief Committee enlisted the services of five “experienced and reliable women . . . to obtain frank opinion from the housewives of recipients of relief as to the adequacy or otherwise of the schedule.” Upon completion of their task, the five women reported that some housewives were “just able to manage” but that more than half of the total 2,447 families visited had stated that the food allotments were “sufficient for their family requirements.”¹⁰⁶

How did the relief diet affect the recipients’ health? Edmonton officials dispatched a Dr. Whitelaw to investigate this matter. In January 1933, he reported:

I have been on the whole very agreeably surprised to find that there have been so few cases where it would be fair to say malnutrition exists. On the other hand I have found the great majority happy, healthy, and vigorous to a greater degree than might have been expected. Despite the Depression now existing it would appear from health reports that the general health reports of the community throughout our province and dominion is even more favourable than it has been during the periods of prosperity in past years. This may be due to a plainer, more sensible even if somewhat restricted diet made necessary or unavoidable because of the prevailing economic depression.¹⁰⁷

A provincial relief investigation committee came to similar conclusions five years later. In December 1938, the committee reported to the province, “Some of the officials consulted went so far as to say that there was less malnutrition among children of relief recipients than among children whose parents were in a position to buy them large quantities of processed articles of doubtful food value.”¹⁰⁸

Housing and Food Relief: Single Men

Food and shelter relief for single men was distinctly different from that for married men and their families. Rather than issuing vouchers redeemable at grocery stores or providing rent payments, municipal

officials distributed to single men meal and bed tickets redeemable at local cafés and hotels. By January 1931, approximately one thousand single men were assembling each morning at Edmonton's relief offices to receive meal and bed tickets. Afternoons were given to reviewing and accepting new applications for single men's relief. In order to reduce situations that relief officials believed might promote disorder, the city devised "a scheme . . . whereby an entire change of rooming houses takes place once a week and so far has been productive of the results anticipated—no complaints."¹⁰⁹ This strategy went some direction in aiding café and hotel owners as well. "So far a fairly equal distribution of services has been extended throughout the city," Superintendent T. S. Magee of the Civic Relief Department reported to the city commissioner in January 1931. "The reason for using so many [businesses] is we feel people in business . . . are passing through a period of depression while having to take care of rent, licenses, etc. [and] are entitled to participate."¹¹⁰

In addition to compelling single men to move to a different rooming house every week, Edmonton's relief authorities distributed the men throughout the city to reduce the possibility of subversive activities. "It prevents large numbers of men congregating at a given place," the relief officer explained, "as we realize segregation as far as possible is beneficial to the department in handling our problems."¹¹¹ Presumably, Superintendent Magee wanted to avoid the potential problems that might flow from several hundred men taking their meals together and talking about his department's shortcomings, or worse, organizing some sort of collective activity against the state. With more than three thousand single men on city relief in mid-January 1931, it is perhaps not surprising that Magee harboured serious concerns about possible situations where the men could congregate.

In Edmonton, unemployed single men could expect two meals per day and a bed at one the city's many hotels. A typical ticket promised two fried eggs or hot cakes, one cup of coffee, bread and butter, and fried potatoes for the first meal, and a choice of four meats (liver, hamburger, whitefish, or sausage) with bread and butter, one cup of coffee or tea, and potatoes for the second.¹¹² The ticket also carried the name

of the establishment where the meals could be had and the name of the hotel where the man could lay his head that night. But cafés and hotels were not the only beneficiaries of the city's relief distribution policies. Individuals outside the regular city retail trade also supplied the relief market with food services and accommodation for single unemployed workers. During the first three weeks of May 1931, for example, one woman served Edmonton's single unemployed more than seventy-one thousand bowls of porridge at a cost of one cent each. She billed the city accordingly.¹¹³ Similarly, a Mrs. Golden, proprietress of the Golden Community Mission, kept ten men and served meals for one hundred, all billed to the city.¹¹⁴ Edmonton citizens who ran boarding houses for single unemployed men received from the city ten cents per man per day, but while this income went some way toward paying city taxes and utilities, it was never enough. Boarding house operators compensated by trying to increase their share of the boarding house market. The city's medical officer of health alerted the city commissioner to the full implications of the problem in March 1933: "Operators cannot operate at this price and so they squeeze many more lodgers than are allowed by law."¹¹⁵

Unfortunately for the single unemployed, cities could not sustain the practice of supplying them with a bed and two square meals each day for long. During the first few years of the Depression, for example, city officials ceased registering single men after April 30, fully expecting the men to "shift for themselves" through the summer months. The cities would then reinstate the meal and bed scheme through the winter.¹¹⁶ The general spring cut-off, however, had to be flexible enough to accommodate what the cities considered emergency cases. In late May 1931, for example, Edmonton relief officials felt "obliged . . . to provide sleeping accommodation . . . for thirty-five men" and to issue four meal tickets each to some one hundred men.¹¹⁷ The city relief officer, however, was aware of the emergency relief's implications. "This service we fear will have an ever widening scope," he pointed out to Edmonton's city commissioner on 21 May 1931, "and may in the near future bring back many of those cut off on April 30."¹¹⁸ Within one week, his fears were realized: by 27 May, the city was providing emergency accommodation for 254 men, and delegations from both the United Empire Loyalists Association and

the National Unemployed Workers Association were demanding equal treatment for their members.¹¹⁹

Similar problems cropped up the following spring, and by August 1932, the city, together with federal officials, was quietly investigating the possibilities of mass feeding and mass accommodation schemes for unemployed single men. In one scenario, the city would use the old federal penitentiary at the centre of town as a site for mass feeding only. In another, it would incur some small expenditure on a new set of buildings at the penitentiary to house and feed the men. Yet a third possibility was to set up a simple tent city at the exhibition grounds in Edmonton's north end.¹²⁰ When word of the city's mass feeding plan finally trickled into the local business community, it prompted fifteen Edmonton café owners to issue a formal protest against the move and to call for the maintenance of the old ticket system. The mass feeding plan, the café owners complained, "will affect our ability to pay taxes and otherwise carry on business." Edmonton Mayor Daniel Knott replied to the petition by pointing out that the provincial and federal governments had lately assumed all responsibility for the care and maintenance of unemployed single men, including their mass feeding.¹²¹ The city could do nothing but go along with this new scheme. Still, the implicit threat behind the café owners' petition was probably not lost on Knott. After all, business and property taxes were among the few forms of revenue generation open to the city.

Some of Edmonton's unemployed workers likewise protested the mass feeding and housing plan. On 14 November 1932, a huge crowd met in the city's downtown market square to oppose the idea, noting that "Calgary experience shows such kitchens only economize the already meagre relief allowances of single unemployed workers" and calling for cash payments to the single unemployed instead.¹²² The Edmonton Retail Clerks' Association shared the sentiments of those attending the mass meeting about the meagre relief allowances, although probably for reasons quite different from those of the single unemployed men. In May 1931, association representatives S. H. Williamson and James McMillan wrote the city commissioner requesting that the city provide more substantial food, shelter, and sleeping accommodations to single

unemployed men. More specifically, they proposed that the city offer each man at least two meals per day at no less than 12.5 cents per meal.¹²³ Tellingly, the Edmonton Retail Trades Association cast its proposal in economic terms rather than focusing on food quantity or quality. While the association was doubtless interested in the welfare of the city's single unemployed men, a more substantial city-funded diet would most certainly benefit the local retail trade as well.

Food and housing issues continued to bedevil city officials. In 1936, when the federal government began to wind down the Dominion relief camps, the provinces were faced with the problem of providing food and shelter for the men who had recently been released from the camps, many of whom were migrating back into the cities. In Edmonton, a delegation of seven, representing fifteen hundred unemployed single men who ate at a downtown community soup kitchen, complained to the provincial government about their situation. In addition to two meal tickets per day, the men received bed tickets worth ten cents each—but, as one man pointed out, there was “no accommodation for such things as soap or towels, no provision made for shaving and toilet necessities. . . . If a man wants a hair cut, he has to get it the best way he can.”¹²⁴ As for meals, conditions verged on the intolerable. “The heat and stench in the soup kitchen is more than we can bear,” one member of the delegation declared. “One of the boys fainted on Sunday night, and the men could hardly eat their supper.” Living under such circumstances was stigmatizing, and it robbed the men of their dignity and sense of independence. “These conditions in many cases have been undermining our lives,” one of the men observed. “Our food and clothing leaves us isolated from the rest of society. There are demoralizing influences for the younger men in the kitchen.” What the men really wanted was cash “to pay for meals in a restaurant, or if we like, rent a little housekeeping room and buy our groceries.”¹²⁵

A provincially appointed relief committee that was struck in early 1938 to investigate relief conditions across the province found most of the problems associated with the kitchen “unavoidable.” Among these problems were the “association of some individuals of undesirable habits” and the “accumulation during the meal of unsightly quantities of unused food, creating an ‘atmosphere’ repugnant to aesthetic sensibilities.” More



Figure 3. Unemployed single men queue for food at Edmonton's soup kitchen, 1933. In this photograph, the kitchen appears precisely the way city officials wanted it to: clean, clear, orderly, operating with machine precision. Single unemployed men described a different kitchen in their brief appearance before the cabinet of the Alberta government in 1936. Glenbow Archives, ND-3-6523a.

distressing to the visiting committee, however, was the kitchen's demoralizing effects, especially on its longer-term clientele: "A tendency is gradually developed to lower the morale of those eating in the Kitchen. At first the individual finds eating at the Kitchen a necessity but objectionable. Later this objection is gradually overcome by repetition, and eating at the kitchen becomes a habit, destructive to initiative and ambition."¹²⁶

Some of Edmonton's single men found accommodation at rooming houses paid for by the city, but despite the medical officer's warning in 1933 about overcrowded conditions, the problem remained some three years later. One unemployed man complained to provincial officials in 1936: "In one place in particular, there were eight men in a room where, according to city health regulations, it would only be allowed to

hold three men." The city, he said, was doing its best to make conditions better, but the rooming house keepers simply could not afford to maintain clean, reasonable accommodations at ten cents per man per night. The man also warned of potential health problems due to overcrowding: "Because of men on relief being compelled to sleep with other men, probably they get diseases. We have had cases like that of men having to sleep with other men who were diseased."¹²⁷

In Winnipeg, unemployed single men apparently enjoyed better living conditions. On three separate occasions in early December 1932, representatives of the Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council visited the sleeping and dining quarters on Water Street, which housed eight or nine hundred men. Water Street officials permitted the council's delegation to "inspect every phase of the serving of relief to single unemployed men," and the council representatives were "on hand to see the first meal being served." The breakfast meal consisted of porridge "with a fair grade of milk," sausage or bacon, bread, butter and honey or syrup, and tea or coffee to wash it all down. Only the meat was rationed; the men could eat all they could of the rest. For the second meal, the men received soup; beef, pork, or some other type of meat; pudding; bread and butter, with jam, honey, or syrup; two kinds of vegetables; coffee or tea; and milk. According to the delegates' report, both meals and sleeping accommodations were good.¹²⁸

FINANCING RELIEF

City relief machines relied heavily on financial contributions from higher levels of government, which typically covered one-third to one-half of the total costs associated with relief. Without that financial aid, as well as indirect financing help, the relief machinery simply could not function. The first Dominion-wide arrangement between the cities, the provinces, and Prime Minister Bennett's new federal administration in Ottawa for funding the city relief machines emerged in September 1930. Thereafter, the federal government agreed to renew the arrangement, with various important modifications, until the end

of Bennett's administration in 1935. Whenever the government (federal or provincial) threatened to withdraw its financial contributions or delayed renewing the agreements, the cities responded quickly. During the spring of 1932, for example, both the provinces and the municipalities grew increasingly alarmed at word that the federal government intended to discontinue its support of urban relief schemes. "It is absolutely impossible for the province or municipalities to carry on the very heavy burden of direct relief," Manitoba's Premier John Bracken informed Bennett in April 1932. As the premier pointed out, Winnipeg was in an especially difficult position: direct relief was costing some \$265,000 per month, an amount the city could not cover on its own.¹²⁹ A year later, it was the same story. The federal government had yet to renew its 1933 legislation after it expired on 31 March. By May, provincial and municipal officials across the prairies were growing worried. "From my personal knowledge of the situation in the West," Alberta's Premier Brownlee informed Bennett on 9 May 1933, "I am quite convinced that the urban and rural municipalities cannot be expected to assume any larger financial obligation than was required of them under the previous agreement. As we have been obliged to ask your Government for assistance, it is equally clear that the province cannot assume any larger obligation. I feel it is therefore absolutely necessary that the Dominion Government continue for this year to make a contribution on the same basis as under the previous agreement."¹³⁰

Although the federal government promised city councils that funding for urban relief systems would be forthcoming, actually getting the money was often an arduous process. City officials relied on a variety of methods to subtly (and sometimes not so subtly) impress on senior government administrators the difficult position they were in as a result of the slow transfer of funds. These ranged from appealing to the federal government directly, to recruiting premiers and other provincial officials to intervene on their behalf, to using their "man in Ottawa," typically a local senator or Member of Parliament. In 1931, for example, the federal government signed agreements with the Province of Alberta and the City of Edmonton to fund 50 percent of the cost of public works relief undertaken in that city, with the balance shared by the city and the province

equally. The federal government's portion of the cost, according to the agreement, was \$200,000. Within three months, Edmonton had received less than \$24,000 from Ottawa and nothing at all from the province. "Tax collection is not supplying sufficient money for current needs," the city's treasurer informed the city council in April 1932, "and Governments must pay money owing by them."¹³¹ In this case, foot-dragging on the part of the federal and provincial governments forced the city to withhold more than \$300,000 earmarked for Edmonton Public School Board salaries and wages and to direct the money instead toward the city's general operating expenses, at least until the federal funds came through. Edmonton's Mayor Knott immediately fired off a telegram to Senator William A. Griesbach, one of Edmonton's "men in Ottawa," asking him to "please influence dominion to pay what it owes. Situation serious."¹³² The mayor then anxiously wired Alberta's Premier Brownlee, advising him that "the city has no more credit at the bank."¹³³ In the end, after a good deal of heated communication between Edmonton and Ottawa, the federal government agreed to make good on its share. But, as MP Ambrose Bury told city council, Ottawa insisted that its share was only \$127,000, not the \$200,000 that Edmonton expected. The shortfall, while not devastating, certainly put a difficult strain on the city's finances.¹³⁴

The proper functioning of city relief machines also relied on financing arrangements with the federal government. With their credit ratings at banks and other lending institutions growing ever more precarious through the early Depression years, cities like Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg depended on the government to underwrite or otherwise secure substantial loans on their behalf. At a 1932 conference attended by the four western premiers and the mayors of the major cities, it was agreed that "because cities and provinces cannot make necessary relief expenditures without borrowing, and because the federal government has access to low interest loans, the federal government should get loans on security of provincial treasury bills" and make more funds available to the provinces and the cities. Prime Minister Bennett, however, was not sympathetic: "The Dominion has nothing to do with debts piled up by the cities and the provinces," he began, and went on to reiterate the federal position that the ultimate responsibility for unemployment

relief rested with the provinces and the municipalities.¹³⁵ Saskatoon, in as dire a financial situation as any other city, secured a series of loans from the provincial government in order to carry out its relief programs. The loans rested on promissory notes signed by the city at 7 percent interest, a rate that city council considered unfair on the grounds that the “province [could] borrow money at a cheaper rate of interest than 7%.” “It is assumed,” Saskatoon’s city clerk pointedly reported to Premier Anderson, “that there is no intention on the government’s part to make a profit from the transaction.”¹³⁶

City administrators were also acutely aware of perceived inequalities in the distribution of municipal relief funds, and they constantly sought to correct them. Edmonton city officials, complaining in March 1930 that Calgary had taken “the lion’s share” of Alberta’s \$243,000 of relief disbursement announced that spring, immediately sought authority to spend any remaining and unallocated relief funds.¹³⁷ The cities’ dependence on senior levels of government meant that the municipalities had little bargaining power. In November 1931, the federal and provincial governments compelled city officials in Edmonton to accept their terms when it came to dealing with single men. Noting that single men were “flocking into town,” the city agreed to provide relief for the men if they had registered prior to August of that year. In return, the province and the federal government together promised to cover two-thirds of the costs of their relief. For single men arriving after August, the city would pay only 25 percent of their care, with the province paying another 25 percent and the federal government covering the balance. “It appears we must accept these terms if we are to function under the Government Scheme,” Edmonton’s relief officer, T. S. Magee, reported to the city commissioner.¹³⁸

The provinces, while contributing financially, were not interested in taking control over the administration of relief in the cities. In Manitoba, for instance, provincial officials noted that “the Bracken administration’s policy has been to financially and otherwise, assist municipalities in dealing with unemployment, recognizing that elected councils and officials have the necessary intimate local knowledge upon which to base the measure of relief required.”¹³⁹ Similarly, Alberta’s

director of employment services pointed out to Edmonton's Mayor Knott that "some of the expenditures shown on direct relief statements are beyond what might be considered reasonable assistance. We have no desire to suggest to cities what should be given, though."¹⁴⁰

Depression-related unemployment relief policy was clearly about more than municipal efforts to reduce costs or to control what they perceived as a potentially dangerous unemployment population, although these were critical elements of policy decisions. Ultimately, relief policy was designed to protect and promote city officials' visions of their cities and their societies. How municipal officials administered relief had tremendous implications not only for how their cities experienced the Depression but also for what the social structure of their cities would look like once the economic and social crisis ended. The preference was clearly for couples who conformed to the model of male breadwinner and female homemaker, and the way that relief recipients were categorized, as well as the associated relief distribution methods, attempted to stabilize a social structure that privileged such couples over men and women who were single. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, the realities of the Depression compelled city authorities to adapt constantly to new situations. In the end, however, while these challenges stretched and strained and bent the relief systems, the basic concepts and social norms upon which city relief machines rested remained intact.

3

Building Cities

The governor general was there with Lady Bessborough. So were Winnipeg's mayor, Colonel Ralph Webb, and Manitoba's minister of Public Works, William R. Clubb. And gathered beneath the leafy elms lining St. Mary's Avenue stood hundreds of Winnipeggers in the late afternoon sun. It was mid-August 1932, and all were present to watch the laying of the cornerstone at Winnipeg's new Civic Auditorium. With the last few notes of "God Save the King" still ringing from the Canadian Legion Band's horns, Lord Bessborough accepted a trowel from the chief contractor and carefully lined the stone's edges with mortar. Into a gap behind the place where the cornerstone would rest, William Clubb tucked a container that held some coins, a few papers of record, and several copies of recent newspapers. Workmen who had been standing nearby then neatly slid the stone into place.¹

The presence of the king's representative, the Earl of Bessborough, governor general of Canada from 1931 to 1935, lent an air of royal spectacle to what was already a symbolic occasion. The cornerstone ceremony that August afternoon put the finishing touch on one of the last—and most impressive—in a series of public works projects designed to provide work relief to the city's jobless residents. Built entirely by workers taken from Winnipeg's unemployment rolls, the Civic Auditorium represented thousands of man hours of work to hundreds of the city's married jobless men, many of whom had been without steady income for years.

The auditorium was only one of many unemployment relief projects carried on in Canadian cities between 1930 and 1932. Financed by all three levels of government but administered entirely at the local level, the projects were designed to provide maximum employment to the growing ranks of the nation's urban unemployed. The projects offered significant additional benefits to the cities. For one thing, they provided cities with lasting and useful infrastructure at a fraction of what they would have cost without federal and provincial financial involvement.² For another, the projects typically engaged large local manufacturing and construction contracting businesses, helping them to survive the economically difficult period.

Cities embarked on the first batch of projects in the late autumn of 1930 under a widespread belief that the economic downturn would not last and that work relief would only be needed to carry the cities and the unemployed through the coming difficult winter.³ By the following autumn, however, the Depression and its effects had only grown worse, so cities began another series of relief projects, again with the hope that the spring would bring some respite. When it did not, municipal governments clamoured once more for federal and provincial financing for further work relief projects, but this time the senior governments were unwilling or unable to help. No new jointly funded major work relief projects would be forthcoming in the autumn of 1932; the era of national urban work-for-wages schemes was over. Thereafter, and for the remainder of the Depression, cities could only offer their urban unemployed relatively modest jobs such as street sweeping or snow shovelling.



Figure 4. Winnipeggers enjoy a concert in the newly completed Civic Auditorium, 1932. For the most part, relief projects were not regarded as boondoggles. Rather, municipal authorities felt that these projects contributed something of value to the city and often described them as “useful” or “necessary.” Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg – Buildings – Municipal – Civic Auditorium, Collection item 23, NI3469.

Dissatisfied, city authorities continued to impress upon both the federal and provincial governments the need for major jointly funded work relief projects, but the upper echelons of government remained resolutely opposed to reanimating the programs that had marked the first three years of the Depression.⁴

City engineers and other technical experts played a central role in shepherding city work relief projects from conception to completion. These men were not social work leaders intent on providing the urban unemployed with aid and lifting them from their “demoralized” state. They were professional city planners who organized their approach to work relief during the early Depression years much like they had approached city building and maintenance work in normal times. To

these professionals, work relief meant jobs for the unemployed, not charity for the urban poor. Their work was imbued with rationalist and scientific principles of a Taylorist bent, not with the ideals of professional welfare workers, who emphasized case work and focused on the moral regulation of the welfare client.

Historian Bonnie Fox Schwartz notes this effect in her examination of the short-lived Civil Works Administration (CWA) in the United States. “Businessmen and efficiency experts,” she argues, “came to dominate the CWA from Washington down to the state and county offices; and they ran the program more like an emergency employment corporation rather than charitable made work.”⁵ The work relief programs carried out in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg were similarly dominated by city engineers and planners: they proposed the projects, organized the labour and materials required to implement them, and managed the workers and work distribution through to each project’s completion. And much like the CWA’s efficiency experts, they shared the spirit of the management innovations of the 1920s. According to Schwartz, the CWA’s efficiency experts stood in direct conflict with professional social workers, resulting in a contest over control of the CWA. In the end, social workers failed to support continued federal funding of the CWA after the winter of 1934; social workers, Schwartz argues, “saw the CWA as a disruption of proper case-work counselling, and they resented the engineers for usurping their hard-won role as chief dispensers of federal aid to the unemployed.”⁶ With the efficiency experts out of the way after 1934, the social workers could resume control over unemployment relief. There is little evidence of such a contest in Prairie cities during the same period, but, according to historian James Struthers, Canada’s most famous social worker, Charlotte Whitton, saw in the federal government’s abandonment of work relief as an unemployment relief measure a “golden opportunity for the professionalizing of the dole.”⁷

In large measure, the direction of public works relief projects was governed by the local peculiarities in the orientations of city planners, city engineers, and citizens. Edmonton, for example, directed its work relief efforts mainly at sewerage and gravelling projects—the nuts and bolts of city infrastructure—while Saskatoon and Winnipeg both

Table 2 Population growth in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg, 1901 to 1931

	1901	1911	1921	1931
Edmonton	3,000	25,000	59,000	79,000
Saskatoon	341	12,000	26,000	43,000
Winnipeg	48,000	157,000	229,000	295,000 ^a

^a This figure includes “greater Winnipeg.” The actual city population in 1931 was 179,000.

SOURCE: Canada, Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Seventh Census of Canada, 1931* (Ottawa: J. O. Patenaude, King’s Printer, 1935).

pursued grander projects such as the Broadway Bridge and the Civic Auditorium, respectively. A concert hall, several bridges, various buildings, riverbank improvements, grading and gravelling and brush work projects, and major sewerage construction: all reflected city officials’ ideas about what their cities needed. During these difficult years, infrastructure needs were, of course, always measured against the amount of work (the number of man hours, for example) that the project might offer the unemployed.⁸

Public works projects in Prairie cities—as well as relief administration generally—were carried out within the wider context of the expansion in both size and influence of the cities themselves. The sheer growth, nothing short of astronomical, of Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg through the three decades leading to the Depression (see table 2) had transformed those places from mere contenders to three of the most important political, economic, and cultural centres in Canada.

CITIES AND CITY BUILDING IN THE EARLY 1900s

Authorities in the emerging five metropolises on the Canadian Prairies—Winnipeg, Regina, Saskatoon, Calgary, and Edmonton—sensed keenly the promised wealth from the agricultural and settlement boom of the first decade of the twentieth century. Boosters believed that in order

to capture the largest possible share of that wealth, city administrations had to develop their cities' industrial bases and urban infrastructure before their rivals, the smaller but equally ambitious surrounding cities, towns, and settlements.⁹ The early 1900s were therefore marked by building and city service construction on a scale never before seen on the Canadian Prairies. Newly formed cities like Edmonton, Saskatoon, Regina, and Calgary embarked on mad infrastructure construction in an effort to keep pace with the booming real estate and agriculture-related markets then buffeting their borders—in Saskatoon alone, 267 independent real estate offices struggled to manage all the buying and selling and speculation. By 1912, Saskatoon had constructed forty-one miles of concrete sidewalk, one of the hallmarks distinguishing a growing and important metropolitan centre; the concrete walks replaced the earlier boardwalk street perimeters and guarded city folk's boots and shoes from the muck of the streets. A combined total of nearly eighty miles of sewers and water mains carried Saskatonians' waste out of the city proper and provided homes and businesses with fresh running water.¹⁰ Eleven miles of street railway tracks transported citizens in and out of the downtown core.¹¹ New banking buildings; agricultural implement company buildings; hotels and retail stores; schools, including the new provincial university; churches; and other civic buildings sprang up rapidly after the arrival of three branch rail lines in 1908.¹²

In Edmonton, the process of city building was well under way by 1905. In December of that year, the city engineering department reported to the city commissioners that it had produced eleven miles of sidewalks, graded most city streets, and set up fifty-three street lights.¹³ Two years later, the city boasted a new street railway along Jasper Avenue, a waterworks department capable of pumping 5.5 million gallons of water each day, thirty-two miles of water mains, and twenty-five miles of sewers. The boom in the years prior to World War I saw even more development, as the population grew from 18,500 in 1908 to 63,000 in 1913, following the incorporation of Strathcona into the city.¹⁴

At the same time, Winnipeg was emerging as an important industrial and commercial centre.¹⁵ Manitoba's industrial output (of which

Winnipeg produced the bulk) stood at \$13 million in 1900. Ten years later, it had grown to \$54 million. Behind the growing industrial output, of course, was a growing industrial workforce that demanded more city services like roads and sidewalks, streetcars, housing developments, and electricity, sanitation, and sewer systems.¹⁶ A well-pleased Winnipeg Board of Trade reported in 1905 that “a greater amount of public works was carried out in 1904 than in any preceding year.”¹⁷ In that year, the city had built seventeen miles of asphalt, thirty-three miles of macadam, sixteen miles of block pavement, twenty-three miles of artificial stone, and 186 miles of plank walks. The sanitation department had also been busy, constructing eighty-seven miles of sewers and ninety-nine miles of water mains.¹⁸ By 1906, Winnipeg’s city council had convinced itself and the city’s ratepayers to form the publicly owned and operated Winnipeg City Hydro to generate enough electricity to service the city’s growing domestic and industrial needs.¹⁹ Construction of a power-generating station at Pointe du Bois, some 150 kilometres northeast of the city, began three years later, and Winnipeg received its first power from the site in 1911. In the postwar years, city building slowed considerably from the rapid pace of the century’s first two decades, partly because of slower population growth through the 1920s.²⁰ In part, too, the slowdown was due to the uncertain economic times of the early to mid-1920s, when the recession that had begun in 1913 reasserted itself following the Great War. But the intensive city building through the early boom years meant that the three Prairie cities had laid the basic infrastructure groundwork by the end of the Great War, and thereafter, this groundwork required primarily maintenance work rather than outright replacement.

By the 1920s, few people (not least the municipal officials themselves) doubted which cities flexed the greatest political, economic, and cultural muscle on the Canadian Prairies. Nor would any deny the future import to both the region and the nation of cities like Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg. In fact, the fortunes of those cities were part of a much larger, continent-wide trend that would see the growing prominence of the urban, often at the expense of the rural. In the United States, extensive railroad networks, and the access those networks provided to Midwestern raw resources (especially coal and iron ore), transformed

cities like Cleveland, Detroit, Milwaukee, and Chicago into titans of steel and iron fabrication through the late nineteenth century. Thereafter, based on that early industrial growth, Midwestern cities emerged through the first three decades of the twentieth century as the primary sites for the production of one of the most important commodities of the twentieth century: the automobile.²¹ Although William Cronon's *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* offers a much bleaker view of the rise of the industrial city through the same period, Cronon nevertheless shows how western cities (like his Chicago) emerged out of the Great War as economic, political, and, increasingly, cultural power centres. This shift would come later to the Canadian Prairies than elsewhere since agriculture dominated Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba until at least the end of the Second World War. However, all the early signs of growing metropolitan power were already in evidence at the onset of the Depression: skyrocketing population growth, intensive infrastructure building, and increasingly complex bureaucratic forms. In Winnipeg, for instance, important rail lines like the Canadian Pacific Railway, the Northern Pacific, the Canadian Northern, and the Grand Trunk–National Transcontinental linked that city with critical regional, national, and continental markets, thus securing access to much larger markets for Winnipeg business interests.²²

URBAN WORK RELIEF AT THE BEGINNING OF THE DEPRESSION

Municipally initiated work relief schemes were not uncommon features of the urban landscape even before the onset of the Depression. Local improvement projects, typically small scale and seasonally based, offered underemployed labourers limited opportunities to earn some money between the end of the harvest season and the beginning of the spring construction season.²³ The conventional wisdom during recessions or periods of seasonal market instability was that work relief was preferable to direct relief. Work relief kept men busy, reinforced the work ethic, and limited the possibility of welfare dependence.

Throughout the recession of the early 1920s, for example, the federal government, while maintaining that unemployment relief was a local responsibility, nevertheless offered some financing of public works designed to create employment.²⁴ By 1929, little had changed in this approach to unemployment relief.²⁵ “The main question is already settled,” declared the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* on 8 November 1929. “It is agreed that work is the best solution of any unemployment problem and that public authorities should, so far as possible, spread their spending programs over the winter season.” The editor of the *Manitoba Free Press* concurred: “Public works, which are needed and which the public funds can afford, should . . . be undertaken.”²⁶

By autumn 1929, when municipal governments began feeling the Depression’s first effects, they already had in place a tradition of work relief. Due to the difficult situation in which the cities found themselves that winter, the provinces agreed to bear a portion of the costs associated with winter public works construction in the western cities.²⁷ Saskatoon officials learned of the Saskatchewan government’s plan to aid the municipality in late December. Wary of the increasingly sticky issue of responsibility for the unemployed, the provincial government took great pains to iterate Saskatoon’s basic responsibility for its own unemployment problems. The provincial minister of Railways, Labour, and Industries did admit, however, that in extraordinarily “acute” or “widespread” unemployment conditions, the federal and provincial governments had both the reason and the obligation to provide some form of unemployment relief. But by the minister’s estimation, Saskatoon’s entire jobless population—including both single and married men—numbered only 327.²⁸ In a city of little more than forty-three thousand, this hardly qualified as either acute or widespread. Saskatoon’s own count of its jobless population, though, was at least twice this number.²⁹ The discrepancy between the numbers probably speaks more to the shortcomings in the province’s method of counting than to any conscious exaggeration of the problem on the part of the city: the provincial officials arrived at their estimate by counting only those men who had registered at the provincial unemployment office. In any case, provincial authorities undoubtedly recognized the inaccuracy of their official count because they asked the cities

for submissions of potential public works that could provide jobs to the province's urban unemployed over the coming winter.

Despite this encouraging tone, the Saskatchewan government, along with the provincial administrations in Alberta and Manitoba, had serious reservations about establishing, without the participation of the federal government, any real and far-reaching unemployment policy that would undoubtedly set dangerously costly precedents. Saskatchewan officials suggested that civic administrators develop alternate plans for tackling the unemployment problem because, as the deputy minister of Railways, Labour, and Industries had explained, "the furnishing of employment cannot of necessity be undertaken in every city of this province."³⁰ At the same time, provincial authorities across the Prairies reasoned that some limited provincial funding for municipal relief works, modelled after the federal emergency relief schemes of the early 1920s, not only would ease the urban unemployment problem and pacify municipal demands but would do so at a small political and economic cost to the province. After all, provincial aid in small enough doses toward what was widely understood to be a local responsibility was viewed as nothing more than an emergency palliative move, an explicitly short-term cure for an expected short-term ill.

In Saskatchewan, this meant that the province was prepared to contribute two-thirds of the extra costs associated with winter public works construction. Although local improvements were generally more efficiently carried out during the summer, efficiency was not the main goal of the provincial scheme. Winter construction, the province reasoned, would not only provide more men with more work, but it would do so when that work was needed most. The province also promised to reimburse the city for sharpening picks, one of the few tools permitted on relief jobs; maintain worksite shacks for the men; and keep gravel roads open for construction purposes on any project falling under the scheme. The program was not, however, intended to help finance any work that the city would normally carry out under less adverse economic conditions unless the men were employed "solely for the purpose of providing unemployment relief."³¹ Nor did the province allow the city to charge materials or equipment purchases against the relief scheme,

mainly because these had a residual value outlasting the winter. And while the province was prepared to contribute financially, it would not assume any responsibility for the administration of the relief projects. The Saskatchewan government expected Saskatoon's civic authorities not only to determine the "nature and extent" of the proposed projects but also to take full responsibility for the rotation of the men at work, ensuring that "as many men as possible should share in the work provided."³²

Upon hearing of the province's promised financial aid, Saskatoon's engineering department immediately set about drawing up plans for storm sewers, a sewerage outlet at Eleventh Street, and a water-main extension along Eighth Avenue. According to engineering department estimates, the province would be responsible for nearly \$20,000 under the scheme. The city's chief engineer selected the three projects carefully according to certain criteria: they all demanded large amounts of hand labour, the city considered them useful and necessary, and they were expected to employ some 350 married men over the coming winter. With rotating shifts of sixty different men each week, each man would receive one week of work out of every six-week period. With a minimum wage of forty-five cents per hour, each worker would earn an average of twenty-two dollars in a week.³³

Although helpful, the provincial interventions hardly matched the magnitude of the unemployment crisis facing the cities. The provinces soon added their voices to the municipal chorus calling for the federal government to accept some responsibility for unemployment relief. For his part, not only did Prime Minister Mackenzie King maintain that the federal government had no responsibility for any urban unemployment problem, but he even denied that a problem existed. For all his political savvy, he vastly underestimated the depths into which some parts of the country had fallen. Over the winter and early spring of 1929–30, however, the urban unemployment rate grew ever higher, and it was not long before the crisis had assumed such proportions that the federal government could continue to ignore it only at its peril. King's Liberals paid for his mistake in the 1930 general election.

The newly elected Conservative prime minister, Richard Bedford Bennett, true to his election promise to find work for all who were

willing “or perish in the attempt,” introduced a series of unemployment relief acts designed to provide work to all who were willing.³⁴ The Unemployment Relief Act, passed in 1930 and in effect for one year, and the Unemployment and Farm Relief Act, passed in 1931 and likewise in effect for a single year, provided a legislative framework that allowed the federal government to enter into agreements with provincial governments to finance urban work relief schemes. It was under the legislative authority of these two acts that most of the urban work relief projects in the early 1930s took place. But the legislative framework, despite the hope it offered, was unwieldy, requiring municipal authorities to submit relief work proposals to their respective provincial governments for approval rather than to the federal government directly. The provinces would then resubmit those proposals to Ottawa, and federal funding for approved projects would finally flow back to the cities through the provincial governments. This complicated system reduced federal costs significantly by downloading administrative tasks to the municipalities. It also nicely upheld the fiction that unemployment relief remained a local responsibility by staying inside the bounds of constitutional divisions of powers.³⁵ Still, the two unemployment relief acts offered considerable aid to the cities. In the first one, the federal government promised to bear 25 percent of the material and labour costs of approved urban work relief projects. Upon federal approval of a given project, the provinces would match the federal contribution, leaving 50 percent of the work relief cost to the municipality. The second relief act, even more attractive to cities, doubled the amount of Ottawa’s contribution to approved urban work relief programs.

THE CASE FOR WORK RELIEF

Benefits for Cities

That these “emergency” measures should have taken the form of work relief rather than direct relief, or “doles,” is in some ways surprising.³⁶ After all, municipal, provincial, and federal authorities knew that from a short-term cost perspective, work relief was far more expensive than

direct relief. Whereas simple payments made to the unemployed, either in cash or in kind, cost cities only the relief itself plus a small administrative output, work relief typically involved the labour costs—again, in the form of cash wages or kind—plus the often considerable cost of materials. Depending on the sort of work relief on order, this could range anywhere from a small initial outlay for snow shovels or brooms to some 40 percent of the costs associated with more substantial projects like buildings or bridges.

Edmonton's chief engineer made clear the difference in cost between work relief and direct relief in a letter to the city commissioner in June 1931: "Sewer construction including labor and material, seems to run about \$12.00 per man day, whereas on the other extreme, direct relief . . . was 49.3¢ per man day last winter."³⁷ For smaller projects like grading, the difference was less extreme, but even these ventures cost cities roughly 50 percent more than straight direct relief. For every dollar spent on labour costs of grading jobs in Edmonton, for example, the city spent a further fifty cents or more, depending on the work, on associated costs such as pay for foremen, horse teams, equipment, and extra lunches for the men. In December 1931, Edmonton's chief engineer explained that "in the case of sidehill grading, the roads have to be gravelled later on, protection fences and draining facilities have to be supplied, and recurring annual maintenance costs are involved."³⁸ Clearly, dollar for dollar, direct relief consistently cost cities less than work relief.

Still, useful and necessary local improvements at half the usual price, even if the municipality's half was borrowed, was an offer no city could easily refuse. "The decision that the federal government will finance the unemployment schemes is of tremendous importance to Saskatoon and the province," Saskatoon's mayor, John Hair, explained in September 1931, "as it will mean that money will be obtainable for this work at a much lower rate than could be obtained by either the cities or the province. The probable saving will be approximately 20% on the cost."³⁹ Even after the provinces and the federal government could no longer afford to support urban work relief, cities insisted on using government contributions to direct relief toward wages on local improvement schemes whenever they could.⁴⁰ After all, municipal authorities thought, the economic

downturn would probably end soon, but the improvements would continue to serve the city for years, even decades, to come.

One consistent theme running through most local discussions of possible work relief programs was an insistence that they be necessary and useful. City administrators knew that the city's own contributions to work relief programs would be palatable to city ratepayers and non-ratepayers alike only if they met this criterion. Useful projects, moreover, enhanced a city's stature immeasurably. The Broadway Bridge, for example, had long been considered by Saskatoon's city council as a much needed traffic conduit connecting the popular Broadway district on the city's south side with its downtown.⁴¹ The bridge would also go a long way toward relieving traffic on the decrepit Nineteenth Street Bridge. Although its construction irritated several shopkeepers along the top of Broadway near the river for several months, the city's ratepayers overwhelmingly supported the project, both as a relief measure and as a critical addition to the city.⁴² Winnipeg's city council was likewise "very desirous" of building the Civic Auditorium, for its cultural value as well as its promise of substantial employment for Winnipeg's jobless.

Both Winnipeg and St. Boniface similarly considered their Norwood and Assiniboine bridge projects "absolutely necessary" mainly because of increased traffic across the older bridges from St. Boniface, Dawson Trail, St. Mary's Road, and St. Anne's Road. The two cities also anticipated that the bridges would form a connecting link to the Trans-Canada Highway. Likewise, responding to criticism of the construction of Alberta's Bowker Building in 1934, Superintendent of Buildings D. E. McDonald argued that it was "an absolute necessity" because the province had been "up against it for office space." The building, of course, was also "a great assistance especially to the labor men in the City of Edmonton and provided employment for a great number."⁴³

This is not to suggest that everyone agreed on which projects were necessary, or even useful. In December 1931, for example, Edmonton's city council sought to have the construction of a bridge over the Rat Creek ravine built as a relief project under the Unemployment and Farm Relief Act. Despite heavy promotion in the *Edmonton Journal's* editorial pages and the clear support of city council, M. J. Warner of the Cromdale

Community League registered the league's opposition to the project, insisting that the ravine be filled in instead.⁴⁴ Both the Highlands Community League and the Westmount Community League agreed, arguing that a fill-in would offer the local unemployed more work and could employ more men.⁴⁵ The Eastwood Community League, however, was "unanimously in favour" of the proposed bridge, but only if it was built with reinforced concrete since this would "employ local labour entirely." The League argued that although a steel structure might last longer, most of its fabrication would occur elsewhere, doing Edmonton's local unemployed no good. A steel bridge, the league continued, "would not add the colour or beauty of a concrete structure."⁴⁶ As for the fill-in proposal, Mrs. C. W. Lee, secretary of the Local Council of Women, "strenuously objected to this bridge being replaced by a fill" because it would destroy "the beauty of the surroundings of a natural park."⁴⁷ The Edmonton Art Club similarly recommended that no ravines be filled unless and when the city grew so large as to require the space for residences or businesses. Like Mrs. Lee, the club wished to retain the area's natural beauty.⁴⁸ In the end, despite the pockets of local opposition, the bridge project went ahead as a steel structure.⁴⁹ The bridge was completed some four months later and opened to public traffic on 30 April 1932. We can only speculate what the city council thought of the opposition, but it seems likely that any opposition was too weak, or considered so by council, to make much difference.⁵⁰

Benefits for Business

In addition to providing work for the unemployed, work relief went some way toward maintaining the many contracting and construction companies operating in the cities. Because private sector building all but stopped during the Depression, bridge and building construction, storm sewer work, and gravelling and paving jobs helped these businesses survive. Seeking the contract for the bridge project in Winnipeg, for example, the Dominion Bridge Company appealed to Premier Bracken. "What I have most at heart," the company's vice-president wrote in October 1930, "is the fact that this is the only work coming

up in this territory which would enable us to keep our plant working during the winter months." If the contract went elsewhere, "we will be compelled to close down our plant."⁵¹ In seeking a contract for supplying brick for Winnipeg's Civic Auditorium in February 1932, the manager of Alsip Brick, Tile, and Lumber Company similarly noted that "our men are suffering in common with every one else, and we plead their case for them."⁵²

In fact, these firms consistently appealed to the cities and provinces, especially when they learned that work relief projects had been approved at senior levels of government. Upon learning of Edmonton's plans to construct a reinforced concrete bridge crossing Groat Creek ravine early in 1931, for instance, the Poole Construction Company offered to do the job for a competitive price of \$1,900, promising that "all labour would be supplied under relief conditions and material by or through the city." Consulting with the city's chief engineer as to whether Poole should be awarded the contract, City Commissioner Leslie discovered that the city's engineering department had already made a start on the bridge using its own employees. In this case, even though the chief engineer believed that Poole could do the job just as well, the company's offer was turned down. Contracting out could prove to be a time-consuming process, and the bridge needed to be completed before the end of April or Edmonton would risk losing the 75 percent contribution from the federal and provincial governments under the Unemployment and Farm Relief Act.⁵³

Work relief generally took the form of construction. Not only did construction work employ large numbers of men, but it also aided the construction industry, whose general economic health was a key indicator of municipal prosperity.⁵⁴ Fearful of losing businesses and factories and their taxes, especially the general wealth they represented and the employment they generated, the cities had a real economic interest in maintaining the impression that work was going on, that they were dealing with the problem.⁵⁵ "Enterprise breeds enterprise," the editor of the *Edmonton Bulletin* pointed out in November 1929. "Lethargy induces stagnation. A progressive city encourages private investment and draws population. Nobody wants to live or invest money in a city whose people

seem to take for granted that their community has run its course and reached its maximum development.”⁵⁶

Prescriptive letters to city administrators also almost invariably counselled work relief over direct relief as the best method to deal with the unemployment problem. The heads of contracting concerns and building associations, steel mill and quarry owners, lumber operators and coal dealers all expressed a consistent desire for the institution of public works relief over the dole. W. H. Carter of Winnipeg’s Carter-Halls-Aldinger construction company castigated Manitoba’s deputy minister of Public Works for moving the province’s support in 1933 from work relief to direct relief. “As to direct relief,” he wrote, “you and the Dominion Government have employed the best brains of the continent to study the cheapest method of administering direct relief; you have this down to a science. The same thought has not been given to a relief works programme.”⁵⁷ Secretary Lorne Mellish of the Edmonton Builders’ Exchange was pleased to learn that the city planned to borrow money from the federal government for a works program to avoid relying on direct relief.⁵⁸ Edmonton’s Western Supplies Limited similarly believed it “very desirable to proceed with some such useful work at this time and the city receive the lasting benefits and reduce to some extent the expense in connection with unproductive relief.”⁵⁹ The company was even willing to supply the city with waterworks-related material on credit, to be paid for in better times, to “provide some employment now when it is needed so badly.”⁶⁰

The Saskatchewan Association of Architects supported work relief because it would benefit not only unemployed men in Saskatoon but also anyone involved in constructing a new building, from general contractors and subcontractors, to mechanics, labourers, supply men, teamsters, hotel and restaurant keepers, railway workers, and businessmen generally.⁶¹ The Winnipeg offices of the Canada Ingot Iron Company made a similar case to Manitoba’s minister of Public Works in September 1931. The company, specializing in producing corrugated metal culverts for sewerage and drain projects, complained that it was not receiving an equitable share of provincial and municipal orders for relief work. If the provincial and municipal governments failed to make

more orders, the company warned, many of its employees would be added to the unemployment list.⁶² Winnipeg's Building Trades Council, for its part, protested that some "so-called 'work-schemes'" involved costs that far outweighed their value, resulting in high public expenditures with a correspondingly small "social value" to either the unemployed or the city at large. But the same objection could not be raised against house building. "Apart altogether from the economic aspect of housing schemes," the council argued in September 1933, "it is surely a State obligation as well as a Health necessity to see to it that the whole of its people is decently housed."⁶³

The Work Ethic

What also made work relief preferable to direct relief was the difficulty that many Prairie residents had with the idea that the unemployed should get something for nothing, that the urban jobless might enjoy wages without offering up any work or time or effort in exchange. These sentiments emerged early, spread widely, and remained consistent throughout the early Depression years among relief policy-makers. Winnipeg's Alderman R. Maybank reported to the secretary of the Civic Unemployment Relief Committee, "Our own matter is peculiarly the question of getting further assistance to defray administration costs and to do away with the system of giving relief without any work in return."⁶⁴ Maybank added that, according to another Winnipeg alderman, even Gideon Robertson, the federal labour minister, felt the same way: Robertson "personally thought it would be very much better if we could arrange some such plan because he quite agreed with the representations that giving something for nothing is destructive of morale."⁶⁵ Edmonton's city council agreed that "all men in receipt of relief should be asked to do some work in return."⁶⁶ Saskatoon's Mayor Hair likewise asserted that "the dole suggestion is entirely out of the question."⁶⁷ Manitoba's unemployment relief policy stated it most explicitly: "Work is the cure for unemployment, rather than 'Direct Relief' which is simply a dissimulation of the 'Dole.'"⁶⁸ This sentiment persisted, even as the Depression worsened. Mayor

“Fightin’ Joe” Clarke of Edmonton, for example, suggested in 1935 that “the average citizen . . . whilst sympathetic to meeting the actual necessities of the unemployed has a deep aversion to this method of relief and invariably insists upon some quid pro quo in the form of work in return for the relief provided.”⁶⁹ A short time later, Clarke declared that he did not want to “encourage . . . any recipients of cash relief from the taxpayers to think that they do not have to earn the money they receive.”⁷⁰

The economic, political, and social benefits of work relief projects underwritten in part by federal and provincial funding were not lost on the city officials in charge of relief works, who consequently tried to squeeze as many items as possible related to their projects into the tripartite work relief agreements. But keeping a close eye on city reimbursement statements were federal and provincial accountants and comptrollers, whose task it was to ensure that the cities were not taking unfair advantage of government contributions. While generally supportive of the work ethic, federal and provincial officials indicated very clearly what their funds could and could not be used for. Typically, such funds could not be applied toward the purchase of any materials or equipment—graders, tractors, hoists, shovels, assorted tools—that would have a residual life beyond a project’s completion, although some small compensation was offered to cover the rental of some items. Nor, in the case of Winnipeg’s Civic Auditorium, would the province pay for furnishings or other equipment inside the building.⁷¹ The same was true for any departmental expenses or overhead costs. In Edmonton, for example, this meant that fully 10 percent of any relief project’s cost fell outside of its relief work agreements with the federal and provincial governments.⁷² Where cities did submit expenses above and beyond what those governments regarded as legitimate, senior officials typically thwarted their efforts. “From time to time certificates of expenditure are received which include amounts for equipment . . . which have a residual value,” federal Commissioner of Unemployment Relief Harry Hereford admonished Manitoba officials in 1932. “It has been ruled that the Dominion government will not contribute to the cost of items of this nature.”⁷³ In that particular case, the city was not reimbursed for those items.

PUBLIC WORKS RELIEF PROJECTS: THE FIRST UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF ACT

Winnipeg's Twin Bridges

On 4 September 1930, just a few short weeks before the Unemployment Relief Act passed in Ottawa, Manitoba's Public Works minister met with representatives of the cities of Winnipeg and St. Boniface to "find some way of financing the building of the Assiniboine and Norwood Bridges."⁷⁴ The proposal had three parts: demolishing two narrow bridges constructed earlier in the century; opening and widening the streets leading to the proposed spans, a co-operative venture involving both Winnipeg and St. Boniface; and constructing the two new bridges themselves. Engineers from both cities estimated the cost of the project at a little over \$1 million and expected the work to provide employment for some four hundred men.⁷⁵

Everyone at the meeting agreed with Winnipeg's Alderman Honeyman that the construction project was probably "the best method of meeting the [unemployment] problem."⁷⁶ But everyone also recognized that, as Honeyman pointed out, "it would be impossible in these hard times to have the rate-payers pay for this expensive scheme and the only way we can undertake it is to bring as attractive a scheme as possible before the people."⁷⁷ In fact, Honeyman's colleague on council, Alderman A. J. Doucet, was skeptical of the whole scheme. "It will be many months before anything can be done on the project," he said. "If 1000 men, which I consider a minimum, were employed on the construction work, it would cost \$3000 a day for wages, taking \$3 a day as the average wage. It would take at least 100 days to complete the work, making \$300,000 for wages."⁷⁸ Alderman Murchison of St. Boniface agreed: "If the federal government cannot see its way to financing the whole project with convenient terms for repayment of our share of the cost, then I think we can go no further."⁷⁹

Making relief work programs attractive to city ratepayers chiefly meant spreading their costs across as many jurisdictions as possible. Like other public works proposals drawn up that autumn in cities across the Prairies, the joint Winnipeg–St. Boniface bridge project depended

heavily on contributions from the federal and provincial governments. Winnipeg and St. Boniface certainly intended “to take advantage of the Ottawa Unemployment scheme.” Manitoba’s Public Works minister, W. R. Clubb, told the representatives of the two municipalities that if Ottawa agreed to contribute to the bridge construction, the provincial government would “give some assistance.”⁸⁰

The idea for the two spans was based on studies of current and future traffic patterns conducted in both Winnipeg and St. Boniface. Those studies concluded that both bridges would serve the two municipalities immediately, as well as in the near future when, or so city planners expected, the main Trans-Canada Highway would enter the area across the spans.⁸¹ At that time, the main Trans-Canada Highway followed a course northward, veered east to Whitemouth, and then turned south where it connected with Ontario. “I think that as years go by the present location of the Highway will cut straight through to the Springfield road,” Honeyman pointed out, “and therefore this bridge is needed not only for the present needs but for future needs.”⁸² The idea was to construct a main arterial route running from St. Boniface on the south side of the Assiniboine to Winnipeg on the river’s north side, just west of where it intersects with the Red. Two bridges were required because the route would cross both rivers.

The twin spans, city planners and the two city councils believed, would increase traffic through the cities, enhancing the wealth of both. This was a point that business interests in both cities insisted be made directly to Ottawa. “When we ask for financial support of the federal government, the need for unemployment relief must be stressed,” David Campbell, the representative of the four trade boards in the two cities, urged those present at the meeting. “It must also be stressed that the project will be a connecting link in a federal highway.”⁸³ A *Manitoba Free Press* reporter concurred, arguing that construction of the two bridges “would be links in a new highway from Winnipeg to the south, running down the east side of the Red River, or via Pliney to the border.”⁸⁴ Easier access to American markets, the writer reasoned, could only be good for Winnipeg. Importantly, the bridges also promised to strengthen transportation and communication networks between St. Boniface and

Winnipeg, a connection that the Winnipeg Electric Company was happy to support. The company offered \$50,000 to the project for “the laying of rails and other railroad equipment across both structures” and for realigning tracks from the “north side of the Assiniboine bridge into the Main Street street car houses.”⁸⁵

With the city councils’ arguments in hand, Premier Bracken and a delegation of representatives from both cities, together with the province’s minister and deputy minister of Labour, travelled to Ottawa the following day, and on 1 October 1930, they entered into an agreement with the federal government.⁸⁶ Though city officials welcomed the federal and provincial commitments of \$170,000 each, the news resulted in squabbling between the city councils of Winnipeg and St. Boniface. Perhaps not surprisingly, disputes centred around how to divide the costs of the municipal share of the projects. Cost-sharing arrangements for the Main Street Bridge on the Winnipeg side of the Assiniboine was not in dispute: Winnipeg would assume the entire \$240,000 municipal share, leaving \$120,000 each to the federal and provincial governments. But the Norwood Bridge crossing the Red required the two cities to divide the \$280,000 municipal share. In earlier meetings of representatives for both cities, it had been agreed that because citizens of St. Boniface were more likely than Winnipeg residents to rely on the Norwood Bridge, St. Boniface would contribute two-thirds of the municipal share. In mid-October, St. Boniface’s city council balked, insisting that the two cities each contribute half of the municipal share of the cost of both bridges.⁸⁷ Winnipeg’s Alderman E. D. Honeyman urged a speedy resolution to the dispute, suggesting that “should the electorate of Winnipeg or St. Boniface turn down the proposition their one chance at securing a half million dollar improvement at half-price will be lost forever.”⁸⁸ One month later, the two cities were still deadlocked, but now St. Boniface suggested that if it paid two-thirds of the municipal share, then 80 per cent of the unskilled labour employed on the job should come from its unemployment rolls.⁸⁹ Not until the end of November did the city councils sort out their differences, agreeing that St. Boniface would pay two-thirds of the municipal share on the understanding that two-thirds of the unskilled labour would be St. Boniface men.⁹⁰

Once the agreement had been struck, Winnipeg's Civic Unemployment Relief Committee appointed a special committee to get the project started. One of the committee's first steps was to appoint A. J. Taunton, a member of the Board of Engineers, to serve as resident engineer for both bridges at a salary of \$500 per month. The appointment was critical: Taunton held primary responsibility for arranging purchase orders and requisitions, certifying payrolls, and following procedures for passing accounts and establishing progress estimates. He was also responsible for making recommendations to the committee on tenders received from companies eager to carry out the various tasks associated with the bridges' construction, as well as for overseeing the entire bidding process. All contracts, ranging from suppliers for piers and abutments to steel fabrication and erection, passed first across Taunton's desk, and the committee, relying heavily on Taunton's engineering expertise, awarded the contracts based solely on his recommendations.⁹¹ On the engineer's advice, the committee issued tenders for steel fabrication, having decided to construct the bridges using a steel superstructure, and accepted the Dominion Bridge Company's bid of \$136 per ton.⁹² Shortly thereafter, some three hundred unemployed steelworkers were busy at the bridge company's shop fabricating steel for the bridges. Early in the new year, another three hundred unemployed men would find work doing the actual construction.⁹³

Saskatoon's Subway and Sewerage Work

Not surprisingly, other cities followed steps similar to those established in Winnipeg. When news of the Dominion scheme reached Saskatoon, for example, Mayor John Hair presented the provincial government in Regina with an ambitious \$700,000 unemployment relief work scheme prepared by the city's engineering department. The proposal included a street subway, storm sewer work, and a new wing for the City Hospital.⁹⁴ Saskatoon went through the same process as Winnipeg, submitting its work relief program to the province, which in turn sought approval for funds from the federal Unemployment Relief Act appropriation. The province approved the city's plan of \$300,000 for the subway and

\$150,000 for the storm sewer work, both of which promised employment to Saskatoon's unskilled jobless labourers, but dismissed the \$250,000 proposal for the new hospital wing. In defending its decision, the province argued that the hospital project would employ primarily tradesmen, and Saskatoon tradesmen were already engaged on other work throughout the city. The money, provincial authorities explained, would be better spent on a building in Regina.⁹⁵

The "subway," essentially a rail bridge crossing over Nineteenth Street near Saskatoon's downtown core, was designed to enhance the flow of goods and traffic through the city. Since the subway fell under the terms of the Unemployment Relief Act, the federal and provincial governments each contributed \$50,000 to its cost. Because it would be used by the railway companies, the Canadian Pacific and the Canadian National railways contributed a further \$50,000 apiece to the project, leaving \$100,000 to be paid by the city.⁹⁶

Edmonton's Roadway Improvements

Edmonton's work relief scheme, proposed that same autumn, did not share the grand scale of the other two cities' programs, nor did the city authorities show much enthusiasm for the federal unemployment legislation. Edmonton's wan response to the Unemployment Relief Act was due in part to the engineering department's engagement in nearly \$1 million worth of public works projects, mainly road improvements, throughout the city as part of the city's normal operations through the fall and winter of 1930. Although the work was not explicitly directed at the unemployment problem, it nevertheless lowered the jobless rate considerably in the city. Another reason was the city council's hesitance to commit the city to millions of dollars in costs. Alderman Findlay, for one, urged caution. "The council should go slow" in endorsing any proposal for work relief under the new act, he pointed out in late September 1930, "as it might mean the saddling of the city with ten or twenty millions of dollars expenditure."⁹⁷ In the end, the city embarked on a modest work relief program under the legislation, with the same vision as that of authorities in Winnipeg and Saskatoon: improved

communication and transportation systems within the city. Through the summer and early fall of 1930, the Alberta government had been busy constructing highways radiating from Edmonton in all four directions. Business boosters in the city, such as the editors of the *Edmonton Bulletin*, believed that the city could best complement the new provincial highways by connecting them “at the boundaries with equally good or better roadways leading to the business centre of the city.”⁹⁸ By 17 September, the city’s engineering department had drawn up plans for more than \$200,000 of road construction, paving, grading, and gravelling. The largest and most important of these plans was the paving of Calgary Trail on the city’s south side to meet up with the new provincial arterial highway connecting Edmonton and Calgary.⁹⁹

Edmonton’s Calgary Trail improvements, like Saskatoon’s subway project and Winnipeg’s bridges, represented city officials’ efforts to bind their unemployment relief goals to their city’s current and future infrastructure needs. Their decision to focus those efforts on improved transportation systems is not surprising. The opening decades of the twentieth century had seen the dawn of the mighty automobile age, and automobiles, of course, demanded serviceable roads. Cars and trucks were interesting curiosities at the beginning of the century, but by the late 1920s, they had become critical means of both personal and commercial transport. It was the First World War in particular, according to American historian Merrill J. Roberts, that illustrated the important benefits of road transport.¹⁰⁰ Belligerents on both sides made use of some 130,000 motor trucks for transporting supplies and troops to great effect through the course of the war. Furthermore, the war made accessing rail transport in North America more difficult, mainly because rail traffic was largely dedicated to moving supplies and troops toward harbours where steamers waited to carry them to the conflagration overseas, forcing Americans and Canadians to rely on alternate means of transportation.

After the war, the idea of road transport was on the rise. The moderately strong economy of the 1920s, coupled with a trend that saw businesses maintaining smaller inventories in-house and consequently requiring more shipments of goods more often, made motor transport even more attractive. Saskatchewan’s experience is telling. The province

registered only fifty-four new motor vehicle licenses in 1907. By 1920, it had issued more than sixty thousand.¹⁰¹ Truck transport was more specific, more direct, and faster than rail transport. While the journey of rail-delivered goods ended at the railway depot, motor trucks could manoeuvre city streets and ship goods directly to the merchant's or consumer's door. Finally, automobile prices declined steadily through the 1920s, making them more affordable to more prospective motorists.¹⁰²

THE DEEPENING DEPRESSION: THE SECOND UNEMPLOYMENT RELIEF ACT

By the autumn of 1931, the economic situation had grown worse, and the number of jobless larger. Serious signs of problems had appeared in the spring and summer of that year as the federal Labour minister, Senator Gideon Robertson, toured the West.¹⁰³ Upon his return to Ottawa, he described alarming conditions suggesting that neither Bennett's celebrated tariff nor his government's Unemployment Relief Act had made any significant dent in the unemployment situation. The federal government's Unemployment and Farm Relief Act was designed, according to James Struthers, "to deal with the crisis in the West" and was "rushed into Parliament on Dominion Day."¹⁰⁴ Once again, cities in the West drew up programs of relief based on estimates made by their engineering departments and city planners. When word of the new federal relief scheme arrived in Saskatoon, for example, the city applied for approval of another \$300,000 storm sewer project. Along with the submission, Mayor Hair reminded provincial officials how badly Saskatoon's jobless were faring, estimating that out of a total of fifteen hundred unemployed married men in the city, fifty were "very distressing cases." Considering the acute needs of these men and their families, Hair asked the province if the city could begin work on enough of the sewer project to provide employment for those fifty men.¹⁰⁵ Despite the fact that the new act had yet to be officially enacted by Parliament, the province approved \$30,000 toward the project.

Saskatoon's Broadway Bridge

For Saskatoon, the sewer project was only the first part of its unemployment work relief construction plan. Municipal authorities had long viewed a bridge crossing the South Saskatchewan from the increasingly popular Broadway district on the south side to the downtown core on the north as an ideal relief project. In fact, ever since A. E. K. Bunnell, a Toronto city planner hired by the City of Saskatoon to advise on needed infrastructure works, had suggested the bridge in 1930, city officials had seemed to be biding their time, waiting for the right moment to introduce the plan. A new bridge, city officials believed, would not only offer a much needed conduit between the Nutana residential area and the downtown core but would also relieve traffic on the decrepit and dangerously narrow Nineteenth Street Bridge. "The reason for building the bridge in the first place," City Clerk Tomlinson wrote provincial officials in December 1932, a month after the new bridge opened, "was to remove street car tracks from the existing traffic bridge on account of the danger in operating over such a narrow bridge." The necessity of the new bridge became clear in April 1932, a few months after construction began, when a streetcar jumped the track on the older bridge. The city clerk believed that it was only "through sheer luck a serious accident did not result."¹⁰⁶ Shortly after Ottawa announced the new relief act in July 1931, Mayor Hair, City Commissioner Leslie, and Chief Engineer Archibald discussed potential capital works that would provide employment for the estimated fifteen hundred jobless married residents expected by October. The project would need to be large enough to sustain this number of unemployed men for twelve months.¹⁰⁷ The bridge fit the bill.

By September, the number of jobless married men needing employment had grown to twenty-four hundred. Even given Chief Engineer Archibald's estimation that 25 percent of this number were physically unfit for manual labour, the city still had to find employment for nearly two thousand men.¹⁰⁸ Rumours trickling down to Saskatoon's city council through one of the city's Conservative MPs suggested that the federal government would contribute 50 percent of a project's cost to a maximum of \$350,000.¹⁰⁹ The city's engineering department estimated

the bridge project's cost at \$1.2 million, and city council agreed to top up any amount over the \$700,000 limit imposed by the legislation. Gaining federal and provincial approval for the project, though, was no easy matter. Despite submitting the project to provincial authorities in early September, the city had heard nothing from Ottawa by late October. As a *Star-Phoenix* writer observed, "The delay in receiving word from Ottawa as to the building of the new bridge has created considerable apprehension that it is not meeting with the approval of federal authorities or that financial conditions will not permit of the undertaking."¹¹⁰

A report leaked to the *Star-Phoenix* by an eastern correspondent the next day, however, suggested that neither federal approval nor financial conditions were the cause of the delay. Although the provincial government had forwarded the bridge proposal to the federal Department of Labour, the paper reported that provincial authorities "did not especially press or suggest that this work be undertaken."¹¹¹ An indignant Premier Anderson responded to the charge almost immediately.

The statement being made at Saskatoon that the provincial government has not approved of the proposed bridge is entirely erroneous. The whole matter of bridges, including the Saskatoon bridge and those bridges over the Saskatchewan River, was placed before Hon. G. D. Robertson, minister of labor, when he was in Regina last. The request of the City of Saskatoon was also taken up in Ottawa by the attorney general on his recent visit east. The Saskatchewan government was not prepared to recommend an expenditure of \$1,200,000 but has recommended an expenditure of \$1,000,000.¹¹²

Anderson's strong public display of support for the new bridge effectively eliminated any lingering doubts about the success of the application. But city officials had counted on and planned for a \$1.2 million bridge. The \$200,000 shortfall compelled city engineers in charge of the bridge's design to return to the drawing board and reduce the project's costs accordingly.

In the early evening of 4 November 1931, Saskatoon MP F. R. MacMillan wired Mayor Hair, unofficially advising him of the federal

government's intended \$350,000 commitment to the bridge project.¹¹³ With both federal and provincial approval essentially secured, Saskatoon's city relief machine ground into action. City Clerk Tomlinson issued tenders for the construction, gravel, cement, and steel required for the bridge. Chief Engineer Archibald, in consultation with Dean C. J. Mackenzie of the University of Saskatchewan's engineering department, finalized the bridge's design and implementation plans, and the city council, together with the provincial government and the Local Government Board, discussed and debated financing arrangements.¹¹⁴ The city council's plans, based on engineering department estimates, anticipated a debenture repayment period of fifty years at 5 percent interest—an amount that many ratepayers would doubtless have balked at under normal economic conditions. But, as a *Star-Phoenix* writer observed late that October, “while the ratepayers of this city are not unanimous in their opinion as to the desirability of undertaking such an ambitious project at the present time, opposition to the project has not been particularly noticeable.”¹¹⁵ Saskatoon's ratepayers confirmed that assessment nearly one month later, voting to pass the debenture bylaw by a margin of four to one.¹¹⁶

On a clear, crisp, bitterly cold Saturday morning, Mayor Hair returned to Saskatoon on 12 December following a three-day conference with provincial authorities in Regina. He carried with him a signed agreement authorizing the city to begin construction of the Broadway Bridge under the terms of the Unemployment and Farm Relief Act.¹¹⁷ That afternoon, Saskatoon's city council awarded the bridge construction contract to the R. J. Arrand Construction Company, whose bid of nearly \$262,000 was more than \$22,000 below that of the next lowest bidder. Anticipating the project's approval, the city engineering department had issued tenders for the job and had received wildly varying bids from contractors. “The tender of the lowest and successful bidder was less than 50% that of the highest,” Dean Mackenzie later recalled, “and the nearest responsible bid was 33% higher than that of the lowest bidder.” Speculating on the reasons for the wide spread among bids for the same job, Mackenzie suggested that the labour and material conditions imposed by the provincial and federal governments on the construction

project “appeared to contractors to carry heavy risks” and led some contractors to incorporate compensatory amounts into their bids.¹¹⁸

The most important of these conditions, not surprisingly, related to the relief workers employed on the project and underscored the city’s intention that the construction of the bridge was first and foremost a relief project designed to provide maximum employment to the city’s jobless. To this end, the contract kept construction machinery to a bare minimum so that the bulk of the work would rely on hand labour.¹¹⁹ This meant that the contractor could use no machinery other than cement mixers, pile drivers, hoists, and air hammers. Even the concrete that would fill out the bridge’s superstructure could not be poured from cement trucks; it would instead be mixed on one side of the river bank, put into wheelbarrows, wheeled by hand to the work site, and dumped directly into the forms some twelve hundred feet away. Furthermore, the city, not the contractor, purchased cement, aggregate, and steel directly from local suppliers “in order to provide as much local labor as possible.”¹²⁰ Following purchase, those materials were shipped to the work site on local trucks driven by relief workers. Once at the site, all materials passed through the hands of relief workers; stone was crushed, sand unloaded, even steel bent “on the site by the engineering department, using local labor.”¹²¹ The contractor was also required to rely almost entirely on relief workers taken from the city’s relief rolls; he was allowed only three of his own men on the job: a superintendent, a general foreman, and an accountant. All other workers were to be rotated according to relief schedules designed by the city engineering department according to family size, and no worker was allowed to work more than eight hours on any given day. Hourly wages were set by the city at a minimum of forty-five cents for common labour, ninety cents for carpenters, and one dollar for electricians.¹²² Finally, while the contractor was permitted to fire any worker for cause, “the city engineer was made the final court of appeal in all disputes.”¹²³

Clearly dominating the job’s work distribution was George D. Archibald, the city’s chief engineer. As far as possible, he organized the labour like a regular construction contractor giving work to the unemployed rather than like a charity giving alms to the poor. Archibald,



Figure 5. The construction of Saskatoon's Broadway Bridge, 1932. Relief workers in a cofferdam lay the foundations for the bridge's second pier, using hand shovels to carve through the dirt and hard blue clay. In the upper left is the pump house, where river water was pumped out of the cofferdam. City of Saskatoon Archives, 1104-003-006.

together with the contractor, R. J. Arrand, had a bridge to build, not a boondoggle to keep idle men occupied. In this spirit, their attention from the beginning focused on the practical matters of getting the job done. Chief among these was the time restriction imposed both by federal dictates and by the local weather. The federal government insisted that all relief projects carried out under the 1931 Unemployment and Farm Relief Act be completed no later than mid-December 1932. If the

engineers wanted to remain within their time limit, they would have to work fast. What's more, by the time construction began, the mid-winter weather had turned bitterly cold, promising to make the work difficult for the many relief workers employed on the job. Added to this were the constant threat of an early spring ice break-up and the possibility of June flooding. Over the twelve months ahead, the planning team would have to organize materials and labour by drawing on their previous experience with local seasonal changes. During the first construction stage, from New Year's Day to March 15 over the eleven coldest weeks of the year, they would take advantage of the thick ice covering the river to construct the bridge's six piers, four of which would stand in the river.¹²⁴

To get this first critical job completed in time, work ran continuously day and night, even through Sundays and holidays, according to Mackenzie.¹²⁵ Workers first erected a light scaffolding across the river and then constructed wooden forms that sat on the river bed and jutted out of the ice; they used cofferdams to clear out the river water from the area where the piers would stand. Nine thousand cubic yards of concrete, prepared on the banks, was then transported by hand cart along the scaffolding to the forms, into which it was poured and left to dry. At one point, the temperature dropped in just a few hours to less than -30°C , accompanied by a "biting northwest wind." The cold threatened the integrity of the concrete, which had to maintain a temperature of at least 32°C in order to pour properly. Workers hurriedly wheeled barrows of concrete along twelve hundred feet of rickety open-air scaffolding twenty feet above the ice to pour it into the pier forms before it froze.¹²⁶

After mid-March, even though the river ice typically did not begin to break up until at least mid-April, the planning team avoided most river work for fear of flooding. In previous years, the river had risen by as much as twenty feet between April and June, and the engineers knew that such a flood would threaten the whole structure. Between mid-March and June, then, the planning team set workers on the approach spans and retaining walls on either side of the river bank. Despite the coming spring, several feet of frost and ice still remained on the banks, and a good deal of excavation was required to clear the area. The false-work and forms for the two arches over the banks were constructed next,



Figure 6. The elaborate falsework of the Broadway Bridge's arches, 1932. Workers mixed cement on the riverbank of the South Saskatchewan River, loaded it into wheelbarrows, and then manoeuvred the wheelbarrows along the narrow wooden trundle before dumping it into the pier forms below. City of Saskatoon Archives, 1104-003-045..



Figure 7. The arch work for the Broadway Bridge, 1932. When the photograph was taken, the bridge's official opening was just over two months away. City of Saskatoon Archives, 1104-003-050.

leaving the arches over the river and the surface of the twelve-hundred-foot span to be constructed after the threat of flooding had passed.¹²⁷

By October, the bridge's five arches had been completed, and the pavement and street railway tracks had been laid on the bridge's surface. Some eleven months after the project had begun, the Broadway Bridge opened to public traffic on 11 November 1932. The bridge's overall aesthetic was subdued. In the words of its designer C. J. Mackenzie, "careful attention was given to aesthetic considerations, and especially in view of

the nature of the undertaking, all pretentious ornamentation, terminal pylons, etc., were avoided and reliance placed in the inherent beauty of simple bold outlines and proportions.”¹²⁸

Edmonton's Multiple Projects

Like city engineers across the country, Edmonton's chief engineer, A. W. Haddow, was called upon by city council to draw up a list of possible relief works in anticipation of the new federal Unemployment and Farm Relief Act. The engineer listed twenty-three items totalling a little more than \$1 million, comparable to the other cities' plans that summer, but none among them was on as grand a scale as Saskatoon's bridge or Winnipeg's auditorium. Haddow instead proposed a series of sewer and drainage projects, some grading, boulevard, and gravelling work, and the construction of small bridges over portions of the city's extensive ravine system along the river valley.¹²⁹ Most of the individual projects on the list cost considerably less than \$50,000. Compared to Saskatoon's Broadway Bridge and Winnipeg's Civic Auditorium, with estimated costs of nearly \$1 million each, Edmonton's plans to spread its resources across a number of smaller projects were conservative, to say the least.¹³⁰

The city commissioner reported to city council on 18 August 1931 that Edmonton's program of work had been prepared “primarily to provide the maximum percentage of labor keeping in view also at the same time the permanent requirements of the City.”¹³¹ Here was the city planner at his most pragmatic. That work relief was meant to provide the maximum amount of work to the maximum number of unemployed married men was a given, but work relief was also designed explicitly to fulfill present and future city needs. The city's aldermen concurred with the plans, and the following day, Edmonton's mayor, with council's approval, travelled to Calgary to meet with Prime Minister R. B. Bennett and representatives of the provincial government to discuss their participation in the city's work relief plans. Significantly, the council members also appointed Chief Engineer Haddow to join the mayor at the Calgary conference, thus revealing their anticipation of his critical role in work relief negotiations.

Upon his return to Edmonton some days later, Haddow reported to City Commissioner Mitchell that the federal and provincial governments were “willing to contribute substantially” to the city’s work relief plans. This was happy news, considering that the city’s relief officer had earlier mentioned to the engineer that some three thousand married men were unemployed and on relief in the city, and that their number would not decrease until at least April of the following year. But even with federal and provincial funding, the city could not provide for all unemployed married men on relief. One possible solution, the engineer suggested, was to institute “some part time arrangement” so that more men could be employed in relief work. Instead of each man working full-time at the city’s minimum hourly wage of fifty cents, each man would work half-time, or even quarter-time.¹³²

Winnipeg’s Civic Auditorium

Winnipeg likewise initiated a new series of work relief projects in the autumn of 1931 in answer to the federal Unemployment and Farm Relief Act. After considering a series of possible construction projects, the city settled on nearly \$1.5 million worth of work, including a new relief office, sewer work, the Sargent Baths, and two more new bridges at Salter Street and St. James. Upon approval from the province and the federal government, the new schemes got underway, and by October 1931, work crews taken from the city’s five thousand unemployed married men were busy working on the relief office and the sewers.¹³³ Despite the size of the projects begun that autumn, the city still had its sights set on a new Civic Auditorium. In early October, Winnipeg’s mayor, Ralph Webb, spoke informally with Premier Bracken about it, and the matter was taken up in the provincial Cabinet. The Cabinet subsequently approved the auditorium, although only offering a little more than \$150,000 toward the project; the province was prepared to submit the proposal to the federal government if the city was able to come up with approximately \$350,000 toward the cost. With the federal contribution of 50 percent of the total cost, the city would have nearly \$1 million to complete the project.¹³⁴



Figure 8. Relief workers in Winnipeg, 1931. Here, workers prepare the foundations of the site that will house the Civic Auditorium. The engineers who organized the project insisted on using as little construction machinery as possible. Relying on hand labour instead of machine labour meant that more men could find work on the project. Provincial Archives of Manitoba, Winnipeg – Buildings – Municipal – Civic Auditorium, Collection item 10, N9182.

Following some haggling over cost sharing through most of October, all three levels of government finally agreed that Winnipeg and the Province of Manitoba would each contribute 25 percent of the project's cost, and the federal government would cover the remaining 50 percent on the assumption that the total cost would be \$832,000.¹³⁵ The province, though, insisted that the men be rotated on the job such that

no one man would work more than one week in three. City engineers and architects, moreover, would have to submit construction specifications, building plans, and all contract terms to both the province and the federal government. The city would also have to furnish the land and agree to have the building “substantially completed” by 1 May 1932.¹³⁶

Work on the auditorium began almost immediately, with men clearing and grading the land upon which the building would stand and then rushing to complete the walls and roof before the first snowfall so that workers could stay relatively warm inside through the cold winter months. By late December, though, the project was running seriously over budget, and the city informed provincial officials that a further \$100,000 was needed to finish the job. A large part of the problem revolved around higher-than-expected tenders received from city contractors for various parts of the job, including electricity and wiring, ventilation, plumbing, and stone construction. The province grudgingly contributed the additional \$100,000, given that the project was well underway, but when the city again sought an increase in the budget, this time for another \$32,000 for an all-stone building, the province balked. In a letter to the city clerk, Public Works Minister W. R. Clubb stated firmly, “The Provincial Government . . . is very desirous of having it definitely understood that the maximum price of all relief works must be considered as fixed and not subject to increase.” Turning down the city’s request, Clubb ordered “that a very careful canvass shall be made into all phases of the building with a view of effecting the greatest possible saving.”¹³⁷

Following the province’s refusal, Winnipeg’s city council asked the engineering department, including the city architects, whether it would endorse any changes that might bring the cost down. The first to go from the auditorium plans was more than thirteen feet off the height of the main building, entirely eliminating the planned third floor. Chief architect G. W. Northwood explained that the change would not affect the auditorium’s “essential features.” It would, however, mean that the building’s upper balcony could not be built, reducing the main auditorium’s seating capacity from 4,500 to 4,150. A small antechamber off the main section’s south side would be retained, but a planned gallery would not. Any further savings, the architect maintained, would have to

come from the revised (and reduced) tenders submitted by the electrical and plumbing firms, and the companies supplying materials.¹³⁸ One such supplier, the Alsip Brick, Tile, and Lumber Company, upon hearing news of the escalated costs of the auditorium, suggested that the city use brick and stone in the building's construction rather than just stone. "The Stone men have had a pretty good inning in this relief work," the company's manager wrote in late February, "and there is no question . . . but that they will get a very large contract out of it." Using a combined brick and stone construction "would make what we consider in our opinion, a much nicer building."¹³⁹ In the end, the city went with the all-stone construction, considering its cleaner line more fitting for a public auditorium.

NO SIMPLE ANSWERS: ALBERTA'S ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

Debates over construction materials on relief projects—and particularly who would supply them—could even provoke interprovincial squabbling. When the Alberta government, in December 1929, announced plans to build a new administration building as a relief project, it met with immediate—and threatening—reactions from interested parties outside the province. The gist of these reactions turned on whether the successful contractor should make plans to use Indiana limestone or Manitoba Tyndall limestone in the construction of the building. The provincial government, hoping for the lowest price for stone possible, issued a call for tenders to quarries in both Canada and the United States. Upon hearing of the intended tender process, Premier John Bracken of Manitoba angrily fired off a telegram to Alberta's Premier John Brownlee: "We had hoped your government would follow [the] policy of Dominion and Manitoba governments by giving first preference to a Canadian product," he admonished, "and thus materially aid in development of the country's natural resources."¹⁴⁰ Tapestry limestone from Manitoba's Tyndall region, Bracken pointed out, was widely used in Canadian construction projects and compared favourably with

Indiana limestone. His central message was clear: using a variety of limestone imported from Indiana when comparable limestone was available domestically in Manitoba undermined the national interest. One day later, on 27 December, Secretary J. M. Davidson of Manitoba's Industrial Development Board wired Brownlee, again arguing that Manitoba limestone was "equal to imported product and is used in some of the finest buildings in Canada from coast to coast." Interestingly, like Premier Bracken's telegram of the day before, Davidson maintained that Manitoba limestone was equal to Indiana limestone *in quality* but stopped short of saying the same about the cost. Davidson ended his message by reminding Brownlee that Manitoba was "cooperating in finding markets for Alberta products" and that he hoped Alberta would "reciprocate by giving first preference to products from the West's own economic area."¹⁴¹

Responding to Bracken's telegram first, Brownlee sidestepped entirely the issue of whether the limestone should come from domestic or foreign suppliers. Instead, he pointed out that Tyndall quarries had been invited to tender for the contract and that the Alberta government would make a decision "when the tenders are opened."¹⁴² It was not until Manitoba's Industrial Development Board made public through the Alberta press their protest, and that of the Manitoba government, against Alberta's tender process that Brownlee addressed the issue directly in a letter to Premier Bracken: "This [press] report stressed the fact that Manitoba was consuming a great deal of Alberta coal and that there should be reciprocity between Provinces. . . . The coal men of this Province feel they are receiving little, if any, support from either your Government or the business firms who presumably support the Winnipeg Industrial Association."¹⁴³ In the end, Alberta decided to use Tyndall limestone from Manitoba "to assist as much as possible in stabilizing industrial conditions," even though the Indiana stone tender was considerably lower. Furthermore, the Indiana stone required some finishing that would have been done in the province and would have provided \$25,000 to \$35,000 in wages to Alberta workers. In another letter to Bracken, Brownlee concluded by expressing the hope that the Manitoba government would "continue to assist us in efforts to extend our coal market in your Province."¹⁴⁴

On one level, the Alberta government intended its administration building to provide the local jobless with work, but as the interprovincial exchange between Brownlee and Bracken makes clear, relief work entailed a good deal more than state aid to unemployed workers. The construction of the million-dollar building made good economic sense for the province. The cost of renting space for provincial departments in privately owned office buildings throughout the city came to more than \$48,000 per year, and the province would probably have had to find additional space to accommodate offices associated with the newly acquired natural resource rights.¹⁴⁵ However, in moving all provincial departments to the new administration building, the province left substantial vacancies in seven office buildings in the city; the owners of these private buildings could no longer count on regular rent payments from the province.

Municipal officials in Edmonton encountered a similar problem when in 1934 they considered approaching the federal government about the possibility of initiating a purely federal relief construction project. Future senator W. A. Griesbach warned city officials away from the idea. "There may be opposition to new public buildings in Edmonton," he suggested to Mayor Daniel Knott, "because they have the effect of emptying certain office buildings and therefore making it difficult for owners of public buildings to meet their municipal taxes and it reduces rentals in office buildings."¹⁴⁶

By the end of 1932, most of the major work relief programs carried on in Canadian cities under the Unemployment and Farm Relief Act had been completed. Two of the larger ones discussed above—Saskatoon's Broadway Bridge and Winnipeg's Civic Auditorium—held their official openings well after the structures were substantially finished.¹⁴⁷ But the soaring relief costs that had long overwhelmed municipalities across the Prairies had begun to take their toll on the federal and provincial governments. In fact, it became clear as early as the summer of 1932 that the federal government had no plans to renew its work relief funding and financing scheme that had for two years made major urban work relief projects possible. Prime Minister R. B. Bennett believed that he had little choice but to abandon entirely the costly policy of federal support for

work relief schemes in favour of the cheaper direct relief. It was no mere policy shift. Rather, it was a complete reversal of the federal unemployment strategy. During his 1930 election campaign, Bennett had promised work for wages, the abolishment of the dole, and an end to unemployment. By 1932, unemployment levels were higher than ever, direct relief was Ottawa's new approach to the unemployment problem, and the era of work for wages was over.

At the local level, cities simply could no longer afford to continue the policy on their own. This did not mean that cities were prepared to abandon work relief altogether, but in place of the major projects that had characterized work relief since the autumn of 1930, cities now employed jobless married men for small-scale, short-term work such as snow shovelling, street sweeping, and brush work. City engineers and planners organized this work as well, but never again would they be responsible for orchestrating massive undertakings using unemployment relief labour as they had during the early years of the Depression. City councils continued to ask them for advice on projects that might be proposed to the senior levels of government, but neither the provinces nor the federal government would sign work relief agreements of the sort they had approved under the two unemployment relief acts.

In the end, what cities like Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg were left with was a series of practical and useful infrastructure improvements that they would not have been able to afford on their own. And while the projects were never able to provide the cities' jobless with steady work, they nevertheless offered urban residents work when there was none and wages that went some length toward feeding, housing, and clothing families.

4

Unemployed Men at Work

Charlotte Whitton, the famed director of the Canadian Council on Child Welfare, wrote to Saskatoon's city clerk in early January 1931 asking about that city's relief policies for the unemployed. City Clerk Mordaunt Tomlinson replied quickly and decisively: "We distribute nothing without work, as otherwise we should be creating paupers and there is no doubt in my mind that this is the greatest danger at this time."¹ Whitton was undoubtedly pleased with the clerk's reply, but his response was not entirely truthful.² Saskatoon's city relief administration, like those operating in Edmonton and Winnipeg, struggled to provide its resident jobless with relief work and often came up short. At the same time that the city clerk was claiming that his city distributed "nothing without work," all of the city's public works projects combined were employing no more than five hundred men, yet well over

one thousand men were unemployed and on relief in the city.³ And these numbers did not account for any of the unemployed women on direct relief in the city. The situation was the same in Edmonton. “Last year,” the city’s chief engineer wrote on New Year’s Eve, 1931, “there remained a large number of married men who could not get regular work. As far as possible, these men were handled by giving them direct relief.”⁴ Similar conditions faced Edmonton a year later, when the city relief officer admitted, “We have not anywhere near sufficient work to keep the relief cases occupied, and it is our opinion that they are much better occupied than they are idle.”⁵ Put simply, there was never enough work to keep all of the urban unemployed occupied all of the time, forcing relief officials to, in fact, distribute something without work.⁶

The creation of paupers, as Saskatoon’s city clerk pointed out, was considered by relief officials in all three cities as a serious and negative repercussion of unemployment, especially among able-bodied men. Pauperism threatened the work ethic and contributed to demoralization among the unemployed. Work relief in its broadest sense was designed to counteract these effects. Compelling able-bodied unemployed men to work for their relief reinforced the work ethic and guarded against both welfare dependence and demoralization, as it gave them something useful to do with their time.⁷ But city officials by no means applied their work relief policies to all able-bodied men equally. Rather, they reserved employment on their major work relief schemes explicitly (and nearly exclusively) for unemployed married men, primarily in an effort to prevent the withering of the main breadwinner role. They justified this practice on the basis that, theoretically at least, married men’s work relief wages would help support whole families. Meanwhile, they denied employment to the increasing number of what they viewed as potentially dangerous single men congregating in their cities in the hopes that doing so would encourage those men to accept work on farms or in work camps well outside of the city’s borders.⁸ Work relief policy, both as a concept and as a practice, therefore, represented one tool in relief officials’ toolkit that could simultaneously accomplish these two city policy goals: maintaining the ideal of the breadwinner role and moving single unemployed men out of the cities.

The degree of success in these efforts, however, was in many ways contingent on a broader policy narrative written by the provincial and federal governments. As detailed in the previous chapter, from 1930 to 1932, all three levels of government together funded and financed major urban work relief schemes designed primarily to keep unemployed married men working. These years saw the regular and mostly willing participation of such men in the relief projects. In fact, there were typically far more men clamouring to secure a job than there were jobs available. This was not surprising since the work took place within the city and offered workers a real hourly wage, mimicking conditions in the normal capitalist labour market.⁹ By the fall of 1932, however, the senior governments had abandoned the policy of financing urban work relief schemes in favour of cheaper contributions to cities in the form of direct relief. Thereafter, cities administered smaller, less expensive work projects, using as labour mostly unemployed married men on direct relief. Aside from their smaller size, the main difference between these projects and their pre-1932 counterparts was that workers were not paid in cash. Instead, the men had an account at the relief department, and the work they did was credited to that account, as a form of payment against their relief “debt.” Not surprisingly, unemployed married men’s participation in whatever small relief programs the cities could cobble together on their own fell off considerably. According to the associate editor of the *Winnipeg Tribune*, Ronald Hooper, the men were “galled by general conditions,” and “it irritates these men to find themselves and their wives without a nickle [*sic*] in their pockets after some days of rather humiliating work on the public streets.”¹⁰

Urban work relief policy related to single men was likewise dictated in large measure by policy-making at the provincial and federal levels. From 1929 to 1932, both the provinces and the federal government insisted that cities were responsible for all unemployment relief-related cases inside their borders, including unemployed single men. This forced relief officials to deal with what was fast becoming the problem of masses of unemployed single men congregating in their cities. For city officials, unemployed single men were “pests,” “agitators of the worst type,” and “potentially dangerous.” Winnipeg’s Alderman Ralph Maybank warned

in the spring of 1930 that single unemployed men congregating in the city “have no place to sleep and nothing to eat; the danger lies in the fact that they may take the law into their hands.”¹¹ City administrators, together with the provincial governments, encouraged single unemployed men to leave town and take farm jobs or work at camps operated by the provincial and federal governments through the winters. During spring and summer, authorities found various ways to minimize the threats posed by single unemployed men, including simply cutting them from the relief rolls altogether and hoping they might leave of their own accord.¹² After the fall of 1932, the federal government effectively took responsibility for single transient unemployed men, making arrangements to house them in relief camps administered by the Department of National Defence.¹³ This essentially freed cities from taking any further responsibility for single homeless men and reduced the potential for disorder that they represented.

BUILDING MEN: FROM THE NEW POOR LAW TO DEPRESSION-ERA WORK RELIEF

Western societies have long believed in the idea of insisting that the very poor offer up some form of work in exchange for alms, charity, or relief. Even the “great monuments of antiquity,” as historian John Garraty suggests, could be seen as (very) early public works relief projects.¹⁴ But it was the emergence of the workhouse in the late sixteenth century that marked nation-states’ first efforts at institutionalizing in an organized way the exchange of work for charity.¹⁵ Thereafter, thousands of the idle poor entered, mostly involuntarily, Europe’s workhouses—the *hôpital général* in France, the *tuchtuis* or *rasphuis* in the Netherlands, the *casas de misericordia* in Spain. However, historians are quick to note that many more people received “out-door” relief—that is, benefits or cash outside of the workhouse.¹⁶ Whether the aid came inside the workhouse or not, the idea that the poor must work for their relief became well established and would remain so through the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.

The administration and delivery of poor relief has long been about more than mere economic considerations. In fact, gendered assumptions and constructions have infused ideas about welfare provision at least as far back as the Poor Law Amendment Act (also called the New Poor Law) of 1834. Historian Sonya Rose argues that the act itself “proclaimed that men were solely responsible for the economic welfare of families” because it offered relief to families through men only.¹⁷ The New Poor Law, then, adopted the ideal of the family wage and emphasized the relationship between men and the role of breadwinner. The corollary to this, of course, was that women and children came to be viewed as dependents of men. Historian Marjorie Levine-Clark recently linked the aims of the New Poor Law with Victorian medical discourses that cast women as frail and naturally dependent on men. These medical discourses shared an easy alliance not only with the New Poor Law’s ideological assumptions about the male breadwinner role but also with working-class male activists’ fear that women’s lower wages would undercut their own, as well as with middle-class moralists who insisted that women should “limit or cease their work both for their own health and that of the families they were presumably neglecting at home.”¹⁸ Considering women far too frail and delicate for waged work thus served several ends. It is this idea—that women did not share the “ablebodiedness” of men, to use Levine-Clark’s term to describe their husbands, brothers, or fathers—that correspondingly reveals how British society at that time linked men’s independence, manhood, and breadwinner status with work as a means of providing for their families. In the end, much like the work relief systems set up in the urban Prairie centres a century later, the New Poor Law emphasized (and in fact was preoccupied with) protecting the male breadwinner role. These ideas informed the approaches to dealing with unemployment that city councils on the Canadian Prairies would use in the twentieth century. Work relief—that is, compelling relief recipients to offer their labour in return for food, clothing, and shelter—was one of several stones upon which both the New Poor Law of 1834 and Prairie cities’ unemployment relief policies of the 1930s rested. Another was the breadwinner role itself.

WOMEN NEED NOT APPLY

While the Depression may have threatened the male breadwinner ideal, it simultaneously bolstered it. As we have seen in previous chapters, city relief policy-makers focused much of their attention on families, particularly on the unemployed married man. In good, or at least stable, economic times, the male breadwinner ideal maintained a quiet insistence of its simple truths: that a man's rightful and natural role was at the head of his household and that his responsibilities to his dependents were to be fulfilled through hard work and the wages that it produced. In unstable economic times, that quiet insistence grew louder, anxiously reinforcing what many considered a man's natural provider role in the face of unprecedented social and economic threats. Historian George Chauncey, writing in the US context, argues that times of economic difficulty have affected men's sense of their masculinity, creating hyper-heterosexual environments: "The reaction against the challenges posed to manhood by Depression conditions was widely evident in the culture, from the celebration of powerful male physiques in the public art of the New Deal to the attacks on married women for 'stealing' men's jobs."¹⁹

Emphasizing the protection of men's breadwinner status was not uncommon on the urban Prairie. "Why should working girls give up their jobs for men?" one Saskatoon woman, who identified herself only as "A Working Girl," asked the editor of the *Star-Phoenix* in May 1932. "Because men are the breadwinners. How many girls are working to support their families? Nine out of ten are working to satisfy their own desires."²⁰ Here, women's work is dismissed as supporting frivolous pleasure rather than affirmed as contributing to the family economy. It was only the family man's work that supported his wife and children. And, at least according to this "Working Girl," women should leave their jobs during periods of widespread economic distress and give them over to the breadwinners.

Similar thinking pervaded the administration of work relief programs. Any women who disputed this attitude typically met with

resistance. One of Edmonton's female relief officers advocated for offering relief work to qualified women: "As representing women and girls in this City, I fail to see why they should be discriminated against, as we women feel they are entitled to the same consideration as men." Noting that women "cannot take up employment in tunnelling and such like work," she nevertheless believed that women could certainly work on lighter jobs.²¹ But despite her efforts, no women joined men on work relief projects, although some tried. In July 1931, Saskatonian Lily Whaley wrote Mayor Hair seeking employment through the city's work relief program: "My circumstances place me on the same level as a man, and I will be glad if it could be possible for the city to provide manual labour as far as these unemployed men for myself at the same low salary rather than be compelled to ask for relief."²² The mayor was sympathetic to Whaley's request, suggesting that unemployed women might do a little light gardening for the city (as she might for her own kitchen garden at home), but Chief Engineer George Archibald warned against such a measure, writing to the mayor two days after Whaley's letter was written: "It is probably quite true that there are many unemployed women in the city that could perform manual labour, just as well as many of the men who are at present time engaged on this sort of work. However I do not think the city should take any step in this direction as I am quite sure there would be a very serious revulsion of feeling on the part of the public if women were to be engaged on even lighter forms of labouring work."²³ Letters to local newspapers generally confirmed Archibald's warning. "The great majority of [employed] married women are working just so they can get away from their husbands and have a good time," one concerned citizen wrote in a letter to the city council in October 1931.²⁴ Another asked the editor of the *Star-Phoenix*, "Supposing we all practiced the selfish economy of married couples working, what would be the result? The world would sink into oblivion."²⁵ In the end, much like women in other Prairie cities, no Saskatoon women were employed on relief projects. Relief work was for breadwinners, and breadwinners were married men. Even single men with dependent parents or other kin did not qualify as providers.

EXCLUDING SINGLE MEN, 1929–32

The deepening depressed conditions through the early 1930s exacerbated anxieties about the inability of married men to sustain their prescribed main breadwinner role. This should not, however, be taken to mean that the Depression ushered in any kind of “crisis of masculinity.”²⁶ Rather, relief policy-makers, although they would not have used these terms, were anxious that a particular masculine construction at a particular moment in time was under threat. Recent writing on the constructions of masculinities through time suggests that the very definition of “manhood” is historically contingent, continuously contested, and subject to the contexts of place and circumstance.²⁷ Influential masculinities theorist R. W. Connell, for example, argues that there is no single masculinity, but many. This is not to suggest, however, that masculinity is so diverse that it lacks the specificity to be useful as a category of analysis. While individual men might develop distinct senses of their own masculinity, their engagement with shared cultural references, similar situations, and common struggles with other men tends to have a unifying effect, crystallizing an otherwise amorphous form. Neither are all masculinities equal in their effects or potential effects on society. Instead, societies tend to feature competing masculinities, some of which are held in higher esteem than others. The most admired, what Connell calls the “hegemonic” masculinity, need not be totally dominant or even held to by the majority, but it does serve as the cultural leader or authority. During the Depression years, a bourgeois, or middle-class, ideology represented this cultural authority, this hegemonic masculinity. Its hallmark was the male breadwinner role.

During the interwar years, and specifically the Depression, anxieties over the threat to the male breadwinner role manifested as an undermining of the jobless family man’s morale, his self-respect, and his “manhood.” “It is infinitely better in the interests of the morale of the [married male] citizens,” declared Edmonton’s mayor in August 1931, “that an opportunity be afforded to earn by means of relief work rather than to perpetuate direct relief which virtually resolves itself into the

dole system.”²⁸ The city commissioner further pointed out that work relief would “eliminate or at least restrict the necessity for continuing direct relief and thereby correspondingly enable many of our citizens to maintain their self-respect in supporting themselves by their own productive labor.”²⁹

As a result of these concerns, relief officials reserved participation on city work relief projects almost exclusively for married men, and especially for married men with children. In most cases, especially as the Depression wore on, urban relief administrators tried to give more work relief to men with more dependents. In September 1931, for example, Saskatoon’s mayor reasoned, “It is quite apparent that the married man with no children does not require as much as the married man with a family of five or six.”³⁰ According to Saskatoon’s labour distribution system, this meant that married men with six or more children qualified for twenty-two days of work on the Broadway Bridge project within every four-week period. On the other end of the scale, married men with no children qualified for no more than sixteen days of work each month.³¹

The privileging of married men over single men on work relief jobs emerged early. In December 1929, for example, City Commissioner David Mitchell emphasized that Edmonton’s “emergency relief plan is for the benefit of unemployed married men who are bona fide residents of the city. The city is not in a position to consider others. No single men will be employed under this plan and each married man will be carefully investigated by relief officer Magee before being placed at work.”³² The same conditions applied several weeks later when Edmonton began a new relief project on the Garneau sewers: city officials stated that “as far as possible this work will be confined exclusively to bona fide married residents of the city.”³³ In doling out work on a new nurses’ residence being added to Saskatoon’s City Hospital in the summer of 1930, Mayor John Hair assured citizens that “a rigid checkup is being maintained to insure that the people who were given jobs are bona fide citizens, married men with dependents receiving first consideration.”³⁴ That same summer, large placards posted at the entrance to Edmonton’s city hall announced that only married men supporting families needed apply at

the relief office for work on the city's latest waterworks construction project, and the city commissioners issued an "iron clad ruling that no single men . . . can take advantage of the work offered."³⁵

Any ruling, however "iron clad," would have little effect unless it was enforced rigorously. This was easy enough at the relief office itself, where men assembled to receive their work orders each day: the relief officer simply assigned jobs only to married men. The process became more complicated when the city contracted jobs to local construction and hauling companies. Although the married-man-only rule applied to private firms involved on relief jobs, the relief office, being one step removed from hiring workers, found it more difficult to ensure that only married men were hired. For the most part, the contracted private firms followed city work relief distribution policies. For example, W. H. Carter of Carter-Hills-Aldinger Company explained the company's practices and experiences on Winnipeg's bridge work in a letter to the province in the fall of 1933: "We possibly employed on two relief jobs during the month of July 1932 around 500 men, and say 500 more in the plants in Winnipeg processing materials." By rotating the men so they worked half-time at most, Carter estimated that his company had made provision for some two thousand men. All of the men were married, Carter said, and, based on an average family size of five (according to provincial statistics), he estimated that "this would take care of 10,000 individuals at least and possibly more."³⁶

But not all contractors followed city dictates. Typically, city officials relied on outside complaints that single men were working on relief jobs. When Edmonton relief officials learned, for example, that the J. B. McDonald and Son grading company was using a single man to haul gravel for a relief job, the city's chief engineer instructed the company to "remove him and make room for a married man."³⁷ In another instance in Edmonton, Alderman James Ogilvie received an anonymous letter advising him that "someone named Swanson was employing single men on city work." Upon looking into the matter, the city's chief engineer found that Swanson, who had earlier won a curbing and walk work contract from the city, had in fact hired five single men as finishers and form setters. The remaining thirty men on the project were married. The engineer

only allowed Swanson to retain the single men when he learned that finishing and form setting required experienced hands and no married men with that experience were available. Perhaps more importantly, the results of the engineer's investigation showed that Swanson employed no other single men on the job.³⁸ The chief engineer made a similar report on the Crown Paving Company and the H. G. Macdonald Paving Company, who had hired a combined total of eighty-seven men. All but five were married.³⁹ Saskatoon city authorities were equally anxious to ensure that single men found no work on relief projects. In December 1930, the city commissioner received word from a concerned member of the Canadian Legion that the city was "employing New Canadians who are presumably married but are not actually married, or if they are, have wives living in the Old Country." The commissioner asked the Legion to provide a "list of the names of the new Canadians" since the city was "more than anxious to deal with the difficult problem of seeing that the available work goes to those most entitled to it."⁴⁰

On one level, of course, city work relief policies excluding single men made good economic sense: by offering work only to married men with wives and children, city administrators effectively stretched each relief dollar further than by hiring single men. But on another level, reserving work relief jobs exclusively for married men was aimed at enabling those men to fulfill their breadwinner role and to preserve their morale, self-respect, and manhood. In defending his city's policy that only "bona fide" married men qualified for work relief, for example, Saskatoon's Mayor John Hair explained to several single men seeking work relief that "one of the first principals [*sic*] of manhood was to recognize women and children first. Until we have taken care of women and children I had no authority to deal with men such as they."⁴¹ Manhood, in the mayor's estimation, involved breadwinners taking care of their families, not unemployed single men working on relief jobs. The mayor's admonishment suggested that the single men lacked even a basic sense of what "manhood" was all about. His message was simple: single men need not expect work relief from the city until the married men were able to fulfill their breadwinner role. The director of Edmonton's special relief office agreed with the principle of maintaining the primacy

of the breadwinner role through relief work, but he expressed it in legal rather than economic terms. “Undoubtedly,” he asserted in 1934, “a man has a legal responsibility to take care of his family.”⁴²

Others believed that an unemployed married man’s inability to provide for his family would negatively affect the man’s self-image, and only a proper course of work relief would ameliorate that unhappy situation. In a letter to Manitoba’s Public Works minister in November 1932, Ronald Hooper, the *Winnipeg Tribune*’s associate editor, wrote that married men had “struggled hard to keep off relief and preserve their self-respect.” But those same men, the “heads of families who are homeowners, who have been encouraged to expect a relatively high standard of living,” were nevertheless “coming on relief in increasing numbers.” In Hooper’s opinion, one he claimed was shared by unemployed family men throughout the city, heads of families needed relief work, preferably paid in cash to “help them in preserving their self-respect and make things a little easier for their wives.”⁴³ Hooper’s emphasis on the loss of self-respect among unemployed heads of households speaks primarily to his anxiety over married men’s loss of breadwinner status due to unemployment rather than to a concern about simple pauperism. His remarks also reveal how class anxieties intersected with gendered ones in relief policy debates. Work relief would not only maintain the breadwinner role among both working- and middle-class married men, but it would also bolster the self-respect—and class position—of those unfortunate cases who had enjoyed a high living standard before they lost their jobs.

Groups representing unemployed workers also believed that without a proper course of work relief, the unemployed family man’s manhood was in danger. Direct relief for married men, the Building Trades Council explained to Winnipeg’s relief officials, meant “suffering privation, under-nourishment of women and children, and the stagnation of manhood.” Direct relief, like unemployment generally, led to a “loss of stamina, the disintegration of the home, and other heart-rendering [*sic*] effects.” In the view of the Building Trades Council, unemployed married men required “a standard of wages sufficient for any self-respecting citizen to maintain his home and family with the necessities of life.”⁴⁴ Edmonton’s Unemployed Ex-Service Men’s Association (UEMA) shared

that view. Formed sometime during the summer of 1930, the association claimed to represent nearly 250 married men, together with more than 700 dependents.⁴⁵ The association drew liberally on the idea of men's provider role, linking it, perhaps not surprisingly, with veterans' service to King and Country during the Great War in order to seek better unemployment relief terms for its membership.⁴⁶ The UEMA president, F. J. Barringham, wrote to federal Labour Minister Gideon Robertson in June 1931: "The main object of this association is to solely look after the interests of the unemployed ex-service men [*sic*] and his dependents." A proper work relief program, he wrote, would likely go some direction in alleviating their unhappy situation. Work relief would allow these men to "preserve their self respect by working honestly for the living of themselves and their families."⁴⁷ At the same time, the UEMA set itself apart from other unemployed men, suggesting that non-Canadians (and presumably non-veterans) did not share their type of manliness: UEMA members, Barringham reported to Robertson, "ask that they not be expected to stand in line with those of foreign extraction many of whom cannot speak our language. They ask that in any works undertaken that they be not classed with those that can never hold anything in common." The UEMA, in other words, claimed that its members were willing to work for their relief, and hopefully maintain their breadwinner role in the process, but their role as provider was of a higher order than family men of foreign extraction.

Married men themselves also used language linking their desire for work relief to their provider role. One Edmonton man wrote to the mayor applying "respectfully for work of any kind" to support his wife and five children.⁴⁸ Another who had "done no work" for months and who had a "wife and invalid daughter" to support sought the mayor's help in finding him at least three days' work each week.⁴⁹ And a third, responsible for "bringing up and educating six children," asked for the mayor's help in his efforts to "earn a dollar cutting lawns, trimming hedges, and doing general garden work." The man even offered to cut the mayor's lawn for free, reasoning that doing so would be "a recommendation in itself to other citizens."⁵⁰ Like so many other unemployed family men, these three made their requests for relief work as husbands, as fathers, as breadwinners.

Sometimes unemployed workers' use of the breadwinner ideal produced real results. In September 1931, for example, Saskatoon's city council agreed, after hearing from a delegation of workers, to rescind its plan to reduce relief workers' wages from forty-five to forty cents per hour. The workers had argued that wages on relief jobs should at least "give a married man enough to live on according to the number of his children." The city council's decision was not unanimous, but one alderman who spoke out on behalf of the married men suggested that "if there was to be any cutting, it should be on other city employees from the top down." The delegation of workers attending the council meeting greeted this remark, according to the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, with a round of applause.⁵¹

City authorities were quite conscious of the hierarchy of relief and the implications of their work relief distribution policies. "Married men should, I feel, be treated differently," Edmonton's relief officer confided to an Alberta Provincial Police detective in March 1931. "From personal contact, I find necessity to exist among married men who have kept out of the bread line as long as possible."⁵² Recipients, too, were clearly aware of the disparity in distribution of relief to single versus married men. One Edmonton widower, who was offered only single men's relief after his wife died, railed against what he viewed as his diminished status in a letter to the premier in 1932: "Now they give me Single Men's Relief, and compare me to the kind of men who know neither God nor Church. Do you think that I, 64 years old, should only eat twice a day?"⁵³

The hierarchy of relief convinced some relief officials that single men were getting married only to improve their financial situation.⁵⁴ Saskatoon's relief officer, for instance, pointed out in March 1932 that more than half of the 2,152 families on relief had been married for only a year or so. The majority of these, he claimed, "got married in order to get on relief."⁵⁵ One week later, the relief officer pointed to the case of a man who, after being married for only three days, had applied for assistance.⁵⁶ In order to deal with such situations, Saskatoon instituted a policy whereby newly married couples could expect no relief, and certainly no work relief, until they could satisfy the city that they had been married at least one year.⁵⁷ Edmonton relief officials discovered similar activities

in their city, and followed a course much like Saskatoon's. "No man on 'single' relief," Edmonton's relief officer declared in February 1933, "shall be allowed to transfer to 'married' relief notwithstanding the fact that he may have been married in the meantime."⁵⁸ The situation even led relief officials to make moral judgements about relief recipients' conjugal relationships, accusing the newly married of failing to take account of their poverty before heading down the matrimonial aisle. Single men who married without "proper foresight and no funds," Edmonton's relief officer declaimed, were not yet prepared to take on the duties and obligations of the married man. "These cases are not isolated ones, but are occurring with sufficient regularity and frequency to indicate that there is an undoubted intention on the part of some people to get married and set up homes at our expense. When a man has no money whatever and has no job . . . we cannot accept [him] making his vows and then immediately coming to the Relief Department to ask us to carry them out."⁵⁹

In some instances, it seems that single men, rather than getting married just to get on relief, claimed they were married when they were not. In one case, a relief officer told the tale of five single "foreigners" who "had each produced the same woman in turn as his wife in making application for assistance."⁶⁰ Another Saskatoon man was sent to jail for three months after he had obtained \$4.75 worth of work relief from the city on the apparently false claim that a certain woman was his wife and that one of her children was also his. The woman received a one-month jail sentence on the charge of "corrupting the morals of a child."⁶¹ Clearly favouring a hardline approach to fraud, the relief officer told the court at the trial that "he was confident that many men were receiving relief as married men when in fact they were single and living with women for the purposes of defrauding the city."⁶² In response to this trend, Saskatoon instituted a new policy insisting that applicants for married men's relief produce documentation to prove that the marriage had actually taken place. Almost immediately, some single unemployed men found ways to circumvent the new policy. "Several [men] who had no wives," Saskatoon's relief officer reported, "merely bought marriage certificates" and produced them as proof of their married status.⁶³ For these men, it seems, committing fraud to get work relief jobs reserved for

married men was clearly preferable to remaining on single men's relief, which gave them, at best, farm work or camp work well outside the city and under close supervision, and at worst, the bum's rush out of town.⁶⁴

MARRIED MEN IN THE CITIES, POST-1932

By the early autumn of 1932, city relief officials across the country knew that both the provinces and the federal government had effectively ended their financial support for the sort of major urban work relief programs that had been the hallmarks of Bennett's two unemployment relief acts. The conviction that only work relief could bolster the main breadwinner ideal, however, appeared to grow ever stronger among relief policy-makers and the general public alike. Indeed, breadwinner language played a prominent role in efforts to convince the federal government that the re-establishment of work relief was critical. Manitoba's Premier John Bracken, for instance, drew on the breadwinner ideal in an effort to secure federal dollars for Winnipeg relief projects. "As the period which families are maintained on direct relief increases," he wrote Prime Minister R. B. Bennett in April 1933, "the needs which must be met increase." At issue was more than simply spiralling relief costs: the very independence of the family hung in the balance. Bracken continued: "The recipients become dependent on the relief officer for the solution of many of their intimate family problems such as the replacing of worn out clothing, supplying sewing material, providing medical attention and medicine, and repairing of bedding and household effects and numerous other items." The premier believed that these were clearly things that a breadwinner's wages should provide. Direct relief, he warned, weakened recipients' moral fibre and self-reliance, and "in some cases their desire to work."⁶⁵

Voices across the Prairies called for a renewed course of jointly funded work relief programs, which would surely strengthen married men's sense of responsibility for their families. Without work relief, a Winnipeg relief department report noted in December 1933, the city's unemployed had taken on an "attitude of dependence . . . resulting in an

inevitable deterioration of human values.”⁶⁶ Edmonton’s Highlands and District Community League, a group representing the Highlands neighbourhood, likewise feared that the system of direct relief was “destroying the qualities of self-respect and economic independence and initiative” in unemployed married men.⁶⁷ The league insisted that the city immediately pursue a program of work relief to counteract the destructive nature of direct relief. A Calgary resolution shared with Edmonton’s city council in September 1933 was even more explicit: “It is generally recognized and admitted that the continued lack of employment of a large section of our population particularly in homes where women and children are affected, is having a degrading and demoralizing effect which is becoming daily more intolerable.”⁶⁸ Calgary’s city council, like most city councils across the nation, was especially concerned about married men’s inability to provide for their families. The alternative, one Winnipeg businessman warned Manitoba officials, would be “a terrible item which you will have to pay for in years to come.”⁶⁹

Shrinking Funds and Mundane Work

The loss of provincial and federal funding for urban work relief projects, of course, had immediate and important consequences for urban public works plans. Gone were Edmonton’s extensive plans, set to begin during the winter of 1932–33, for nearly \$4 million worth of road improvement work, waterworks and sewerage extensions, bridge and subway construction, and an extension to the city’s power house.⁷⁰ Winnipeg’s new program of work was certainly off the table, nor would Saskatoon be able to proceed with its proposed schemes. The problem was simple: the cities were nearly broke. “Further capital commitments are not warranted in view of the City’s . . . abnormal bonded indebtedness,” Edmonton’s city commissioner concluded in October 1932.⁷¹ The following summer, municipal bureaucrats again turned their thoughts to the coming winter’s expected unemployment problems. “Your commissioners are in fullest possible accord with the idea of providing work,” Edmonton’s city commissioner reported to city council in July 1933, “but the city’s resources are limited and it

would be futile on the part of the city to even contemplate the possibility of providing any considerable program of public works or local improvements under present conditions.⁷² In Winnipeg, Manitoba's assistant deputy minister of Labour resignedly wrote to city officials: "Provinces and Municipalities are not in a financial position which will permit of them entering into a program of relief works to any considerable extent."⁷³ It was an unhappy reality shared by cities across the Prairies. The problem was not a lack of work, one official in Saskatoon remarked, just a lack of money to carry that work out.⁷⁴

As city administrators soon learned from the federal government, this did not mean that Dominion funds were no longer available for local work relief improvement schemes. To the contrary, the federal government promised to contribute one-third of the cost of municipal direct relief programs, and city authorities were allowed to use that contribution as wages for city relief projects, whether in cash or in kind. Any costs related to materials, supervision, and administration, however, would have to be borne by the cities themselves.⁷⁵ These costs, of course, severely limited the sort of work relief that municipal governments could offer unemployed married men. Given the cities' dire financial situation, the only relief projects they could undertake were ones, in the words of one Edmonton relief official, involving "for the most part hand labour and with a minimum of cash expenditure."⁷⁶ In practical terms, this meant that cities could carry out little more than maintenance work such as improving traffic views, brushing ahead of any construction work that might be started in better times, snow removal and ice harvesting, boulevarding and grass cutting, and cleaning vacant blocks throughout the city to prepare for their potential cultivation.⁷⁷

Some city governments chose to avoid even these types of relief projects. Winnipeg relief officials revealed in July 1935 that "it is some time, two years in fact, since we had any work for relief, with the exception of the St. Boniface woodyard, where last fall the men did the piling." But this could hardly be called work relief. "Each chap on relief," the city's relief officer admitted, "got, possibly, three days work every six months, as a credit against his relief account." Through 1933, Saskatoon "endeavoured to secure a certain amount of return for relief supplied in



Figure 9. Edmonton relief workers, 1939. After the federal government refused to continue financing unemployment work relief projects, city officials could offer unemployed married men little more than odd jobs. Here, men are shown clearing ice and snow from city streets. City of Edmonton Archives, 160-1052.

the way of work in the City Engineer's and Parks Department."⁷⁸ The city's efforts in this direction, however, did not last long, mainly because of the high costs. The work, city officials later explained, "involved considerable expense for supervision, tools and equipment, demands by the relief recipients for extra food allowance on the ground that more food was required because of the physical exertion involved in the performance of work, [and] extra clothing during the Winter period on the ground that such clothing was necessary to withstand the rigors of sub zero weather."⁷⁹ The heavy cost of these expenses, incidental to the work itself, convinced city officials that Saskatoon could not afford even minor work relief programs.

Equally important as cost to Saskatoon's decision to abandon the policy of offering unemployed married men work relief was that "a great many of the men did a minimum amount of work."⁸⁰ The men's attitudes were, in many ways, directly related to the sort of work on offer. While men had generally considered work on Saskatoon's Broadway Bridge desirable, they had small regard for what they considered "make-work" projects that paid no real wage. On one occasion, Saskatoon's city park superintendent, A. H. Browne, visited the city nursery to investigate claims that the men sent there to work off their relief hoeing garden beds were shirking. He found the men "sitting outside the nursery's gate."⁸¹

Signs of men's unwillingness to take such work seriously had appeared even before the bridge was completed. In May 1932, for instance, city officials discovered what appeared to be the increasingly common practice of relief workers loafing on a nearby riverbank job used as a work test for those men unable to find regular rotation work on the bridge. The men earned groceries and fuel in exchange for working five hours a day, two days a week.⁸² "If one man wants a match to light his pipe," Alderman F. A. Blain complained, "four or five seem to go into conference on the matter and it takes about five minutes to arrange all the details. The passage of a train over the Canadian National bridge also appeared to be a signal to cease operations and look about."⁸³ Relief officials complained about one man who had a propensity go "down along the river bank for an hour and a half loafing."⁸⁴ An entire group of men, Alderman Blain pointed out, "were not even trying to work." Of thirty-six men working at the riverbank, only five men were actually using their tools. "And the slow-motion action of the majority who were using their tools," he continued, "was not a very desirable recommendation to their industry."⁸⁵ Determined to find out for himself the extent of the alleged loafing, Saskatoon's city commissioner travelled out to the riverbank worksite in late May 1932. He found that "out of one group of twenty men, only two were actually working." Upon spying him, though, "the men all started working."⁸⁶ Later, the commissioner reported to city council that, given the men's unwillingness to work for their relief, "the city would be just as well off if the relief groceries

were given direct as a donation with no return of any kind.” The city’s relief officer agreed, suggesting that the matter be set on the council’s agenda at the next meeting.⁸⁷

Not all the men on the worksite faced charges of shirking, but relief officers believed that the ones who did set bad examples for the hard workers. In May 1932, two reports in the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* quoted relief officer Frank Rowland on this issue: “There are quite a number of industrious and conscientious men working with the relief gangs on the river bank who would put in a proper day’s work if they were not afraid that their fellow workers would make conditions uncomfortable for them.”⁸⁸ In some cases, the shirkers went beyond merely creating discomfort for their hardworking fellows. “Some of the men were merely putting in time,” Rowland noted, “and if anyone tried to put in a proper day’s work he was likely to be thrown into the river. This also applied to the foreman who wanted to speed up work.”⁸⁹ The men were “only putting in an appearance and making a pretence of being busy so they could get their groceries”—although Rowland had little doubt as to the source of the problem: “If all the Reds or near-Reds were taken off the relief gangs, more work would be done.”⁹⁰

Edmonton, it seems, accepted with more enthusiasm the use of the federal and provincial contributions, which amounted to two-thirds of the city’s direct relief costs, as wages for work relief. Special relief officer H. F. McKee described the city’s work distribution system:

We receive our calls for work from the Engineer’s Department in specified groups, such as, fifteen men for Grierson Street, thirty-five men for the City Stables, etc. These calls come to the wicket the week previous to the time the work is done, and the men are picked out as they come for relief and as their turn falls due. After the man has worked, a payroll is made out by the Engineer’s Department. This payroll is checked with the men who are called at the wicket, and the number of hours worked are recorded to the credit of each individual man.⁹¹

Under this system, few unemployed married men in Edmonton worked on grading, gravelling, and water main extensions.⁹² Instead,

most found themselves at the city dump, at the city stables mucking horse stalls, or on the streets clearing debris. The experience was markedly different from their earlier work on the larger projects funded under the federal work relief acts. In addition to receiving no real wage, the men found that the worksite was subject to change on any given day, and while the city tried to assign men work near their own homes, this was not always possible. A delegation of Edmonton relief workers reported to city council that “men were required to go very considerable distances extending from the extreme limit of one end of the city to the other in order to perform their required quota of work.”⁹³ The city’s solution to the problem was to issue free streetcar tickets to any man who lived more than two miles from that day’s worksite.⁹⁴ The streetcar tickets cost the city a total of some \$100 per week, and although the chief engineer acknowledged that this was a significant expense, he pointed out that it was the only cost associated with the relief work and was without a doubt “very much appreciated by the men.”⁹⁵

Relief Workers Strike in Edmonton

The married men were generally unhappy with the new work relief arrangements, in part because the work was labour intensive and did not rely on skilled labour to any great degree. What it did require, however, was a healthy body, something that, as the Depression wore on, fewer and fewer men seemed to have. In the fall of 1934, Edmonton’s Trades and Labour Council complained about the city’s stipulation that men on relief work use greater than “size 2 scoop shovels,” stating that the heavier shovels put “too great a hardship and strain upon their constitution. Many of these people have been on relief and this extra strain required of them with this exceptionally hard and heavy work for at least eight hours per day is liable to cause a breakdown in health, which will result in a further economic loss to the City because they will be responsible for their health and maintenance should they become sick.”⁹⁶ Perhaps most importantly, however, the men insisted that the city pay at least some cash wages on relief jobs.⁹⁷ In this, they found an unlikely ally in Edmonton’s Chamber of Commerce. The

men, of course, wanted cash to spend on whatever they chose, while, for its part, the Chamber of Commerce wanted as much cash circulating through the local economy as possible.⁹⁸ City officials, not surprisingly, took a different view of the matter. "It is unfortunate that there has grown up the impression that work is a penalty," Edmonton's relief officer retorted to a series of worker complaints about the system of payment. "As a matter of fact, relief work is paid for notwithstanding the different method, the same as regular work, and at the same union rate. If a man who has received relief takes advantage of today's work, he can wipe off his liability at a good wage. The majority of those on relief recognize this."⁹⁹

Evidently, many relief workers did not recognize the benefits to being paid against their relief accounts, doing low-level maintenance work, and drawing what they believed was inadequate relief. On 15 May 1934, the Unemployed Married Men's Association (UMMA) called a strike, exchanging shovels for picket signs at the city stables, where the men normally assembled for the distribution of relief jobs throughout the city. On the first day of the strike, little more than half of the 126 relief workers that the city had ordered for the day showed up for work at all. Moreover, according to the city engineer, the number of workers who did appear was subsequently "very much reduced . . . due to the activities of the pickets." The picketers had been "very active," even going so far as to forcibly remove one of the city's non-relief workers from his wagon, "evidently believing he was one of the relief men." When the picketers realized that the man was a regular city worker, they left him alone.¹⁰⁰

The following day, city authorities ordered a police contingent to the stables to ensure that the men did not engage in disorderly activities, but the police discovered that only three relief men remained on the job. "In view of this situation," the city engineer suggested, "I think it would be advisable in the meantime to suspend operations . . . since most of the hand labour is effected [*sic*] by the strike."¹⁰¹ Later that afternoon, despite an early morning downpour that threatened to continue through the day, more than seven hundred strikers gathered at Market Square and embarked on a parade through the city's downtown streets. Many carried

signs, prepared earlier at the UMMA headquarters, reading "Support Our Strike" and "Our Children Are Slowly Starving to Death."¹⁰²

Relations between the city and the strikers deteriorated rapidly, despite some early efforts at negotiations to get the men back on the job. When those failed, city authorities threatened to cut from the relief rolls entirely any relief workers who did not appear at their scheduled jobsite ready to work. The city assured the workers that police protection would be provided on all worksites.¹⁰³ But the strikers were determined to continue their action. Two relief workers who tried to return to their worksites were beaten by strikers, and a third was threatened until he gave up and went home.¹⁰⁴

The UMMA also embarked on an organized campaign to get the wider community onside, soliciting support and funds by conducting a house-to-house canvass of Edmonton homes and insisting that local merchants either display strike notices in their shop windows or face blacklisting by strikers.¹⁰⁵ "Women relief strike aides," as the *Edmonton Journal* called women strikers, supported the workers by arriving at downtown cafés just before noon each day, ordering one cup of coffee, and sipping it "until five minutes past one o'clock, keeping all stools occupied against other customers . . . so that the machinery will be so tied up that the owner will be forced to appeal to city council."¹⁰⁶ Other supporters cast their assistance in breadwinner language. Edmonton's National Labour Council, for example, urged the city to "bring about an amicable settlement as soon as possible bearing in mind the suffering of the families of these men."¹⁰⁷ The Brotherhood of Railway Carmen referred to the "starvation relief for unemployed married men" and voiced its approval for the workers' action.¹⁰⁸ The Unemployed Ex-Service Men's Association (UEMA) went one step further, threatening to join the UMMA's strike if conditions did not improve. "We are heartily agreed," Colonel George B. McLeod declared at a UEMA meeting, that "there has to be a definite and a substantial increase in relief in the city for married unemployed."¹⁰⁹ Another speaker at the meeting noted the intersection between class and manhood: "It is up to you as men to stand behind those in the same class as yourselves."¹¹⁰ The UEMA would be sure, however, to maintain its own identity if it elected to join the UMMA action, especially since rumours

had been circulating that the strike had a “Red” element. Ex-servicemen would consequently “march under the Union Jack” to ensure that there could be no question as to where their loyalties lay.¹¹¹

Near the end of May, the two sides reached an impasse and settled in for what seemed could be a long wait. While the city council debated acquiescing to at least some of the strikers’ demands and continued to press the provincial and federal governments for financial support, the strikers—sometimes as many as fifty at any one worksite—gathered for daily pickets at the stables, the dump, and various other locations throughout the city.¹¹² The strikers called for at least part of their relief to be paid in cash, an increase in food allowances, and an end to using relief recipients on “maintenance work,” including “boulevarding” (that is, tidying up the streets), parks work, sidewalk clearing, and grass cutting. They also demanded fair treatment from the city: “We’re not a bunch of rough-necks,” one striker maintained in an interview with the *Edmonton Journal*. He emphasized the respectable and reasonable nature of the strike: “All we want to do is peacefully picket the men who are going to work in the face of strike opposition. We want food for our children and for our wives and ourselves, but we don’t want to use force to get it.”¹¹³

As for the city, Mayor Dan Knott explained that its “hands were tied by the two senior governments.” Premier Brownlee had earlier informed the city that “the province is not prepared to take such a wide departure from the present system, either in amount or method, at least until a new agreement was discussed” with Ottawa. And the last time Knott had asked the prime minister for \$1 million to support a proper program of work relief, “all [he] got for his pains was a 20-minute lecture on sound money.”¹¹⁴ Still, the mayor was game to try again, writing the prime minister to advise him of the strike and to call on the federal government to institute a new program of major public works construction. “The local situation is becoming more critical,” Knott wrote, “and at present time the unemployed have refused to carry on work operations.”¹¹⁵

The strike situation—which had long been simmering quietly in negotiations among the province, the federal government, the city, and the unemployed—boiled over on 28 May. The trouble began when

five relief recipients assigned to planting potatoes at a city-owned potato patch in an effort to augment the following winter's relief stores encountered some two hundred picketers determined to persuade the men to stop work. Twelve city police officers quickly descended on the patch, arresting twenty-one strikers and charging them with creating a disturbance. The strikers tried the same tactic the following morning, when some one hundred picketers attempted to stop six workers from planting potatoes. Police again arrived shortly after the attempt and arrested thirty-two men and one woman on charges of intimidation.¹¹⁶

In the end, the city council agreed to increase the food allowance by 25 percent, but the relief workers were still paid no cash, and the work remained as undesirable as ever. Although the strike was ended by vote a short time later, the married men's frustration with the city's work relief system remained. A little more than one year later, married men on relief were routinely failing to appear for their scheduled shifts, forcing the city engineers to regularly order about 50 percent more men than any relief job required "to make provision for those who don't turn out."¹¹⁷

DEALING WITH THE UNEMPLOYED SINGLE MAN

Single men, whether employed or not, have long been regarded as representing some element of danger. In the American context, for example, historian Howard Chudacoff traces the idea of the dangerous single man to at least the very earliest years of the republic. In part, this danger was related to the single man's apparent independence and free mobility: he was, in many respects, unfettered by broader social concerns about respectability, family life, and responsibility. By the late nineteenth century, Chudacoff notes, bachelordom was on the increase, alongside the rise of a newly created consumer culture and growing urbanization. With increasing numbers of young men taking advantage of "alternatives to marriage, such as opportunities for economic, social, and sexual independence" came a growing sense that the single man constituted a danger to respectable, established society.¹¹⁸

The very independence, mobility, and youth that made his experience reflective of the frontier (in both Canada and the United States) simultaneously made the single man dangerous in a number of ways. Historian Paul Laipson argues that the single man represented “both a failure of masculinity and an excess of it.”¹¹⁹ His state of singledom (whether permanent or transitory) imbued him with an ambiguous sexuality: he was perceived, on the one hand, as possibly asexual or even homosexual, and on the other, as aggressively “hyper-masculine . . . reluctant to marry because he is unwilling to restrict himself sexually to one woman or to give up access to the pleasures available to him as a single man.”¹²⁰ More dangerous even than an ambiguous sexuality, however, was the single man’s supposed propensity for violence.¹²¹ According to historian Mary Beard, writing in the 1930s, single men were even behind the rise of fascism: “The Fascist movement in Germany, as in Italy and Japan, is essentially a dynamic of unmarried males. . . . Adolph [*sic*] Hitler, a bachelor like the majority of the thirty or forty leaders of the Nazi party, is a rover, a veteran of the World War, undomesticated and unused to the responsibilities connected with public life in a time of peace.”¹²² In less hyperbolic terms, others believed that younger single and working-class men were prone to engage at the very least in unruly, rowdy, sometimes drunken behaviour and that this sort of behaviour became even more dangerous when young men congregated.¹²³

While Western societies generally saw single young men as representing potential problems, economic conditions caused by the Depression exacerbated that potential in three important ways. Suddenly, single young men were not only unattached, independent, and prone to gather together and cause trouble, but they were also idle, susceptible to a reinvigorated Communist movement, and, perhaps worst of all, representative of both the wasted promise and vitality of youth and the bleak future of Western industrial society.¹²⁴ Edmonton’s Highlands and District Community League warned city councillors in April 1933 that unemployment was “preventing the normal development in the young people [of] self-respect and economic independence and initiative.” Together, these “human qualities” represented “the most valuable asset of the Country.”¹²⁵ Whether societal fears of single men were based on

real or imagined violence and disorder, freedom and independence from “civil society,” and danger, single men, as we shall see, were clearly singled out by relief administrators of Prairie cities as individuals on which to keep a close eye.

As early as December 1929, city officials had determined that single unemployed men represented a serious problem. “We have single men who are without food and a place to sleep,” Saskatoon’s finance committee reported, adding, “if work cannot be provided for them by individual effort, the only other course open is to have them arrested as vagrants and housed in jail, and hope that such an alternative may drive them out of the city.”¹²⁶ Edmonton’s chief of police saw similar problems. Writing to the mayor in December 1929, Police Chief A. G. Shute reported the “increasing tendency of single men coming to the police station asking to be taken care of during the night.” One man who had had nothing to eat since the previous day vowed to “commit a crime to get taken care of. Many crimes—thefts, hold-ups—by men who find it impossible to secure employment and the inclemency of the weather drives them to desperation.”¹²⁷

Out of the City, onto the Farm

Given the prevailing sense that unemployed single men represented disorder and potential danger, especially before the federal government took responsibility for them, city relief officials in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg employed policies designed to reduce their number on city relief rolls whenever possible. One way of accomplishing this was to charge them with vagrancy and put them in jail.¹²⁸ Another was to shift responsibility to the family. As one relief officer in Edmonton explained: “It has been the practice of this Department in handling adult children of married couples that are on relief, to include them as part of the family. The method of handling the adult male dependent now is unquestionably cheaper than the meal and bed system, and provided there is accommodation in the home, it cannot be very much improved on.”¹²⁹ Finally, cities occasionally offered single men some of the meanest work possible, explicitly discouraging them

from waiting on the city for relief altogether. Edmonton's relief officer, for example, suggested that the city's engineering department should "put on a good substantial force of single men with brooms sweeping the muck to the side of the street in little piles. . . . The offering of this work, day by day, until the whole street is cleaned up, would likely have its effect in reducing the number of men reporting for work, and consequently for relief."¹³⁰ In this sense, work relief had different functions for different categories of relief. City relief departments simultaneously used work to maintain married men in the city and to remove single men from the city.

Far more common, however, were municipal efforts to remove single men by encouraging them to take up farm or camp work well outside the city. In this goal, city officials in Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg were far from alone. US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal, for instance, made substantial allowance for programs to take young single urban men from the cities and place them in the "healthy" surroundings of the American "wilderness," there to fight forest fires, clear brush, plant trees, and build bridges. According to historian Jeffrey Suzik, Roosevelt's Civilian Conservation Corps emerged out of the president's "personal interest in the conservation of natural resources; but even more so, it grew out of a societal concern about the uncertain occupational prospects of America's jobless male youth."¹³¹

Farm work was not an unusual or new response to the "problem" of single men, who had long relied on harvest work in the autumn through the three decades leading to the Depression. And farmers, too, welcomed a cheap and available labour supply of single men—and, less commonly, married men—to be available to work during the busy harvest season when wheat had to be threshed before the first frost. Encouraging single men to work on farms would, according to Manitoba provincial officials, "help solve the farm labor problem."¹³² The idea made good sense to municipal, provincial, and federal officials for two reasons. First, paying part or even full wages to single men working on farms was cheaper than maintaining them in cities. Second, most officials recognized the added benefit of removing the idle and potentially dangerous men from city street corners and giving them something useful to do. Alberta's Premier

John Brownlee, for one, believed that “the situation has to be handled carefully as otherwise we may have a considerable amount of disorder and possibly damage.”¹³³

Also of concern was the danger that single men, if left without work for too long, might never learn the value of honest labour. “For God’s sake,” one exasperated man begged Edmonton’s Mayor James Douglas, “relieve me of this deadly incubus idle for a very long time.” The “deadly incubus” was the man’s twenty-five-year-old “terrible burden” of a son. In the father’s opinion, his son’s main problem could be attributed to deteriorating values among young people in general. “I’d clean toilets before I’d be a burden to anyone, but the youth of the present day just want to ‘glass cock’ around with powder comb glass, long hair, no cap or hat and they make me sick in the head and stomach—two foot wide pants, trailing in the gutter.” The mayor replied a few days later by letter: “My advice to you would be to put that boy on a farm where he would be compelled to do a little at least for his board, and you might make a man of him.”¹³⁴

It was when the three levels of government began to jointly initiate organized farm placement programs that seasonal farm work became work relief designed to serve a particular purpose. This began early in the Depression, as exemplified by Saskatoon’s co-operation with the provincial and federal governments in placing single men on surrounding farms in early September 1931. By mid-month, some one thousand single men had been placed with farmers, and another thousand were set to go. The city’s relief officer also instructed investigators visiting the homes of Saskatoon families on relief to advise any single men living there to “take advantage of the threshing season.”¹³⁵ As an added incentive, City Commissioner Andrew Leslie declared that “no more meals were to be served to unemployed single men, unless they were certified unfit for harvest work by the medical health officer.”¹³⁶ Those single men still unwilling to take up harvesting jobs that autumn “would have a tough row to hoe when they apply for work in the relief camps this winter,” warned the mayor, who vowed to convince provincial officials to offer them space in the camps only after all harvest workers had secured a place.¹³⁷

In Saskatoon in the autumn of 1931, all three levels of government promised to contribute to paying urban single men five dollars per month to work on farms. The scheme was made more attractive to single men by allowing farm workers to “receive whatever wages from the farmer they could bargain for” over and above their room and board.¹³⁸ A further five dollars per month would be paid directly to the farmer to take care of the extra costs associated with housing and feeding the men. In Winnipeg, the scheme worked a little differently, with the three levels of government together paying the single man a total of twenty dollars if he signed up to work on a farm for one year. The twenty dollars, representing five dollars per month for four months, would be held for the man in trust and paid out at the contract’s conclusion, leaving him a small amount of cash in his pocket when he left the farm.¹³⁹

Provincial authorities had some concerns about the program’s “bonus to farmers,” since it, perhaps unfairly, privileged farmers by assisting them in paying their labour costs. Despite these concerns, provincial officials believed that the costs were worth the removal of single men from the urban centres. The same benefit would not extend to other industries inside the cities because they could not remove single men from the cities. When two Winnipeg lumber dealers wrote Manitoba’s Department of Public Works seeking a similar five-dollar supplement to the wages of workers whom they secured from Winnipeg’s unemployment rolls, the department’s assistant deputy minister replied that such a scheme would set the dangerous precedent of providing aid “not only for every type of industry, but also for every individual firm which might desire to make a similar proposal.”¹⁴⁰

One of the scheme’s greatest difficulties, according to Winnipeg relief officials, was that “by far the greater number of single men on relief in Winnipeg are without farm experience.” Selection of suitable men for the program was based on their health and cleanliness, as well as their farming experience. Some men, of course, had little or no farming experience. These were the “labourers, mechanics, carpenters, railway maintenance or section workers”: in other words, the young men who had grown up in the city. One single man, for example, signed onto the scheme in early 1932 and was assigned to a farm some one hundred miles

north of the city. He subsequently made his way north through “the extremely severe weather of early February.” When he arrived, the farmer discovered that the man did not know how to milk a cow and consequently “told him to be on his way.” The man was then forced to walk the seven and a half miles back to nearest town, arriving there with “his face badly frozen.” Both the farmer and the single man were recent immigrants from Central Europe, and the employment offices organizing the movement of men to farms had evidently believed that the farmer would treat “one of his own countrymen” with more compassion.¹⁴¹ Other farmers were quite happy to take in city men. In 1931, Vegreville farmer P. Kostynuik wrote to Edmonton’s mayor offering to take two men from the city’s relief rolls to work on his farm in return for their room and board on the understanding that the three governments would pay their wages. Economic benefits aside, Kostynuik felt that the rural experience would be good for the men, who would, he suggested, “live better than in the city and bring there’s children [*sic*] up in good and better habits.”¹⁴² The city quickly found two men willing to take the job.

But despite the “good and better habits” that Kostynuik’s rural experience promised the urban unemployed, the transition from city to country was not necessarily easy. In August 1931, farmer Leo Bunting complained that the two relief workers sent to his farm in Wildwood were “not worth their board.” The two men did not like the work and, after some time, elected to return “to Edmonton to be fed mush and drink soup.”¹⁴³ Cattleman Charles Henry McKinnon discovered other difficulties associated with taking on unemployed city workers at his ranch. “You couldn’t even use them,” he recalled later, “because if you’ve got other men working on the ranch they’re drawing a certain wage and some other fellow working partly for the government, works that way, and he don’t fit with the rest of them very long. They don’t associate well.”¹⁴⁴ It seemed, at least on McKinnon’s ranch, that employing regular wage workers and relief workers made for a volatile working environment, in part because the relief workers were receiving a government subsidy while the others had to work for all their wages.

Another case ended more happily. Before being placed, all applicants for farm work underwent a medical check by a physician at the

relief offices. When one young man arrived seeking placement on a farm, the physician reported that the man “was found to be very weak.” The man “reluctantly admitted that he had not had a real meal for weeks, and had come for relief only after every other means had been exhausted.” On the doctor’s orders, he was promptly admitted to a convalescence room for one week, during which time he regained his strength. Shortly thereafter, he was placed on a Manitoba farm where he, according to relief officials, received hearty meals and a warm bed.¹⁴⁵

How the single men felt about the farm-placement scheme is difficult to gauge in any general way. Some men signed up quickly while others not only refused but also counselled their fellow single unemployed not to accept any farm relief jobs until the various governments agreed to pay something more than “starvation wages.” Some men, whom Saskatoon’s relief officers designated “ringleaders,” attempted to convince single unemployed men not to accept the jobs until the city agreed to pay their fares. The so-called ringleaders appeared to have some success in their campaign. In January 1930, R. Briscoe, a Saskatoon employment officer, reported that “there were a large number who were not keen to take jobs on farms for their board.”¹⁴⁶

For many men, however, remaining in the city meant no work or relief, and possible vagrancy charges. These bleak prospects drove them to the relief offices seeking farm placements. In Winnipeg, some fifteen or thirty single men could be found at the relief office each day at three o’clock in the afternoon “waiting for the doctor to give them the once over” before being placed with a farmer seeking labourers. There, to pass the time, they engaged in “good natured banter” that reflected their shared experiences as young single unemployed men. In good humour, according to relief officials, some speculated that they would take a trip to Europe or the Mediterranean once they received their payment at the end of the season. Others joked that they would get married or that, with the payment in hand, they would soon be ready for retirement.¹⁴⁷ They told stories, too. An apparently popular one was of a farmer who had hired two men from the relief office. A friend of the two men wished to go along. When told by the farmer that there was work only for two men, not three, the third invariably said, “Oh don’t let that worry you.

You'd be surprised at how little work it takes to keep me going." Another story revolved around an inexperienced young city man sent for the first time to a farm to work. On being told by the farmer how hens produce eggs in their nests, the man deduced that he had found a cow's nest when he discovered a pile of condensed milk cans. While stories like these represented single men's efforts to "keep up their spirits," according to Winnipeg relief officials, running through the stories was "a note of pathos," for "still in them is the hope that it won't be long until they can return to their chosen work, with some assurance of permanence and stability in that work and in the homes they try to build."¹⁴⁸

That assurance, for many single unemployed men, must have seemed worlds away from their current realities. One Saskatoon man spent \$1.30 on a railway ticket to get to a promised harvest job. He arrived only to discover that the farmer had already finished his threshing and only needed a man to do some light cleanup work. The farmer paid him \$1.50 for three-quarters of a day's work, leaving him with only twenty cents for his work after deducting the railway fare. Moreover, according to Saskatoon's Mayor Joseph Underwood, some unemployed workers complained "that farmers were making them work all day Sunday for their board." In the mayor's estimation, expecting the men to do any more than regular chores on Sunday "hardly seemed reasonable."¹⁴⁹ Filling harvest jobs was no easy matter even where wages and work were reasonable. Some unemployed men in Edmonton, for example, refused to accept temporary harvest jobs on farms, fearing that the city would cut them off relief as soon as they left town. Only with relief officer T. S. Magee's assurances that their fears were groundless would men finally accept farm job offers.

Relief for Cities: Single Men in Relief Camps

In their effort to get unemployed single men off of their hands and to save money, urban relief authorities also steadfastly encouraged the provincial and federal governments to set up relief camps for single men. The first relief camps opened in the late fall of 1930. At first, federal Parks Commissioner J. B. Harkin had hoped, with good reason, that

the federal government would agree to open a string of relief camps in national parks across the West. Such relief camps, the commissioner believed, were a perfect solution to many of the problems then facing the nation. Not only would they take thousands of unemployed men from the cities, thereby relieving pressure on local city relief administrations, but they would also, through the men's labour, turn the parks into important revenue-generating tourist attractions. In return for their labour, mostly on building roads into and out of the parks to accommodate motor car traffic, the men would get three square meals a day, a warm bed, and a healthy, natural setting in which to wait out the hard times.¹⁵⁰

It was not to be, at least not to the scale that Harkin had envisioned. Because the federal Unemployment Relief Act maintained that responsibility for unemployment was purely local, none of its \$20 million in appropriation funds could be used by any federal department. If Harkin was to get any relief money at all, he would have to convince provincial governments to use part of their appropriation to finance camp work in national parks inside their own borders. In the end, only Saskatchewan and Manitoba agreed to do so, believing that setting up camps at Prince Albert and Riding Mountain, respectively, would ease their unemployment problems.¹⁵¹

Complementing the Saskatchewan camp at Prince Albert, opened in the fall of 1930, was a purely Saskatoon-initiated camp at the city's southern edge. The province donated the use of a government building on the site, and the city renovated it to accommodate double-decker bunks for some five hundred men and installed in the building two steel bathtubs, three shower baths, a delousing plant and dryer, and a rack and wash tubs for washing and drying clothes. Heating was provided by a stationary boiler borrowed from the city's engineering department, which offered some warmth for the men and protected the building's plumbing from frost. The Saskatoon camp was run with military efficiency. Initially, single men applied for admittance to the camp at the city relief office downtown. Later, the city required the men to apply at the camp itself because, as the camp's commandant explained, it engendered in the men "a much greater respect for authority." It also made it easier

to verify the men's statements as to their place of residence and employment history to eliminate "drifters from other provinces."¹⁵²

If an applicant was accepted, the city relief officer handed him tickets to the baths and delousing plant on the camp grounds. While the man was in the baths, camp attendants sterilized all his belongings. Following the bath, the man visited the camp storekeeper, who provided him with clean blankets, assigned him to a bunk, and instructed him to read the "Camp Standing Orders." The orders ranged from insisting that "all men who are warned for any duties must report [for work] on schedule," to ensuring that every man "must shave and generally keep up his appearance," to keeping the toilets "in good order." On this last point, the men were reminded that "loitering there is absolutely forbidden."¹⁵³

Any men found in contravention of the camp's standing orders "did not get their next meal until they were interviewed at the Camp Office and given a warning." On a second offence, "or charges of a more serious nature," he was subject to summary dismissal from the camp. After dismissal, moreover, the camp kept a record of the incidents on file because, as the camp's director later reported, "in some cases these men went down town and complained to some organization of unfair treatment." During the day, the men were given "a certain amount of work . . . to keep them out of mischief."¹⁵⁴ Clearly, most of the men's daily activities were closely monitored. In the evening, the men might enjoy performances by various Saskatoon-based concert bands, free movies at Saskatoon theatres once each week, or free attendance at hockey games played at the Saskatoon stadium. The men were also provided with free daily issues of the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*. Other entertainment included the loans of a piano from a Saskatoon music store and a radio from the Hudson's Bay Company.¹⁵⁵

Meanwhile, Alberta opened relief camps along the Jasper-Banff Highway using its federal appropriation under the Unemployment Relief Act and accepted nearly one thousand of Edmonton's single unemployed male population over the winter of 1930-31.¹⁵⁶ Clearly, Alberta's relief camp activities aided Edmonton's city relief machine, reducing the city's responsibility for roughly one-quarter of its single male population, at least for the winter months. With the arrival of spring, however,

the province intended to close down its camps and expel the men, posing a serious problem for the cities. If the camps closed, Edmonton's city council believed, the men would have little choice but to drift back into the city. The rapid introduction to the city of potentially one thousand single men with nothing to do caused city officials a good deal of anxiety. Edmonton could not afford to look after the high number of unemployed in the city as it was. The addition of up to one thousand men (and potentially dangerous ones, at that) to the mix was seen as simply untenable.

Edmonton's city council had already decided to cut all single men from city relief for the summer and to accept no new applicants beginning on the last day of April; to facilitate this process, city bureaucrats pleaded with the province to keep the camps running for at least another month "to prevent men from drifting into the city" before the cut was made.¹⁵⁷ The province agreed to keep the camps open until the end of April, when the city typically shut down its office for single men. As of 6 May, the city relief officer reported that "no untoward incidents have arisen."¹⁵⁸ But that situation would soon change. In mid-May, the Edmonton Retail Clerks Association insisted that the city continue to issue relief to single men, and near the end of May, the United Empire Loyalists and the National Unemployed Workers' Association added their voices to the call. The following month, those early efforts to have single men reinstated to the relief rolls grew larger, and by early June, Edmonton was reporting a "tense situation" among the single men.¹⁵⁹ The arrival in the city of a detachment of the Strathcona Horse and a strengthening of the provincial police presence forestalled potential violence, at least for the time being; the city's relief officer informed City Commissioner David Mitchell that because of these measures, "a very noticeable improvement in the demeanour of the crowd has taken place."¹⁶⁰ How long the single men's demeanour might remain that way was anyone's guess.

Through the summer of 1931, municipal and provincial bureaucrats grew ever more anxious about how they might deal with what had become known as the "single men problem." Certainly, the cities' favoured solution was to disavow any responsibility for them whatsoever. To do this with a minimum amount of backlash from angry and

frustrated men, however, city authorities would have to find some way to remove the men from their borders. Sending them to work as labourers on surrounding farms, as noted earlier, was one way, but the scheme never seemed to take up enough men. Alberta's Department of Municipal Affairs suggested that single unemployed men should be "concentrated on a semi military basis." Letting the single men roam through the cities and issuing them purchasing tickets would "leave them at large with a feeling of victory to take part in any disturbance agitators wished to promote."¹⁶¹ Prime Minister R. B. Bennett appeared willing to help. The prime minister, in fact, along with most other municipal, provincial, and federal leaders, had long believed that single unemployed men represented a menace and a threat to public order. He also believed that they were especially vulnerable to communist ideas.¹⁶² At a meeting with Alberta municipal leaders in Calgary during the summer of 1931, Bennett assured all in attendance that the federal government "intended to establish camps, particularly in the Parks and in British Columbia on the Railways" that fall. And, as Edmonton's chief engineer reported to the city commissioner, although the prime minister admitted that "the Government has no power to compel single men to go to camps, he practically suggested that the cities should cut out single men's relief."¹⁶³ However the cities interpreted the prime minister's assurances, Bennett himself remained unwilling to allow the federal government to accept full responsibility for single unemployed men. Instead, his administration's Unemployment and Farm Relief Act, passed in Ottawa on Dominion Day 1931, would only provide provinces with federal monies to open road-building camps along the Trans-Canada Highway over the following winter. Although the only projects that Bennett was willing to finance as purely federal undertakings were in the national parks, these too aided beleaguered cities in no small measure.¹⁶⁴

Most cities regarded the work plans for single unemployed men as good news. Edmonton's relief officer, for instance, was pleased to note that the Jasper-Banff Highway camps promised to rid the city "of these transients who are becoming a pest on our private institutions and city homes in the widespread system of begging carried on."¹⁶⁵ Edmonton would also benefit by sending single unemployed men to brushing

and clearing camps at Elk Island National Park, a federal relief camp, just a few miles east of the city. Winnipeg could similarly benefit from new programs for the single unemployed that autumn, federal Labour Minister Gideon Robertson informed a Manitoba delegation in Ottawa in late August 1931. If the province and the city agreed to jointly pay the men thirty cents each per hour for work on the Trans-Canada Highway west of Fort William, the federal government would cover the cost of the men's transportation to the worksite. This arrangement could provide employment for two to three thousand Winnipeg men.¹⁶⁶ In addition, the federal government had set aside \$200,000 for work in national parks. In November, hundreds of Winnipeg men, as well as men from throughout the province, began arriving at Riding Mountain National Park, where they were soon engaged in constructing park buildings, clearing roads, and improving the park's golf course.¹⁶⁷

By the following spring, the threat of single men returning from the camps again emerged, and cities were in no better position to accommodate them than they had been in the spring of 1931. A worried Mayor Daniel Knott in Edmonton wired R. B. Bennett warning him that there was "strong pressure here to again open construction camps [for single men] at Jasper and Elk Island Parks."¹⁶⁸ By May, still no word had come from Ottawa, and Alberta's premier intervened directly, writing the federal minister of the Interior to ask why they were being held up. There was, the premier warned, "an awkward situation with respect to the large numbers of single men in Edmonton and Calgary."¹⁶⁹ The minister replied that negotiations over wages for supervisors and foremen were behind the delay, but he expected the camps to open shortly. In the meantime, the premier informed Edmonton's mayor, the province would open several of its own camps in the forest reserves north of the city to accommodate up to five hundred men.¹⁷⁰ Some weeks later, the first group of eighty-five Edmonton men set out for Jasper.

It is difficult to measure how the men themselves felt about leaving the city to spend an indeterminate amount of time in an isolated camp, but cases of men quitting the camps or even refusing to go tell at least part of the story. Although eighty-five men agreed to go to Jasper, for example, another 119 refused, their chief complaint, according to Mayor Knott,

being the small wages paid at the camp. All were subsequently cut from the city's relief rolls.¹⁷¹ A group of twenty-five men who simply left the Jasper camp and made their way back to Edmonton in early January 1932 received similar treatment. When an "extremely surprized [*sic*]" city commissioner learned that the men, together with another contingent arriving in the city a few days later, had received minimal emergency relief, he ordered Edmonton's relief department to stop offering the men any relief at all.¹⁷² But the men had their defenders. Writing to Premier Brownlee some days later, Secretary William E. Harrison of the Unemployed Ex-Service Men's Association admitted that his organization was "most certainly not in support of the methods these men used in quitting work," but, he added, the men should be given relief anyway "to prevent any portion of them possibly affiliating with the Communistic element in the Province." The threat, according to Harrison, was real and imminent. "We have definite proof," he assured the premier, "that these men were lured away from the job by Communist propaganda."¹⁷³ Whether the men were communists is unclear, but relief officer H. F. McKee saw any occasion—no matter the circumstances—on which men left camps (or farm work, for that matter) as a "very evident excuse for taking up their identification cards" and reducing the city's relief burden.¹⁷⁴

Clearly, then, married men and single men had very different work relief experiences—difference that were, in many ways, related to relief policy-makers' perceptions of the nature of the problem that each category posed to their cities. Whereas married men's work relief was intended, for the most part, to enable them to remain in the city and in their own homes as heads of their households, single men's work relief was designed to remove them from the city. Wages paid to single men on farms or in camps were typically much lower than those paid to married men on city relief. The latter earned between forty-five cents and one dollar per hour. The going rate on farms, however, was five to ten dollars per month, and in the most notorious work camps, such as those housing the so-called Royal Twenty Centers and operated by the Department of National Defence, workers were paid only twenty cents per day.¹⁷⁵ The single men who accepted such work, moreover, would find themselves relying entirely on farmers or camp commandants for their food and

their shelter. And while married men enjoyed a measure of autonomy when their shift ended, single men in the camps and on the farms were under more or less constant surveillance.

Earlier economic recessions had laid the foundation for the use of work relief as a viable approach to urban unemployment, and the sudden downturn in the local economy during the late autumn of 1929 offered no compelling reason to suspect that this approach would not prove useful once again. Few questioned the economic, social, and political value of putting the unemployed to work rather than on the dole. Although public works entailed higher administrative costs than did direct relief, certain social and economic benefits made the implementation of work relief projects worthwhile. From the perspective of city councils, the federal and provincial governments provided low-cost financing and funding for local improvements at a time when, without that support, such projects would have overtaxed municipal budgets. The social benefits of providing the unemployed with work relief rather than direct relief also made that approach worthwhile. Not only did work relief offer some semblance of market and social stability during periods of severe economic instability, but it also purported to combat the moral degeneration of the otherwise idle unemployed. Finally, federal, provincial, and municipal funding of public works made good political sense. Public works relief was simply a more popular approach to the urban unemployment situation than was direct relief.

But, in the end, the issue was moot. Neither the federal nor provincial governments were especially interested in restarting a course of urban work relief programs along the lines of those initiated earlier in the Depression. The cities carried on as best they could, advocating wherever and whenever possible for a renewal of the work relief approach to unemployment, but municipal authorities would be continually disappointed. In city council meetings, debates occasionally emerged over relief issues, particularly in Winnipeg after 1934, when residents of the city elected a council divided between socialist/labour and business/elite councillors.¹⁷⁶ But those issues tended to be matters of degree rather than form. As we will see in the next chapter, local relief officials, municipal authorities, and the unemployed could only look to Ottawa for the next move.

5

Local Responsibility in Decline

The story of urban relief following the winter of 1932–33 is about the gradual decline of municipal influence in creating and implementing relief policy. At the heart of this decline was the fact that local responsibility became increasingly untenable. The idea that cities were in any position to provide relief for their resident jobless strained credulity even at the beginning of the Depression; only three years later, it had become an obvious fiction. By that point, no major urban centre on the Canadian Prairies was able to provide any relief at all without relying on federal and/or provincial grants or loans or on debenture sales to a steadily falling number of interested buyers.¹

During the Depression's early years, as we have seen, municipal administration of work relief programs gave city governments a measure

of control and real responsibility. True, Prime Minister R. B. Bennett's plan of financing urban relief work that employed married men a mere one week out of six (at best) hardly mimicked the normal capitalist labour market. But many of the urban public works relief projects carried out between the autumn of 1930 and the spring of 1933 offered cities first-rate infrastructure at cut-rate costs, and, to some extent, they also sheltered construction-related businesses from the economic storm. Although they did not solve the unemployment crisis or even alleviate it to any serious degree, they did set the cities at the centre of urban unemployment relief policy-making. The municipal governments retained important decision-making powers over relief-related public works projects, from project selection, to the purchasing of materials, to labour distribution policies.

Bennett's subsequent move to the cheaper direct relief in 1933 pleased no one at the municipal or provincial levels. Commentators from nearly every quarter decried "doles" as a surefire way of destroying industry, the work ethic, and especially married men's manhood. But the move away from federally sponsored public works relief, in favour of direct relief, had another significant effect: it represented the first step toward marginalizing the influence of city governments in determining relief policy. While the early insistence that cities accept local responsibility for their resident jobless had certainly not been welcomed by urban policy-makers, that insistence had, at the very least, allowed for a measure of local control. In the spring of 1933, as the last of the urban work relief projects wound down, cities were reduced to mere custodians of their own relief systems.

The federal government's establishment of relief camps to house thousands of single unemployed men further undermined local control over unemployment relief. The move, of course, was not unpopular among city policy-makers, who generally looked with apprehension upon the jobless single men congregating in their cities in search of work. After all, in their eyes, the single unemployed man represented disorder, real or imagined—the opposite of healthy productivity. Bennett's decision to establish a system of relief camps well outside of city limits eased

local concerns considerably, but, at the same time, it removed responsibility for unemployed single men from the hands of city authorities. The national relief camp system thus contributed to a much broader pattern of reducing the influence—and relevance—of local responsibility.

Other important policy changes continued this pattern, but the shift away from the local would not lead smoothly toward national responsibility. Indeed, the development of a modern national welfare state remained years away, its progress subject to fits and starts and sometimes surprising turns.² But although the trend toward a national welfare system was not a carefully planned affair, marked by a grand vision and clear foresight, dismantling local responsibility played a critical role in the process. In short, the cities mattered less after the Depression than they had before it began.³

“RELIEF FROM RELIEF”: THE MAYORS TAKE ON OTTAWA

In many ways, it was the city policy-makers and politicians themselves who helped author this important shift. Civic authorities, especially in the West, had long been calling for “relief from relief.”⁴ In fact, this was the conclusion of a western delegation to Ottawa led by Ralph Webb, mayor of Winnipeg, in February 1930. “We believe that the Government will recognize the nature of the problem,” Webb told Prime Minister Mackenzie King. “We do not want investigations, commissions, and the like, but assistance.”⁵ The unmoved prime minister responded that “with the possible exception of France, actual figures, if available, would show that the unemployment situation in Canada was better than that of any country in the world.” He went on to suggest that the level of unemployment was comparable to any other winter, observing that “at no time was any country without unemployment” and maintaining that unemployment was, in any case, a purely local responsibility. Moreover, Mayor Webb’s active Conservative Party membership helped convince King, a Liberal, that the “alleged” unemployment

condition was little more than a “Tory device to stir up propaganda against the government.”⁶

The Conference of Western Mayors, January 1935

Much had changed five years later. As we have seen, the unrelenting nature of the economic depression, the haphazard and inadequate federal and provincial aid, and the tenacious insistence on the part of senior levels of government that urban unemployment relief was principally a local responsibility had all taken their toll on city finances. And, of course, city bureaucrats could not have known that the economic downturn would last so long or be so devastating. By mid-decade, city officials had had enough. No longer would mere “assistance” do. On 30 November 1934, Mayor Joe Clarke of Edmonton travelled to Calgary for a meeting with that city’s mayor, Andrew Davison, and the two hatched a plan to hold a conference early in 1935 to be attended by representatives from the larger centres of the four western provinces. In presenting the plan to Calgary’s city council for approval, Davison explained the necessity of such a conference: “In the past, we have contented ourselves with making representations to the senior governments and then accepting whatever was offered. While we have gained some concessions, we are of the opinion that more direct action is necessary, if the senior governments are to be convinced of the necessity of their assuming a greater proportion of the heavy costs of civic government.”⁷ No fewer than twenty-five western mayors agreed that a conference that would enable them to discuss common municipal problems—including interest rate reductions, unemployment relief costs, and municipal revenue generation—was in order.⁸

In late January 1935, the mayors assembled in Calgary and agreed to call on the federal government to assume full responsibility for relief, to reimburse all municipal relief expenditures to that point, and to take on all municipal capital indebtedness at an interest rate not exceeding 3 percent.⁹ Clarke, however, had earlier appeared willing to play fast and loose on the issue of interest payments. On 7 December 1934, Davison wrote to Clarke to voice his concern about a report in the *Edmonton*

Journal, noting that, two days earlier, the paper had quoted Clarke as warning that both he and Davison were planning to urge the conference of western mayors to “put our foot down solid and tell the bond holders we are not paying any interest after July 1st, 1935.” Such talk, implicating both Alberta mayors in dangerous collusion to purposefully renege on municipal debts and thus threaten their cities’ credit standing, clearly made Davison uneasy. “As I recollect it,” he wrote to Clarke, “we agreed that in preparation of our 1935 budget, whether or not we liked it, we would be called upon to levy for our interest charges at the rates presently prevailing, but with the hope that it might be possible to get a reduction in such rates to an amount not greater than 3%. To suggest that on and after July 1st, 1935, we will refuse to pay interest of any kind, is certainly something with which I do not agree.”¹⁰ Clarifying what he called a “scare headline,” Clarke replied to Davison, “I did say that I thought the conference would be advised to put their foot down on or about July 1st, 1935, and announce that they would not pay excessive interest, that is, interest greater than we think we are entitled to pay, and that such decision would be laid before the proper authorities, Provincial and Dominion.”¹¹ Like Davison, Saskatoon’s mayor, J. S. Mills, was not prepared to undermine his city’s credit standing in any way. He did, however, evince some sympathy for Clarke’s position, commenting in a letter to him that the federal government could intervene in the matter directly through its “control over interest rates” and its ability to “undoubtedly arbitrarily reduce same if it is considered in the public interest to do so.”¹²

In the end, the western conference of mayors limited their demand on the interest rate question to urging the federal government to reduce rates to 3 percent.¹³ The delegates also insisted that the federal government reinstitute the work-for-wages programs that had been in operation earlier in the Depression and introduce a cash relief program for all jobless not covered by the work-for-wages program. It was a far-reaching set of demands, to be sure, but, in the view of Vancouver’s Alderman George Miller, the demands were not inappropriate. “Unemployment relief should never have been a municipal matter,” he told the conference attendees. “It has nothing to do with the policies of municipal government and in consequence we should in no way be responsible for the

unemployment situation.” Nor were the cities’ demands based on exaggerated claims of municipal hardship, according to Mayor Joe Clarke of Edmonton. “We, as a conference, are ‘on the spot,’ individually and collectively,” he stated. “I think we should organize here together to try and do something for ourselves to help the four Western provinces, do it definitely, and fight with our backs to the wall. Every municipality in Western Canada has been crowded to the wall and there is one thing to do and that is fight and not give up.”¹⁴

The western cities were clearly seeking a good deal more than the assistance that Mayor Webb of Winnipeg had sought five years before. Nor were the western mayors alone. On the conference’s second day, Montréal’s mayor, Camillien Houde, wired Mayor Davison of Calgary inviting the western mayors to attend a much larger conference on relief that would include delegates from municipalities all across the nation.¹⁵ The mood in cities east of the Lakehead, Houde assured Davison, was much the same as that in the West. Already, thirteen Québec mayors and forty-four mayors from Ontario had unanimously passed resolutions calling on the provinces and the federal government to assume full responsibility for urban unemployment relief.¹⁶ With the mayors representing some five million Canadians and 75 percent of the nation’s taxes, Houde felt certain that their demands would be difficult for the federal government to ignore.¹⁷

The western premiers, however, were less certain. Manitoba’s John Bracken pointed out in a letter to Richard Reid, premier of Alberta: “Mr. Bennett has consistently refused to deal directly with the Municipalities, and whenever they have met him he has answered them by saying he can deal only with the Provinces.”¹⁸ Duff Pattullo, the BC premier, concurred. “I do not think that anything is to be gained by representations being made by the provinces and the municipalities jointly,” he advised Reid in February 1935. “The Ottawa Government will doubtless point out, as was done last year, that the municipalities are the creatures of the provincial authority, and as such that representations can properly be made [only] by provincial authorities.”¹⁹ The Saskatchewan premier, Jimmy Gardiner, while reminding Reid that municipal representatives seeking an audience with the federal government during the most recent provincial

conference had been refused outright, remained open to the idea of a joint municipal-provincial delegation to Ottawa, provided it “would be recognized by Mr. Bennett.”²⁰ While the western premiers were generally agreed that unemployment had long become an emergency of national proportions and were happy enough to accept full federal financial responsibility for relief, they would not countenance any federal incursions on provincial authority, jurisdiction, or autonomy.

The Dominion Conference of Mayors, 1935–37

With or without provincial support, the nation’s mayors remained determined to make their case. Near the end of March 1935, roughly a hundred mayors from all across Canada convened at the Hotel Mount Royal in Montréal for a Dominion-wide conference. Their demands were similar to those made two months earlier at the western mayors’ conference.²¹ Calling themselves the Dominion Conference of Mayors (DCM), the delegates arrived in Montréal armed with the latest unemployment-related figures prepared by McGill University’s director of social research, Leonard Marsh. As a snapshot of the relief situation as of February 1935, the numbers were alarming. In Winnipeg, for instance, nearly 34,000 people, or 15.2 percent of the city’s population, were on relief, and almost 17 percent of the city’s annual revenue went to relief-related costs. Just over 7,500 people in Saskatoon were on relief, representing 15.5 percent of the city’s population and consuming 22.4 percent of annual revenues. Edmontonians on relief numbered 11,000 and cost the city \$463,000 per year, or 12.4 percent of the city’s revenues.²² The figures also revealed that, on the whole, cities in the West were worse off than their counterparts elsewhere in the country. In British Columbia, cities spent an average of 10.3 percent of municipal revenues on relief. The average rose to 13.9 percent in Alberta, and to 16.5 percent in Manitoba. In Saskatchewan, the figure was an even more striking 22.5 percent. Average urban relief spending in Ontario, by contrast, stood at only 8.5 percent of municipal revenues, on the basis of data from forty-one cities. The same figure for twenty-five cities in Québec was higher, at 11.9 percent, whereas in the Maritimes, it dropped to only 5.1 percent.²³

But the Montréal conference, characterized by Houde as being without parallel since Confederation and tasked with nothing less than “beginning a new page in Canadian history,” was about more than cold numbers. In his opening address to the assembled mayors, Houde declared that “we are here to ascertain once and for all” whether unemployment relief is “really our responsibility.” The conference, he said, would involve “several sessions of arduous work, from which will be banished every trace of party spirit for the substitution of a national, municipal viewpoint.”²⁴ Each of the delegates in turn sketched a picture of his city’s situation. Alderman Herbert Andrews of Winnipeg lamented that relief costs were ruining the city’s ability to carry on the business expected by its ratepayers: “We lopped here and pruned there, but with each pruning we found we were reducing our services to a point where we were lowering the standard of services which our citizens are entitled to receive, having in mind the taxes they pay. . . . We must have help to keep the Prairie Schooner moving; just now the axles are squeaking badly.” Saskatoon’s new mayor, Robert Pinder, pointed out that although his city’s finances appeared to be in better shape than the year before, “we are coming to the time when we, like every other municipality in Canada, are finding it impossible to pay the tremendous burden of relief.”²⁵

By the evening session of the first day—and, not incidentally, following a Canadian Radio Commission coast-to-coast broadcast by representative mayors from all nine provinces—all delegates had agreed that unemployment was a national problem and that, as such, Ottawa ought to assume full responsibility for it.²⁶ The “costs of unemployment relief,” the mayors maintained, had been “improperly imposed upon municipalities throughout the Dominion of Canada,” resulting in a breakdown of the “financial structures of many urban centres, and others are in like peril.” Nothing less than the “Peace, Order, and Good Government of all Canada is imperiled by reason of the conditions which exist,” the mayors asserted.²⁷ Their cities were simply no longer able to bear any of the burden.

Despite the mayors’ concerted and unanimous stand, federal leaders were not prepared to break fundamentally with what had become long-standing practice and policy. Ottawa would continue to deal exclusively with the provinces.²⁸ At the conference’s close, the mayors returned

to their respective home cities certain that they had made their case but obviously disappointed at the federal government's refusal to deal with their concerns and demands directly. Nevertheless, the conference had not been completely for naught. In addition to generating considerable press on the relief question and specifically on the cities' financial plight, the Dominion Conference of Mayors had invited individual MPs and senators to a special meeting to hear their concerns in the Railway Committee Rooms of the House, after Speaker James Langstaff Bowman refused them audience with the House. Furthermore, as Camillien Houde noted in a telegram to Alberta's Premier Richard Reid two weeks later, the mayors had secured a promise from Acting Prime Minister Sir George Perley "that our representations would be taken seriously and that the provinces would be approached in the matter."²⁹ Just what that meant remained, for the time being, unclear. On the one hand, Perley noted in correspondence with Mayor Houde that the mayors assumed that the federal government had "decided to call a Conference of the representatives of the Provincial Governments. I doubt if this course will be taken, but the Minister of Labour purposes [*sic*] discussing with each Province its individual situation after which an endeavour will be made to meet its needs in as reasonable way as possible." There would, of course, be no direct space afforded to representatives of the municipalities. "When dealing in this way with the Provincial authorities," Perley added, "you will realize that it will not be possible for the Dominion Government to call in you and your Colleagues." On the other hand, at least some provincial leaders assumed that a Dominion-provincial conference on relief matters was on the horizon. Premier Richard Reid of Alberta wrote to Houde on 20 April 1935 that "a relief conference with the federal government is anticipated in view of the fact that the present relief agreement between the provinces and the Dominion has expired and is being extended only temporarily pending an opportunity to meet with the federal authorities for the purpose of going into the whole question of relief."³⁰

As an outcome of the conference in Montréal, the Dominion Conference of Mayors (DCM) struck a Continuing Committee tasked with keeping the municipal relief issue on the national stage until the

group could meet again.³¹ One of the committee's more important acts was to reiterate—in no uncertain terms—the mayors' position on relief to anyone who would listen. "You will have noticed that one of our two main demands was that for the very strong reasons herein stated the Dominion Government should assume the entire responsibility for unemployment relief," Continuing Committee Chair Camillien Houde argued in a telegram to the Alberta premier, Richard Reid, in April 1935.³² In another telegram to Reid four days later, Houde wrote, "It is imperative that the Dominion Government recognize, acknowledge, and assume its sole responsibility for unemployment and relief. We have shown clearly that it belongs to them and to no one else."³³ Still, there was only so much that the Continuing Committee could do, and its work lagged through the summer months, especially once it became apparent that a federal election, as well as several provincial ones, would soon take place. Houde later wrote to the DCM in a review of the committee's activities, "It was increasingly clear that no definite steps could be taken profitably until the various elections were over."³⁴

The following year, in March 1936, the DCM met again, this time at Ottawa's Chateau Laurier, but the political landscape had shifted since the previous year's meeting. The federal government had changed from Conservative to Liberal, and several provinces also had new governments. Nevertheless, little appeared different from the mayors' perspective. True, newly elected Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had called a Dominion-provincial conference for early December to deal in part with relief matters, but the mayors, as expected and despite their best efforts, were not invited. And although the prime minister and the nine premiers invited DCM representatives for a short chat in the Railway Committee Room of the House of Commons, the Dominion-provincial conference adjourned on 13 December "without taking any definite action along the lines suggested by the Dominion Conference of Mayors."³⁵ All the DCM's Continuing Committee could do was issue a public letter addressed to the prime minister lamenting that "everything so far leads us to believe that the Inter-provincial Conference may reach no concrete decisions, to the great disappointment of public opinion at large" and calling on the federal government

to “relieve the municipalities of the load of direct relief which they can carry no longer.”³⁶

As it happened, King did pledge, in the wake of the conference, to increase relief allocations to the provinces by 75 percent until 31 March 1936. He also announced a Dominion Commission on Employment and Relief to coordinate federal and provincial employment generation and relief efforts. But these actions represented little more than a continuation of what the mayors viewed as a failed strategy that fundamentally changed nothing. In this context, it is not surprising that the mayors’ demands from the Chateau Laurier in March 1936 were much the same as the previous year. Once again, the mayors resolved that Ottawa assume relief costs from 1 April 1936 forward.³⁷ The resolution was particularly significant to the western mayors since documents recently tabled in the House of Commons indicated that the four western provinces owed the federal treasury a combined total of \$111 million in outstanding relief loans.³⁸ No other province had outstanding unemployment relief-related loans from the treasury.

The reason for the western provinces’ debt was obvious: unemployment relief spending from 1930 to 1935 in the Prairie cities had skyrocketed in that time, according to numbers prepared for the mayors’ meeting by economist Hymen Carl Goldenberg, then a sessional lecturer at McGill University.³⁹ Spending on unemployment relief in Winnipeg in 1931 reached just over \$900,000. Four years later, the annual amount had more than doubled to \$1,886,000. Edmonton’s annual unemployment relief spending jumped from \$87,840 in 1930 to \$545,543 in 1935. In Saskatoon, relief spending increased even more over the same period, from a mere \$4,231 to an astonishing \$290,671. To Goldenberg, the problem was obvious: “The duties and responsibilities of municipalities have increased without a proportional increase in the power to raise the revenue necessary to meet their new obligations.”⁴⁰

On the matter of retaining at least some municipal administrative control over relief, however, the mayors were divided. Mayor Joe Clarke of Edmonton wanted nothing to do with relief administration, believing that the federal government could do the best job of “cutting out the chisellers” from among the ranks of relief administrators. Winnipeg’s

Mayor John Queen cautioned against relinquishing all administrative authority over relief but nevertheless advised complete federal responsibility for relief costs.⁴¹ Regardless of the opinions of the mayors, Ottawa remained unwilling to deal with the mayors directly, and for the second time in as many years, the mayors returned home disappointed.

With little federal action on the matter by the spring of 1937, the nation's mayors met once again in Ottawa, but this time the Dominion Conference of Mayors was joined by delegates from the Union of Canadian Municipalities (UCM).⁴² Discussions of a merger between the two representatives of the nation's cities had begun the previous November, resulting not in a definite arrangement but in a tacit agreement to divide the work of promoting municipal interests among them. The UCM would carry out "general fact finding," while the Continuing Committee of the DCM would collect research and statistics, and continue to advocate for the mayors' position with respect to unemployment relief.⁴³ In February 1937, the general secretary of the DCM's Continuing Committee, T. L. Bullock (with Houde's resignation as mayor of Montréal, he had ceased to be chair), invited the nation's mayors to attend the DCM's 1937 conference in March with the hope "that final arrangements will be made . . . for an amalgamation between the Dominion Conference of Mayors and the Union of Canadian Municipalities."⁴⁴ The amalgamation did take place, forming the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities.⁴⁵

Stanley Lewis, the mayor of Ottawa, welcomed the delegates to the March meeting and "expressed the hope that the Conference would be a most successful one." The mayors got down to work, forming nominating, amalgamation, and resolutions committees. By the third day of the conference, however, it was clear that the mayors were divided on whether to call once more on the federal government to shoulder the entire responsibility for unemployment. Some, including Deputy Reeve E. J. Humphreys, York Township, and Reeve J. B. Wheeler, Scarborough, wanted the "Dominion Government forthwith [to] take over and assume the entire cost of unemployment relief." But a "large majority" of the mayors, after two years of having their pleas ignored, agreed to scale back their demands. Rather than insist that the federal government accept

total responsibility for unemployment, the nation's mayors would ask for an increase in federal relief grants, providing that Prime Minister Mackenzie King also institute a work-for-wages program along the lines of that implemented earlier in the decade.⁴⁶

Seeking to make a stronger case for greater federal involvement in financing urban unemployment relief, the mayors also released a major report that they had commissioned the previous year to survey relief costs across the country. Prepared once again by economist Hyman Carl Goldenberg and based on responses to a questionnaire circulated to Canada's major cities through the summer and fall of 1936, the report revealed—perhaps for the first time in a uniform way—the onerous burdens that many cities were forced to carry.⁴⁷ The survey's results were stark. Winnipeg, for instance, had spent more than \$3.5 million on relief in 1936 over the course of just eleven months. The province and the federal government had together contributed two-thirds of this amount, leaving the city to come up with the final third. But the city was unable to raise any money and was forced to borrow the entire amount. "We're absolutely sunk in the West," Alderman E. D. Honeyman of Winnipeg reported to the conference delegates. His council colleague Thomas Flye added that without immediate aid, no relief would be possible.⁴⁸ Saskatoon appeared to be in better shape, managing to raise about 40 percent of its one-third share of relief costs for 1936 through taxation, but it still had to borrow nearly \$150,000. Edmonton's situation was slightly stronger still, with the city putting up about 55 percent of its share and borrowing the remaining \$250,000.⁴⁹

Dominion-wide, the problems were severe. Of the sixty cities surveyed, fourteen failed to raise anything at all toward their one-third share of relief costs, and half of the cities had to borrow at least some funds to make up the shortfall. Other figures from Goldenberg's report were equally jarring, especially those relating to cities in the West. Relief spending in Winnipeg, for example, constituted nearly one-quarter of the city's entire revenue in 1935. That same year, Saskatoon's relief expenditure-to-revenue ratio was even worse: the city spent more than 27 percent of its revenues on relief, earning it the dubious honour of having the highest expenditure-to-revenue ratio in the country. Edmonton, once again, was

in a stronger position than the other two cities, but it still contributed nearly 14 percent of its revenue in 1935 to relief alone.⁵⁰

In the end, after two years of futile demands that Ottawa assume responsibility for urban relief costs, the mayors probably agreed with Alderman Honeyman's assessment expressed at the 1937 conference in Ottawa: "There is no use passing the same pious resolution year after year and then going home feeling [we] had done [our] duty." The bottom line was that "municipalities had no control over the causes of unemployment, so they should not be saddled with its effects."⁵¹ But reiterating the situation each spring was clearly having no effect. Honeyman advocated increasing the pressure on senior levels of government in a radical step—one that was quite possibly the only weapon left in the cities' arsenal: calling a relief "strike." The idea of simply refusing to participate in the entire relief process, including costs and administration, certainly reflected Honeyman's frustration with government inaction. "We can't go on," he pointedly told convention delegates. "We had to curtail our services 33 1/3rd percent. Our employees have been cut 16 2/3rd percent. . . . Right now we are being carried by the grace of the Bank of Montreal. I don't know how the Bank of Montreal got its reputation as a business organization when we can't pay and we never can pay." According to the *Winnipeg Tribune*, Honeyman's proposal had the near unanimous backing of his council colleagues, although some, like Alderman James Simpkin, worried about the implications for the city's jobless relievers if Winnipeg suddenly refused to pay any relief until the federal government assumed full responsibility. "We have almost 7,000 married men on relief in Winnipeg," Simpkin pointed out, "and they are on the rolls merely because they can't find a job. No further hardship should be worked on them."⁵² By the close of the conference, the federal government had promised, at the very least, to include municipal considerations and issues in its planned nation-wide survey of Dominion-provincial financial relations, which would become known as the Rowell-Sirois Commission.⁵³ For the time being, the mayors concluded, this would have to do.⁵⁴

The mayors met once again in Ottawa the following year, this time as the first annual conference of the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities. Once again, they appeared divided on relief policy and

especially on what fresh demand to make of the federal government. Some continued to advocate that “the entire burden of unemployment relief should be borne and administered by the Federal authorities.” Others believed that this approach, having failed several times in the recent past, ought to be discarded in favour of some tripartite approach involving municipal, provincial, and federal participation. In the end, the mayors decided to seek half the cost of relief from the federal government if the provinces agreed to assume 40 percent of relief costs.⁵⁵ But it seemed clear enough that no matter the municipal resolutions and demands, and no matter the degree to which they were scaled back or otherwise revised, the federal government would continue to deal with them only through the provincial governments.

FEDERAL RELIEF CAMPS

For officials in cities across the Prairies, news that the prime minister had, in early October 1932, accepted a plan to create a series of relief camps for jobless single men was welcome indeed.⁵⁶ The cities had been calling for a similar idea for at least a year. In the early years of the Depression, most cities had been able—with the help of their respective provinces, the federal government, and charitable groups—to offer single unemployed men some form of short-term, emergency relief. Three related trends made this practice increasingly difficult to continue by the summer and autumn of 1932. First, after two full years of depressed conditions, the city relief machines were overwhelmed. Edmonton’s monthly relief bill in the winter of 1932, for instance, averaged more than \$100,000. As more and more businesses failed and banks foreclosed, revenue generated through property taxes decreased. “At the rate we are going now,” Edmonton mayoral candidate James Ogilvie forecast in November 1934, “it won’t be long before the entire city is owned by the city.”⁵⁷ Other Prairie cities were in similar straits: they simply lacked the financial resources to support emergency relief for single men in addition to their responsibilities to their unemployed married residents. Second, relief officials feared

that their cities would develop a reputation of offering “relief largess” and attract single migrants in search of “generous” emergency relief. Finally, most city relief officials shared the prime minister’s concerns that Communist organizers were active in especially Western cities, preying on impressionable young men congregating in search of work, relief, or a handout.

On 8 October 1932, the governor general signed an order-in-council establishing a string of relief camps throughout central and eastern Canada. Organized under the authority of the Department of National Defence, the camps were to accommodate two thousand men immediately. At the same time, Prime Minister Bennett agreed to spend an additional \$200,000 to establish a series of relief camps in western Canada’s mountain and prairie national parks under the authority of the National Parks Branch. By the following spring, the two streams of relief camps had been consolidated under General Andrew McNaughton through the Department of National Defence.⁵⁸

While the federal promise to finance relief camps for the urban unemployed did little to ease their fears, uncertainty, and anger, the news must have comforted municipal officials anxious to mitigate an increasingly tense situation developing in their cities. On 21 October 1932, for example, Saskatoon city police were on guard at city hall as rumours of potentially violent protests circulated throughout the city. Although the rumours were not realized at that time, frustration among the jobless continued to simmer. On 7 November, some of the city’s unemployed clashed with local police. The *Star-Phoenix* carried a description of the day’s violence: “Wielding blood-soaked batons and sticks, police and the unemployed clashed in a fierce pitched battle at 2 o’clock this afternoon. Charging a yelling mob of workless, nearly 90 officers accounted for a dozen or more casualties and half-dozen arrests.”⁵⁹

A little more than a month later, a similar confrontation between police and protesters, this time aimed primarily at provincial officials, occurred in Edmonton. On 20 December 1932, city police and the RCMP clashed with hundreds of unemployed workers and farmers in Edmonton’s Market Square who were attempting to march on the provincial legislature to protest the Brownlee government’s relief policies.



Figure 10. The Edmonton Hunger March, 1932. On 20 December, hundreds of the unemployed gathered in the city's market square. They planned to march to the provincial legislature some nine blocks away and confront Alberta premier John Brownlee with their grievances. Edmonton police, together with RCMP, blocked their way. Glenbow Archives, NC-6-13014g.

The *Edmonton Bulletin* described the clash the next day: “Batons rose and fell, yells and jeers filled the air as here and there a rioter went down before the police clubs. Women among the marchers screamed imprecations at the police, charging them with being cowards who were riding down their class, but the steady police pressure continued and the back of the parade was broken.”⁶⁰

The bloody conclusion of the Hunger March, like the conclusion to similar protests in Saskatoon a month earlier, revealed the extent of anger and frustration with relief policies at all levels. The large number of unemployed workers and farmers who participated speaks to the evident unpopularity and apparent inadequacy of relief policies and provisions,

both rural and urban. This anger and frustration would crystallize once more, this time emerging out of single relief camp workers' experiences.

Almost immediately, it became clear that the camps were unpopular among their young single residents as well. On the surface, camp life seemed a better, more productive alternative to living hand to mouth on the watery soup and dry bread available in the cities and to being constantly harassed, in the words of one historian, by "local police [who] would shoo the men away rather than arrest them as vagrants, while special patrolmen chased them from the freight yards back towards town."⁶¹ One early camp organizer noted in December 1931 that while the camps promised no easy time, "particularly to men not used to this kind of life," the camp benefits, including accommodation and free clothing, outweighed any hardships.⁶² But for many camp workers, the reality was quite different. To some, they were "slave camps" that paid very little for arduous, backbreaking work in isolated conditions.⁶³ "We were slaves," one camper later recalled. "What else would you call a man who is given twenty cents a day and is expected to believe their bullshit that he is an important part of the country?"⁶⁴ To others, the camps were an affront to human dignity. Historian Bill Waiser describes the harsh conditions: the workers slogged through "endless days of heavy toil with little to show for it. . . . From one monotonous day to the next, nothing changed for the men, and the unnatural, stagnant conditions of camp life steadily ate away at their self-identity."⁶⁵ The camps also, according to one informant, threatened the morality of especially their youngest—and presumably most vulnerable—charges: "The terrible thing about it is that many of the men who are congregated in the camp are teenaged Canadian boys forced into close association with mature men, who have tramped the country, with the result is that the outlook for these boys stands a good chance of being completely warped and their characters so degraded and demoralized that their future is unquestionably seriously menaced."⁶⁶ Many campers were clearly dissatisfied with the whole business. Federal authorities recorded more than 350 camp strikes, demonstrations, and disturbances between 1932 and 1936. Approximately 10 percent of all campers over the same period were dismissed for disciplinary reasons.⁶⁷

In the end, the Conservatives' establishment of relief camps to house the thousands of single unemployed men ended in disorder and chaos, and in the deaths of at least two men on Regina's downtown streets on Dominion Day, 1935. The story of the now-famous On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot, however, began not in the Queen City but in British Columbia. Conditions had been deteriorating in the British Columbia camps for some time. Many young single men had gone to the relief camps in that province, in large part because most provinces to the east actively pushed single men out or made their staying intolerable. This situation was exacerbated after the autumn of 1934, when Department of National Defence relief camps in Alberta reached their capacity. Thereafter, "surplus" men were sent to open camps in Canada's westernmost province. Meanwhile, the Communist-organized Relief Camp Workers' Union (RCWU) had been busy trying to organize the relief camp workers. Formed shortly after the first camps opened, the RCWU quickly began agitating for better camp conditions by organizing strikes and walkouts, and formed grievance committees to give voice to campers' complaints.⁶⁸ In December 1934, faced with an outright ban on grievance committees and other measures to hamper its activities, the RCWU called for a general relief camp workers' strike. Hundreds of relief camp workers from across the West answered the call and descended on Vancouver in a show of solidarity and protest at camp conditions. After a meeting with BC's Premier Duff Pattullo ended with little more than a promise that the province would call on the federal government to investigate the camps, however, the strike quickly collapsed. The strikers returned to their camps disappointed.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, the December strike had struck a chord. Only a few months later, the RCWU was already well into the planning stages of organizing a wider, more impressive, and precise strike. RCWU organizers enlisted the help of veteran radical labour activist and Workers' Unity League member Arthur "Slim" Evans and called a strategy meeting in Kamloops for mid-March. There, organizers drew up a list of demands, established what would become the strike's organizational structure, and set a strike date for 4 April. In early April, men began arriving in Vancouver, by the tens at first, but soon by the hundreds. More than

fifteen hundred strikers remained in Vancouver for the next two months, parading through the city's streets, generally publicizing the poor camp conditions, and demanding work for wages, at the very least. Municipal, provincial, and federal authorities were divided as to the best course of action. Some, like Chief of Defence Staff Andrew McNaughton, believed that the strike would soon run out of steam. In some respects, it seemed as though he had a point. Hundreds of men had already quit the strike by mid-May, and more appeared ready to leave. Others, RCMP Commissioner MacBrien among them, favoured a harder-line approach, suggesting that all remaining strikers be detained and interned. Vancouver's Mayor Gerry McGeer and BC's Premier Duff Pattullo viewed the whole matter as a federal problem. The strikers, after all, were protesting federally organized and administered relief camps, not provincial or municipal ones. Of one thing, however, everyone was certain: the strike must quickly conclude.⁷⁰

It remains unclear as to who first proposed the idea of taking the strike's message directly to Ottawa. Ron Liversedge—who participated in the On-to-Ottawa Trek and would later write a book detailing the strikers' progress through British Columbia and Alberta and the violent clash at Regina—attributed the idea to an unidentified man who calmly stood up at a strike meeting and suggested, "Let us go to them."⁷¹ The On-to-Ottawa Trek left Vancouver on 4 June 1935. The men were, for the most part, orderly, disciplined, and dignified. They climbed aboard Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railway freight cars and made their way east, picking up more men at each stop, singing songs of solidarity, laughing and joking, but determined and serious in their intent. In Edmonton, over 150 men joined the Trekkers, now nine hundred strong, who arrived in Calgary on 7 June.⁷²

Prime Minister Bennett followed the Trekkers' progress with much interest and perhaps equal measures of rage and disquiet. He had been out of the country visiting Britain when the strike broke out in Vancouver, but he had returned to Ottawa in mid-May determined to regain control over a problem that appeared to be rapidly spiralling out of control. They were communists all, Bennett had decided, or at least their leadership was, and they were bent on nothing less than destroying

the capitalist system and replacing it with a communist one.⁷³ In truth, although the Trek's leadership had communist leanings, most of the rank-and-file Trekkers were simply discouraged, disillusioned, and tired, their hopes and aspirations to find a job and start a family dashed on the shoals of the economic crisis. That said, Bennett did have reason for concern. The Trek's leaders headed up a highly organized and disciplined march east, almost military in its precision—the army of the unemployed. And its numbers were growing. In Bennett's mind, the solution was simple: the Trek had to be stopped.

And stopped it was. At Bennett's insistence, the Canadian Pacific Railway—which, up to that point, had carried the men toward their goal—complained to the RCMP that the Trekkers had been illegally riding the rods on CPR freight trains. This complaint gave the RCMP and Bennett the excuse to crush the Trek. RCMP officers quickly descended on Regina and prevented any Trekker from boarding a train. This action made the situation deteriorate rapidly, for now the men were trapped in the city, and they were fast running out of food and cash. Bennett's next move was to dispatch two Cabinet ministers—R. J. Manion, the minister of Railways, and Robert Weir, the minister of Agriculture—to Regina to assess the situation and try to negotiate an end to the Trek. The ministers met with Trek leaders and arranged for a small delegation to travel to Ottawa and speak with the prime minister directly. The meeting between the delegation and Bennett, by all accounts, went badly, degenerating swiftly into little more than a shouting match. The delegates returned to Regina, even as Bennett determined to end the standoff. He instructed the RCMP to move in and arrest the Trek leaders. The constables could not have selected a worse time to carry out the prime minister's directive. By attempting to take the leaders of the Trek into custody while they were in the midst of addressing the Trekkers during a Dominion Day rally, the RCMP promptly ignited a firestorm. When the riot finally ended later that day, one man lay dead and another would die later in hospital as a result of wounds sustained during the battle.

At first glance, the Trek appears to have little to do with municipal relief matters beyond the facts that it began just outside of Vancouver, passed through several cities on the main CPR line, and ended on the

downtown streets of Regina. The Trek had, after all, originated from federally organized and administered relief camps, not provincial or municipal ones. And the Trekkers were themselves headed toward the nation's capital to have it out with Bennett, not toward provincial legislatures or city halls to confront premiers or mayors. They were planning to take their complaints to Parliament directly, bypassing entirely provincial and municipal authorities; the Trek was explicitly *not* about local relief. This very circumvention of local authorities, however, underscored the growing irrelevance of local authorities with respect to single men's relief experiences.

In any event, Bennett emerged from the riot bruised. Parents across the nation who had young unemployed sons about the same age as many of the Trekkers recoiled at the federal government's ham-fisted and hard-nosed response. Canadian citizens in general were sympathetic toward the young men, believing that they were out of work through no fault of their own, yet the federal government had treated them like criminals. Bennett was hemorrhaging what little political capital he had retained after five long years of economic crisis, rising unemployment, and failed policies.

With a federal election looming and in the hopes of lifting his political fortunes, Bennett trotted out a program of legislation modelled on the spirit of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal. Included in the legislation was the Employment and Social Insurance Act, which established a limited system of unemployment insurance, as well as an advisory and investigative commission to oversee health insurance and relief matters. Bennett's "New Deal" also included the Dominion Trade and Industry Commission Act and various labour laws designed to lay the groundwork for implementing International Labor Organization conventions such as a minimum wage, a weekly day of rest, and eight-hour working day regulations. To its critics, Bennett's New Deal constituted little more than a deathbed conversion to greater governmental involvement in the economy. Constitutional scholars doubted it would pass constitutional muster, given that it encroached heavily on provincial jurisdiction. Liberal Opposition Leader Mackenzie King agreed, but he voted for it anyway, recognizing that not to do so would unnecessarily

risk public condemnation.⁷⁴ Eventually, as King probably expected, the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council would strike down as *ultra vires* most of Bennett's New Deal program.

THE DOMINION HOUSING ACT

One important piece of legislation that survived the parliamentary session was the Dominion Housing Act, which underscored further the growing irrelevance of city governments to federal Depression relief policy. The Depression had hit housing hard. The trouble was twofold. First, the nation at mid-decade was suffering from a severe housing shortage—to the tune of eighty-two thousand homes, by some estimates.⁷⁵ In large measure, this was a predictable repercussion of the reluctance of industry (including lenders) to engage in new housing starts in a poor economic climate. Second, many existing homes were in desperate condition after years of neglect. As social scientist A. E. Grauer reported in a 1939 study prepared for the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, “The effects were evident in a decreased number of available homes, the doubling up of tenants in congested residential areas, and the deterioration of low rental houses through the inability of landlords to make necessary repairs.”⁷⁶

Others had come to the same conclusion in early 1935. In January, Conservative backbenchers Thomas Langton Church and James Arthurs pressed the federal government to embark on a national housing program. Such a potentially far-reaching plan, with unknown, though doubtless costly, implications, was too much for Bennett. He suggested instead the more conservative approach of referring the issue to a select parliamentary committee for study and recommendation.⁷⁷ In the end, the Parliamentary Committee on Housing, headed by Conservative MP and New Brunswick businessman Arthur Ganong, advised that the federal government ought to insert itself forcefully in the housing field to redress what was rapidly becoming regarded as a crisis.⁷⁸ A federally assisted housing program, the commissioners believed, had the potential in one fell swoop to solve all sorts of Depression-related problems:

not only could such a program ease the housing shortage by increasing the number of affordable rental units, but more accessible affordable housing would also lessen disease caused by overcrowding and reduce the crime associated with “slum” conditions.⁷⁹ Equally important, the committee’s final report asserted, a coordinated, national housing program would create immediate employment in the construction industry, easing considerably the cost of unemployment relief.

By June, the committee’s report had given way to draft legislation, but the Dominion Housing Act (DHA) shared almost none of the earlier concern for the creation of affordable housing or its supposed ameliorative social effects. The DHA instead tended to encourage high-end construction, with the hope on the part of the federal government for a “trickle-down” effect: citizens of means would trade their present homes for newer ones, leaving their vacated homes to lower-income groups. The DHA promised an appropriation totalling \$10 million toward encouraging new home construction. It was a simple enough plan: the DHA invited approved lending and financial institutions to collaborate with the federal government and prospective homebuilders (either individuals or commercial outfits) in the construction of new homes on purchased land. The federal government would contribute 20 percent of the total cost from its \$10 million appropriation, while the lending institution would put up a further 60 percent and the borrower the remaining 20 percent. The DHA set loans from the federal appropriation to the lending institutions at 3 percent interest and allowed the lending institutions in turn to seek a maximum of 5 percent interest from the borrower on the entire 80 percent loan. This, the government reasoned, would encourage lenders to make available for new construction their own substantial reserves of a reported \$75 million.⁸⁰ During Commons debates on the bill, G. D. Stanley, MP for Calgary-East, summed up the potential for stimulating the ailing housing sector. As he pointed out, the lenders “had \$75,000,000 today which they wished to place if they could be convinced that the security was sufficient. When you have loan companies and organizations coming before the committee and saying that they have \$75,000,000 which they wish to loan, you have a very splendid beginning at any rate; and all they need—so they said—is sufficient

confidence in the undertaking, that their security will be assured.”⁸¹ Sir George Perley, minister without portfolio in Bennett’s Cabinet, calculated that the government’s \$10 million appropriation would translate into a more conservative \$50 million in new housing construction with the participation of private lenders and borrowers.⁸² Whether the DHA would inject \$50 or \$75 million into the nation’s housing sector, the bill promised much in the way of stimulus to lending institutions, land developers, and unemployed construction workers, among others.

Alas, the DHA would not live up to its early promise. For one thing, banks were not interested in financing the sort of low-cost housing that the nation so desperately required, preferring instead to back higher-end housing starts that were beyond the reach of most potential homeowners, as well as land subdivisions for development in better economic times.⁸³ In the end, the act had a limited impact, both on homebuilding and employment generation. This was noted with disdain by the nation’s mayors at their 1936 Ottawa conference of the Dominion Conference of Mayors, where they concluded that “the unsatisfactory housing conditions existing in many Canadian cities is causing grave concern to public health, civic, and other authorities, and . . . the Dominion Housing Act, 1935, has not alleviated this serious condition.”⁸⁴ Only 150 homes were built in Manitoba and a paltry two in Saskatchewan under the act. Not one was built in Alberta.⁸⁵ The trouble was not that either Albertans or westerners in general lacked interest in the scheme. The *Edmonton Bulletin*, for example, “was deluged with requests for information and as to how loans could be obtained under the Dominion Housing Act.”⁸⁶ As noted by the head of the Mortgage and Loan Association of Alberta, the problem was that “no loan company was going to make loans in Western Canada on a basis of five per cent.”⁸⁷ Such a low rate of return on investment simply made little sense when much higher returns could be earned on other investments elsewhere. Some housing construction activity did take place in Alberta, though not under the DHA. Nearly two hundred new homes appeared in Edmonton in 1937, for instance, but they generally featured inferior building standards, cost an average of less than \$500 to build, and looked not “much more elaborate than dog kennels or rabbit hutches,” according to one observer.⁸⁸

The DHA was, however, remarkable in two important ways. It was the first nation-wide initiative designed to stimulate employment outside of any explicit and existing unemployment relief apparatus. Certainly, the federal government had had a hand in earlier employment-generating projects (the building of the Canadian Pacific Railway comes to mind), but job creation in those instances was primarily incidental, not central to the schemes. Nor did those projects appear at times of comparable mass unemployment. Ostensibly, this meant that participating homebuilders or developers could hire whichever workers they liked to complete the job, whether those workers were actively employed or looking for work, whether they were on relief or not. More importantly, the city relief machines that had exercised such authority over relief labour distribution policies in the past had no standing either way. A second significant feature of the DHA was that it broke with the established tradition of federal partnering with provincial and municipal authorities on urban unemployment matters. Of course, the act did not bar local authorities from participating in the scheme, provided they were able to raise their 60 percent of any home's cost themselves. In reality, however, as sociologist and anthropologist D. G. Bettison points out: "It was clear at the time that few, if any, local authorities were in the happy position of being able to float a debenture for housing at a rate of interest less than five percent. As a practical matter, the private lending institutions were the only source of funds likely to be applied, and the federal government knew this."⁸⁹

THE LIBERALS RETURN TO POWER IN OTTAWA

It was late October 1935 when a quietly satisfied William Lyon Mackenzie King returned to his old rooms in the Prime Minister's Office in Ottawa. His Liberals had run a tight election race to oust Richard Bedford Bennett and his Conservative Party from office. But the Liberal campaign—run on the slogan "King or Chaos"—figured only partly in convincing Canadians to return his party to power. It was also their deep frustration at Bennett's inability to turn the economy

around. In fairness, Bennett's failed economic policies, based mostly on erecting tariff barriers to protect Canadian manufactured goods and cutting spending wherever possible, were similar to the policies of governments throughout the industrialized world.⁹⁰ The United States, for example, had also erected huge tariff barriers—most famously, the Smoot-Hawley tariff in 1930—in an effort to protect its domestic producers.⁹¹ These were, of course, exactly the wrong strategies to pull the world economy out of the Depression. As we now know, cutting spending had the effect of tightening the flow of money and hampering global trade and thus served only to exacerbate the already gloomy economic outlook. But Bennett was not alone in trying to steer Canada out of economic hard times using traditional—and, in many respects, outmoded—methods. Bennett's early unemployment relief policies were no more successful—or popular—than his economic ones. By 1935, his was a tired response to an economic crisis already five years old, and King won the election as much on the back of Bennett's failures as on his own promises.

By mid-decade, most Canadians were clearly expecting new ideas about and approaches to the economic crisis. They had, after all, ousted Bennett's Conservatives in favour of King's Liberals, and voters in seven out of Canada's nine provinces had opted for political change in their provincial legislatures as well: only John Bracken's coalition government in Manitoba and the Liberals in Nova Scotia, elected in 1933, managed to reach the end of the decade more or less intact. But if Canadians were expecting immediate and mighty changes—something along the lines of unemployment insurance or even a comprehensive national unemployment relief strategy—then they would be disappointed. King, characteristically perhaps, made no immediate or far-reaching unemployment relief policy changes save for ordering the closure of Bennett's relief camps by Dominion Day of 1936, a move that would have no small effect on cities already worried about the number of single unemployed men waiting on them for relief. As of March 1936, there were no fewer than twenty thousand camp residents set for dismissal.⁹² And while federal Labour Department officials expected that a little better than half of these men would find work as special extra gang labour or in supervisory positions

on deferred railway track maintenance work, many would probably find their way to the cities.⁹³

The provincial legislatures may well have had new governments, but they remained in dire financial straits and were consequently unable to engineer any significant overhaul of their relief systems.⁹⁴ Alberta, for example, had watched its provincial income steadily decline ever since the beginning of the Depression, from \$290 million in 1929 to \$186 million in 1935.⁹⁵ Both Saskatchewan and Manitoba warned Ottawa pointedly in 1936 that they were on the brink of defaulting on their loans.⁹⁶ That the western provincial economies were in bad shape was clear, and, as historian Robert Wardhaugh points out, “the Prairie premiers could hardly afford to offend a federal government they were coming increasingly to rely upon for financial support.”⁹⁷ Where did this all leave the cities? More or less in the same positions they had occupied immediately before the regime changes. Even Alberta’s new Social Credit government retained the old United Farmers of Alberta Provincial Relief Department appointee, A. A. Mackenzie.⁹⁸ Local responsibility, if in name only, remained the order of the day. The city relief machines continued in their roles as custodians for meagre relief programs—mostly food and clothing distribution and rent payments—funded and overseen in the main by the provincial and federal governments.

On a deeper level, though, Canada’s approach to dealing with urban unemployment was undergoing a profound transformation. Cities, imperceptibly at first, were swept up in much larger policy trends that ushered them into the modern national system of social welfare. In the process, the city officials who had wielded considerable influence in determining the nature and character of their local relief systems through the first few years of the Depression saw that influence diminish in the wake of national unemployment relief strategies.

It was not until spring 1936 that King made his first moves toward altering existing arrangements. Pushed by his Cabinet colleagues, who, according to James Struthers, were “anxious to pay off political debts to friendly provincial administrations,” a reluctant King agreed to raise relief transfers to the provinces by 75 percent.⁹⁹ In exchange, King insisted that the provinces co-operate fully with a new National

Employment Commission (NEC). The provinces, eager for access to more relief funds, readily agreed. What they might not have appreciated at the time, however, was the high degree of control the NEC would exert over how the provinces and municipalities administered the funds. As Struthers explains, “although tied to the grants-in-aid, the NEC was in fact designed to reduce Ottawa’s expenditure on relief over the long run by ensuring its administration would become more ‘efficient and economical.’”¹⁰⁰ This was effected in part by the NEC’s appointment of Charlotte Whitton to reorganize and coordinate the complicated tripartite direct relief arrangement among the federal, provincial, and municipal governments.¹⁰¹ For years, she had tried, unsuccessfully, to impress on Bennett that responsibility for and control over relief matters should be wrested from the hands of non-professional city policy-makers and administrators, and set in the capable hands of professional social workers such as herself. Architects of city relief policy, she complained, were not versed in the complex theories and studies relating to welfare in general and unemployment relief in particular. They were wasteful with funds, sloppy with records, and haphazard in all matters of relief. As social work scholar Ken Moffat suggests, Whitton believed that “key positions in social service bureaucracies should be given to those who had proven themselves through social work experience.”¹⁰²

Whitton derived much of her information on local relief practices from a tour of western Canadian cities through the summer of 1932. Her conclusions, laid out simply in her “Report re: Unemployment and Relief in Western Canada,” submitted to Bennett in October of that year, were twofold. First, at least 40 percent of relief recipients in the western provinces did not require relief: in fact, relief had actually raised their standard of living. Whitton argued that during “normal” economic times, many workers and farmers were idle for months at a time. The present system of relief administered and delivered in the western provinces offered relief year-round. Workers on relief, therefore, had uninterrupted “earnings” throughout the year. Second, the relief machinery developing in the West was ridden with patronage, corruption, and wastefulness. Whitton accused municipal authorities, variously, of artificially padding their relief rolls to qualify for more federal relief dollars, stacking their

relief machines with patronage appointees, and spending on relief in wanton fashion.¹⁰³

Most of Whitton's conclusions appear exaggerated and distorted in light of how the city relief machines actually functioned. Certainly, as we have seen in preceding chapters, relief to the unemployed was by no reasonable standard of measurement "overly generous." Some of her conclusions, like her 40 percent figure, are outright falsehoods. But her assessment of the situation was well received by Bennett, who found Whitton's report compelling. More importantly, it confirmed his own suspicions that the provinces and cities were wasting federal relief dollars. Less well received were Whitton's recommendations. In short, she advised that trained professional social workers be dispatched with all haste to take charge of relief administration nation-wide.¹⁰⁴ Bennett, unwilling to go that far, opted instead to reduce relief transfers to the provinces and the municipalities. Struthers describes Bennett's reasoning: "If the provinces and municipalities were wasting federal money, the solution was simply to give them less money to waste."¹⁰⁵ In any event, what Whitton probably failed to notice at the time was that the city relief machines' relevance and influence was already fast on the wane.

In 1936, in her new position on the NEC, Whitton determined to apply her recommendations, little changed from her 1932 report, to the problem. Henceforth, strict guidelines, regulations and protocols drawn up by professional social workers would direct city relief administrators in how to organize their relief systems. Whitton, it seemed, had finally won an important national role for professional social workers.¹⁰⁶

But the NEC was more than a vehicle to enhance the social work profession's prestige. Its mandate, after all, was to "find ways and means of providing remunerative employment, thus reducing the numbers at present on relief, and lessening the burden of taxation."¹⁰⁷ The commission, chaired by industrialist Arthur Purvis, spent the summer taking a full inventory of the relief question with a view to "eliminating obvious abuses, rackets, overlapping and the like," as well as registering and classifying all relief recipients nation-wide.¹⁰⁸ Aiding Purvis in his work was a cast of characters who King was certain would substantiate his belief that the federal government ought not be involved to any considerable

degree in funding and financing unemployment relief, and would make suggestions that would reduce federal responsibility for it. The six other commissioners were economist W. A. Mackintosh from Queen's University; Alfred Marois, a Québec shoe-manufacturer; Neil McLean, a businessman from New Brunswick; two western Canadians, E. J. Young and Mary Sutherland; and Tom Moore, president of the Trades and Labor Congress.¹⁰⁹

The summer of 1936 was a difficult one for cities in the West. Not only would they have to wait for the NEC's interim report, widely expected that autumn, to discover the federal government's next move, but they were forced to accommodate a 25 percent reduction in federal relief transfers to the provinces. King, having secured provincial co-operation with the NEC, felt comfortable enough reducing what he viewed as overly generous relief grants-in-aid. More immediately, the cities feared they would have to contend once again with an influx of single men from the relief camps once the camps closed their gates in July. In an effort to head off this onslaught, King offered money for the construction of the Trans-Canada Highway and several provincial highways, which promised to employ at least half of the ex-campers; he also entered into arrangements with the Canadian Pacific and Canadian National Railways to provide the remaining single men with work.¹¹⁰

What seems clear in retrospect is the fundamental disconnect between King's aspirations for the NEC that spring, and the commission's actual significance. On the one hand, King made it plain that he fully expected the commission to reduce both Ottawa's expenditures on unemployment relief and its responsibility for unemployment more generally. The NEC would, in King's estimation, "save the Treasury & the taxpayers many millions of dollars. Municipalities and provinces," who King insisted would remain responsible for their own relief activities, "will soon find the truth of the saying that 'every man must learn to earn by the sweat of his own brow.'"¹¹¹ On the other hand, the NEC's very existence as a national organization opened the door to greater, not less, federal responsibility, the potential of which King was well aware of. He recalled having warned Labour Minister Norman Rogers that if the commission recommended that the federal government "take charge

of all unemployment,” then “the Party would never escape that obligation on itself *as one for which it was directly responsible through appointing the Commission*.”¹¹² Nevertheless, King had every confidence that his man overseeing the commission’s work, none other than Norman Rogers, would keep matters in their proper perspective: namely, limiting federal responsibility for unemployment. Rogers was, after all, an academician with a “broad knowledge of social, economic, and governmental problems,” King noted in his diary on 30 March 1936. In describing Rogers’s unemployment and relief-related remarks before Parliament that afternoon, King averred that he had “heard nothing in the H of C which seemed to me more to justify post-graduate training in government, economic, and political philosophy than the speech he made.”¹¹³

In September, the NEC presented its preliminary findings to Cabinet. King later recorded in his diary that he thought Commission Chair Arthur Purvis had “made an exceptionally fine presentation” on the matter.¹¹⁴ He especially liked the commission’s conclusion that most of the nation’s relief problems could be laid at the doorstep of Bennett’s administration. It was, King happily confided to his diary on 3 September, “Bennett’s reckless spending” and other “mistaken policies” that had, in large measure, left the relief system in such a mess.¹¹⁵ But although the commissioners’ conclusions confirmed King’s suspicions about his political rival’s failed relief policies, their interim recommendations as to the federal government’s best immediate course of action worried him. To his surprise and dismay, the commission laid out four recommendations that, collectively and individually, threatened to *increase* rather than *lessen* federal expenditure on and responsibility for unemployment policy. First, the commission advised the creation of a national employment service organized and run exclusively by the federal government and designed to coordinate the nation’s labour exchange activities. The commission’s second proposal, modelled on the American Civilian Conservation Corps, was a federally coordinated national volunteer conservation service that would see more than thirty thousand of Canada’s unemployed youth trained in the nation’s primary resource sector and skilled, semi-skilled, and specialized trades sector. Third, the commissioners advocated for a comprehensive, nation-wide rural resettlement

scheme that would place primarily dustbowl farmers on productive land in the northern parts of the Prairie provinces while avoiding earlier “back-to-the-land” programs that merely made “agriculture a dumping ground for all those who have failed in other walks of life.” Finally, the commission argued for a more expansive (and nuanced) housing policy than the earlier Dominion Housing Act. With its twofold aim of creating work for the all but idle construction industry and addressing the serious shortfall in affordable housing, the recommendation called for more federally backed mortgages, direct federal investment in affordable housing construction, and a home-improvement scheme.¹¹⁶

This was far too much federal responsibility for King. The commission had clearly gone in exactly the wrong direction. Most disappointing of all was the conclusion of Rogers, a protégé and academic friend, that the federal government ought to assume full responsibility for unemployment relief. Only a short year and a half before, King had extolled Rogers’s academic credentials as just the stuff to seriously reduce federal relief expenditures and responsibility for unemployment. It was now precisely Rogers’s academic background that made him unsuited to the pragmatics of politics: “I am beginning to see the wisdom of not taking into the Government men who have not had some political training, however able they may be,” King wrote in his diary. “The academic mind is not the best one to handle problems of Government. It is far too theoretical. A knowledge of human nature, above all else, is required.”¹¹⁷

King rejected outright all of the Commission’s early recommendations, save the home improvement plan (HIP), which was itself a fairly limited affair, despite the commissioners’ general view that the HIP had “great employment potential in the rehabilitation of existing houses.”¹¹⁸ In essence, the federal government agreed to guarantee to 15 percent any loans made by chartered banks to homeowners for the purposes of refurbishing, repairing, or making additions to existing residential buildings in urban or rural areas. The plan appeared sound enough. A similar initiative south of the border—the so-called modernization credit plan—had worked to good effect, stimulating the construction industry, creating jobs, and encouraging a much-needed modernizing of homes, not

to mention opening investment opportunities for banks' accumulated assets. In Canada, lending institutions had likewise found themselves sitting on accumulated assets with limited investment opportunities. Not surprisingly, they approved wholeheartedly of the home-renovation scheme, especially since the scheme left in their hands exclusively the decision to deem potential borrowers as creditworthy or not and to make the loans—or not—accordingly. But the trouble with the HIP lay not with the lenders but with homeowners, and more particularly, with their lack of either borrowing power or funds to finance improvements. Real estate values had largely collapsed nation-wide and, according to John Bacher, “caused owners who had paid off most of a mortgage to carry mortgages of more than 60 per cent of the value of their homes.” The problem, then, was simple: homeowners “were unable to borrow more, as their properties were in some instances mortgaged for more than their current market value.”¹¹⁹

Once more, the cities were left almost entirely out of the plan's administration despite the fact that one of its main features was employment creation in the construction industry. This is not to suggest that municipal authorities retained no authority (or responsibility) for the way the plan played out in their cities. Municipal administration was responsible for determining whether specific buildings were beyond rehabilitation and ought to be condemned, for instance, or whether and to what degree rates of assessment ought to be raised on improved properties. That said, cities doubtlessly felt strong pressure to not appear to be hindering in any way the scheme's employment-creating potential. Ensuring that the cities kept the scheme's unemployment-reducing goals in mind were local advisory committees made up of “public-spirited citizens and business interests” and organized by the NEC. The committees kept abreast of local conditions, encouraged prospective borrowers to participate in the scheme, and made representations to municipalities pointing out the immediate and future benefits of facilitating, by any means, home-renovation projects. In D. G. Bettison's assessment, “the plan therefore relegated local authorities to a watch-dog role on habitability while local private enthusiasts were to stimulate the use of the legislation through financial institutions.”¹²⁰ In the end, the scheme created

roughly \$12 million worth of construction nation-wide throughout its life (to 1940).¹²¹ Aside from the HIP's minimal impact on alleviating unemployment, the whole program came to be characterized, derisively, as having provided little more than "rumpus rooms for the bourgeoisie." According to a Senate-commissioned report from the 1960s evaluating the program, "only a wealthy minority of Canadians" were in a position to take advantage of the HIP interest rates. As a result, many of the home improvements carried on under the plan were specialty projects like boutique fireplaces, air conditioning, panelled walls, and Georgian furniture.¹²²

By the end of 1937, the NEC was ready with its final report. Its basic conclusion should have surprised no one, least of all Mackenzie King. For nearly two years, the commission's several interim reports had suggested its leaning toward the federal government's assumption of total responsibility for unemployment relief. Its policy suggestions—from national youth training programs to housing initiatives—all envisioned a central role for the central government. Over the course of the next two years, Ottawa would move more forcefully still into unemployment policy. Finance Minister Charles Avery Dunning noted the enormity of the change: "We are stepping into a field which hitherto has not been a field of the dominion parliament, a field which according to the opinions held by very eminent gentlemen, we have no constitutional right to occupy, and which we can justify entering at all only as primarily an attack upon our great national problem of unemployment."¹²³ In important ways, however, the federal government had been "stepping into" the field for some time—at least since it became clear that "local responsibility" was effectively a fiction.

The basis of King's concern was, as Struthers notes, the very same as Bennett's had been through the first half of the decade: local authorities were in a position not only to best gauge local needs but also to put an effective limit on the extent of relief disbursement. On the one hand, if local authorities, with their limited resources, remained reliant on federal grants-in-aid for their relief systems, then the federal government would retain control over relief costs. If, on the other hand, local authorities relinquished responsibility for local relief, then the only effective

check on relief spending would disappear. The NEC's only dissenting commissioner, Mary Sutherland, articulated the danger:

The further removed and more centralized government becomes and the less direct its taxing power, the less easily can the individual relate his own responsibilities to its functions. No matter which government is responsible for and administers relief . . . there will be constant pressure to increase the benefits and to enlarge the base of admittance to benefits. If responsibility is centralized in the Dominion Government, the counter-pressure from local taxpayers will be eased. The irksome, unwelcome and hard check provided by necessity by municipal officials, harassed by mounting demands on diminishing revenues, will be removed.¹²⁴

Still, unemployment remained high across the Dominion. Despite indications in the summer of 1937 that recovery was finally on the horizon, the fall and winter dashed King's hopes. Unemployment numbers increased, especially in the West, owing in part to a drought-ridden wheat harvest. In the spring of 1938, King agreed to a \$40 million appropriation for federally organized work relief projects, including road, wharf, and office building. None of these measures eased directly the pressures facing local relief authorities. More relevant to their concerns was a new bill introduced into Parliament that spring—the Municipal Improvements Assistance Act.

Like King's other recent interventions, the new act was relatively limited. It promised low-interest loans (at 2%) to municipalities to create local jobs on local improvement projects. The act is significant not for the amount it promised to local improvements—the entire appropriation was limited to \$30 million, with Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg qualifying for little more than \$200,000 each—but rather for the tight federal oversight and control over how the loans could be spent.¹²⁵ For one thing, the federal government required municipalities wishing to participate in the scheme to submit "detailed financial estimates demonstrating to the satisfaction of the Minister that the project to be constructed or the improvements or renewals to be made will be a

self-liquidating project.” The federal government also retained the right to impose further regulations on the actual work as it progressed.¹²⁶ In July, municipal authorities across the Prairies learned that those regulations included what Ottawa was calling “fair wages” and an eight-hour workday for all employees.¹²⁷ This severely restricted the ability of the cities’ engineering departments to spread the work among unemployed workers. It also caused no end of administrative problems. “I am afraid the Dominion Government,” Saskatoon’s Mayor Pinder complained to the premier in November, “has hedged the Act around with so many regulations that it will be difficult for most of the cities to secure any real assistance through it.”¹²⁸ Nevertheless, by late January 1939, Ottawa had finally approved \$13,000 of a \$15,000 proposal for an Electrical Distribution Building. Ottawa had reduced the loan by \$2,000 because under the terms of the act, the federal Department of Finance would not accept the cost of equipment and fixtures associated with the project.¹²⁹ City administrators also learned that Ottawa had approved another loan under the act for \$40,000 for a replacement of a standby plant at the city’s pumping station and a further \$40,000 for the construction of a large water main on Fourth Avenue and Twenty-Fifth Street. The latter project, Saskatoon’s city commissioner pointed out, would be especially useful, given that it would improve the water supply for both the Nutana neighbourhood and the city’s downtown core. The water main would include “the installation of plumbing in some two hundred and fifty to three hundred houses which are located on modern streets but have never been connected up to the sewer and water mains on account of the owners not being able to secure the necessary funds.”¹³⁰ Labour distribution policies differed little from earlier in the decade, save for the city reserving first preference to laid-off city workers.¹³¹

In Edmonton, city commissioners had quickly drawn up a list of public works projects totalling nearly \$700,000 in the hopes that “the Dominion Officials tentatively approve of as many items as possible.” The city council was disappointed to learn that “certain limitations . . . ruled out most of the items submitted.”¹³² Part of the trouble was that most of the projects as submitted weren’t self-liquidating. Equally problematic, for city officials and the unemployed alike, was the federal regulation that

“the money cannot be used for any work completed prior to the signing of the agreements.”¹³³ Unfortunately, the city had already begun work on some of the projects, including a power plant and telephone extensions, prior to federal approval under the terms of the act and so could not be reimbursed for costs incurred up to that point. In the end, the city did receive approval for a paving program and a new substation building for the Electric Light Department; it also received \$150,000 to help replace the city’s streetcars with a trolley-bus system at a combined, though much reduced, total of around \$200,000. The city had also submitted plans for a \$27,000 waterworks department workshop and meter-room building, but Ottawa required “more details as to [its] self-liquidating feature.”¹³⁴ After several weeks of no word from Ottawa, the city reduced its cost proposal to \$20,000. Early the following year, the city learned that Ottawa had nevertheless turned the project down, mainly because “the warehouse itself was not self-liquidating.”¹³⁵ As for Winnipeg, the city made repairs to the Fort Rouge police station, improved and extended a portion of the city’s waterworks system, and contributed to the General Hospital’s rebuilding program.¹³⁶

In short, the Municipal Improvements Assistance Act was nothing like the unemployment relief-related public works construction earlier in the decade. Its appropriation was relatively small: as late as March 1939, Ottawa had approved of projects representing only a little more than \$1 million worth of labour in only five provinces.¹³⁷ The act also limited local projects to those of a “self-liquidating” nature, and it demanded strict adherence to federal labour restrictions. Nevertheless, municipal leaders were generally pleased at the prospect of another work-for-wages scheme, however limited it might be, and the opportunity to upgrade revenue-generating public utilities like water treatment plants, sewer systems, and transportation facilities after years of neglect was welcomed.

The following year, the federal government introduced similar work-for-wages legislation in the form of the Civic Improvements Act. The Rogers Plan—named after its sponsor, Labour Minister Norman Rogers—offered financial aid for labour costs associated with any municipal public works project carried on as a relief project. Under the terms of the act, the provinces and the federal government would assume

50 percent each of the direct labour costs for a limited course of approved urban work relief schemes. The cities would be expected to pay for all materials and supervision. “In approving applications from municipalities,” Rogers told the House of Commons in January 1939, “due consideration will be given the extent of unemployment in the municipality and the value of the proposed improvement to the community and the relative cost of materials in relation to total cost of the project.”¹³⁸ The Rogers Plan caused some local grumbling because while it promised money for labour costs, it offered nothing for the materials or equipment required for major public works. The Civic Improvements Act also issued even more stringent labour regulations than earlier work relief legislation—including the Municipal Improvements Assistance Act. Historian Patrick Brennan explains the implications for local relief control in Saskatoon and Regina:

Both city administrations, whether out of habit or from wishful thinking, assumed married “reliefers” would have priority on Civic Improvements Plan schemes and that they would rotate labour in the traditional way. However, federal authorities rejected both practices as contrary to the spirit of “work for wages.” To avoid any “misunderstandings” the province ordered city officials to ensure that no compulsion was used in hiring, that all men were taken on full-time for the duration of the project, and that every man received the prevailing wage for the work done in cash.¹³⁹

Such restrictions were unheard of through the relief projects of the early 1930s. Still, by early 1940, Saskatoon had completed most of its approved projects under the act, including \$50,000 for a stone recovery and revetment project on the riverbank and \$120,000 more for sidewalk, curb, and boulevard work.¹⁴⁰

Following the twin policy shift ending the expansive public works relief programs of the early 1930s and the creation of federal unemployment relief camps for single men in 1932–33, city relief policy diminished in importance. Thereafter, in incremental stages, the federal government inserted itself more forcefully into relief policy, increasingly

overshadowing local responsibility. Through its housing legislation, the National Employment Commission, and federally funded relief works programs, the federal government marginalized the city relief machines and undermined, in all but name, the concept of local responsibility. The development of a comprehensive national welfare system still lay years away, but the dismantling of local responsibility was crucial to the process.

Conclusion

Throughout the first years of the Depression, Canadian cities stood on the front lines of urban unemployment. To them fell the mighty task of making provision for the care and maintenance of those affected by the economic downturn. Although the cities received financial support from the provinces and the federal government to aid them in that task, the concept of local responsibility—born centuries earlier in Britain’s Poor Laws and written into the cities’ articles of incorporation—left in municipal hands the primary responsibility for administering and delivering relief to the urban jobless.

But local responsibility also meant local control, however tempered it turned out to be. On the one hand, local responsibility offered city relief administrators and policy-makers the freedom to set relief policy according to their own understandings of the meanings of

poverty, unemployment, and relief. On the other hand, local responsibility compelled them to act when they could ill-afford to act and would have preferred not to act at all. It also compelled them to mediate among myriad interests whether or not those interests share their conceptions of their society's needs. In the end, it was in the very administration and delivery of unemployment relief that cities found ways to reduce what they viewed as the Depression's worst threats to the economic and social order. It was, in many ways, the widespread realization that the Depression was no short-term downturn that spelled the end of local responsibility. Despite the early prominence of urban authorities to the administration and delivery of unemployment relief, they gradually became less relevant to the process.

In the main, this book has explored the Depression experience through the lens of city administrators, policy-makers, and planners. The important vantage point of the (primarily) men who made and carried out relief policy reveals their biases, concerns, and anxieties about the future of their fledgling and fragile cities at a moment of extraordinary social and economic dislocation. The cities were relatively new when the Depression began. Only three short decades before, there were no urban centres on the Prairies west of Winnipeg. In the ensuing thirty years—years that can only be described as raucous—Prairie cities experienced a massive economic boom, two serious recessions, and a World War. On the eve of the Depression, the cities had stabilized, and their policy-makers confidently looked forward to steady expansion and growth. The severe economic downturn savaged them more than it did urban centres elsewhere, mainly because of their reliance on a single commodity for their survival.

The chief goal of city policy-makers through the early years of the Depression was a simple one: to help their cities survive the economic and social crisis more or less intact. They quickly discovered that “intact” was open to wide interpretation among the many groups and individuals affected by their relief policies. Neither the provinces nor the federal government, for example, had any interest in seeing cities defaulted and bankrupt—cities were, after all, the economic, political, and cultural engines of the nation—but neither did they want the cities becoming too

big a drain on their own shrinking coffers. Urban businesses were understandably interested in their own economic survival, and their keen following of the supply side of local relief policy for opportunities to feed the relief machinery reflected that interest. Community groups—including community leagues, ethnic, religious, and cultural organizations, and media representatives—asserted a wide array of opinion about how best to deal with the unemployment problem. And, finally, relief policy affected most intimately the unemployed relief recipients. Relief administration and delivery both governed and was governed by the ways in which recipients and society in general responded to relief policy.

Those who ran the city relief machines drew up rules and regulations and protocols to address the Depression's most severe effects, and relief authorities hoped that these would soften the hardships faced by so many while at the same time safeguarding the cities (and more specifically, the cities' sense of themselves). City governments organized their relief administrations according to two main thrusts. First, they worked to distinguish between single and married men, as well as between men and women, in order to promote specific—and highly gendered—values. Single men, for instance, could expect less from city relief than could their married brothers because for the most part, they represented danger rather than stability and responsibility. Similarly, women, whether single or married, could expect less relief than their brothers could—whatever the latter's marital status. The urban Prairie society's ambiguous relationship with unemployed men, and especially with the ways it conceived of manliness and of men's relationship to work, is also revealed through the cities' work relief policies. Work relief helped to cast unemployed men—that is, those who did not receive work relief—as lazy, as paupers, as broken, as shameful, as dangerous, and as frauds. Society needed protection from them, but the men themselves needed protection from want and starvation and, perhaps more importantly, from the idea of unemployment and all its attendant consequences that together undermined his manliness. Men on work relief were the last bastions of normalcy in dangerous days, but they were the very cause of dangerous days when they were not. The unifying theme and the guardian against danger, then, was work.

Marital status clearly meant a great deal to municipal policy-makers during the 1930s. Relief policies set single men, together with women and ethnic minorities, on a second-tier welfare track even while they maintained married men on the first tier. Policy decisions about where different welfare applicants fell on the hierarchy of relief, then, reveals not only the status that policy-makers accorded to relief recipients, but also what threats policy-makers believed each category of relief posed to the patriarchal and capitalist industrial order.

City bureaucrats also ran their work relief systems in what they imagined were “pragmatic” and “practical” ways, always trying to streamline operations and make them as efficient as the machines they believed them to be. For the most part, officials preferred to view work relief as productive labour, as work that contributed to projects their cities needed to complete, rather than as boondoggles designed to keep otherwise idle men busy. Work relief was, in other words, work, not charity. City engineers and city planners ran their work relief projects much as they had run general city infrastructure building earlier in the century. They discovered, of course, that in many ways work relief brought with it its own peculiar logistics, created in part by restrictions on labour and materials imposed by senior levels of government, as well as by the fact that relief workers had varying degrees of skill and experience. Direct relief systems operated according to similar principles, with city officials generally creating relief policy with an eye to economy.

As I have attempted to demonstrate, prevailing conceptions about single unemployed men versus married ones, in tandem with a solid liberal faith in the work ethic, played a crucial role in the administration and delivery of Depression-era unemployment relief. This is not to say that ethnic and class considerations had no influence on the character of city relief machines. However, in comparison to the gendered and liberal ideologies that have been the focus of this book, issues of ethnicity and class do not figure as prominently in city records, local newspapers, and federal and provincial reports, perhaps because ethnic and class biases were widely shared among city elites and therefore required little comment or debate. The overriding concern of city officials was rather to ensure that all unemployed married men would continue to be able to

support their families and otherwise carry on as they would in normal economic times. Implicit in this goal was the assumption that social stability rested on the male breadwinner model, an ideal to which men and women of all classes and all racial and ethnic backgrounds should be encouraged to subscribe.

This book is the result of an effort to understand the mindset of local elites in three relatively small North American cities struggling against extraordinary circumstances. I have argued that although those circumstances were undeniably difficult, city officials wrested all that they could from them. But this book has also been about the men, women, and children who had little choice but to live with the policies that city officials put in place. For businesspeople—both small and large—city relief policies often set up barriers, but they also offered opportunities. For community leaders, those same policies posed challenges that prompted them to voice their constituents' concerns. And, for the unemployed, city relief initiatives produced a system to be analyzed, negotiated, and ultimately manipulated so as best to serve their own needs.

NOTES

Names of frequently cited archives are abbreviated as follows:

EA	City of Edmonton Archives
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
PAA	Provincial Archives of Alberta
PAM	Provincial Archives of Manitoba
SA	City of Saskatoon Archives
WA	City of Winnipeg Archives
VA	City of Vancouver Archives

Introduction

- 1 See James H. Gray, *The Winter Years: The Depression on the Prairies*, and Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years, 1929–1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression*, two popular and widely read studies of the period.
- 2 While municipal relief administrations are mentioned in some works, they are rarely at the centre of the story. For important exceptions, see David Bright, “The State, the Unemployed, and the Communist Party in Calgary, 1930–1935”; Patrick H. Brennan, “Thousands of Our Men Are Getting Practically Nothing at All to Do: Public Works Relief Programs in Regina and Saskatoon, 1929–1940”; Theresa Healy, “Trouble Enough: Gender, Social Policy, and the Politics of Place in Vancouver and Saskatoon, 1929–1939”; Katrina Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters: Young Working Women in a Depression-Era City, 1929–1939*; Steven Hewitt, “We Are Sitting at the Edge of a Volcano: Winnipeg During the On-to-Ottawa Trek”; Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us: The On-To-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot*; and Michael R. Goeres, “Disorder, Dependency, and Fiscal Responsibility: Unemployment Relief in Winnipeg, 1907–1942.” Goeres argues that Winnipeg fashioned relief policy not to alleviate unemployment per se but to address unemployment’s implications—namely, disorder and

dependency. He concludes that the city's experience with Depression-era relief led to citizens' demands for a postwar welfare state.

- 3 See, in particular, A. E. Safarian's *The Canadian Economy in the Great Depression* (1959). Later examinations of Canada's Depression experience that are primarily economic include Alvin Finkel, *Business and Social Reform in the Thirties* (1979), and Graham D. Taylor and Peter A. Baskerville, *A Concise History of Business in Canada* (1994), 371–82. Finkel explores the relationship between the Canadian state and Canadian business community, arguing that, in their quest throughout the 1930s for profit and market stability, businessmen initially attempted to achieve these goals on their own. When that failed, they pushed the state to regulate business through national regulatory bodies in the hope that such bodies could impose stability.
- 4 In "Trade Wars: Canada's Reaction to the Smoot-Hawley Tariff," economic historians Judith A. McDonald, Anthony Patrick O'Brien, and Colleen M. Callahan suggest that the Smoot-Hawley tariff had severe negative repercussions in the United States as well, arguing that Canadian tariffs on American goods introduced after Smoot-Hawley were direct retaliatory measures.
- 5 See, for example, John Herd Thompson, with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922–1939: Decades of Discord*; Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years*, and L. M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R. B. Bennett, 1930–1935*.
- 6 James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920–1970*, 4.
- 7 One of the more important proponents of this view is Harold Wilensky. See *The Welfare State and Equality: The Structure and Ideological Roots of Public Expenditure*, as well as Harold L. Wilensky and Charles N. Lebeaux, *Industrial Society and Social Welfare: The Impact of Industrialization on the Supply and Organization of Social Welfare Services in the United States*.
- 8 Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, 6–7.
- 9 Although I do not explore Depression-era kin survival strategies in this book, many writers have. See, for example, Denyse Baillargeon, "If You Had No Money, You Had No Trouble, Did You?: Montreal Working-Class Housewives During the Great Depression," and Beth S. Wenger's fascinating account of the Depression experience of New York Jews in *New York Jews and the Great Depression: Uncertain Promise*, esp. chaps. 3 and 6.
- 10 See Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence*, and Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History*.
- 11 Louis Hartz, *The Liberal Tradition in America: An Interpretation of Political Thought Since the Revolution*; Gad Horowitz, "Conservatism, Liberalism, and Socialism in Canada: An Interpretation."

- 12 See James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941*, and Kenneth Bryden, *Old Age Pensions and Policy-Making in Canada*. In his examination of King's Green Book proposals of 1945, Alvin Finkel argues, however, that whatever welfare policies the postwar federal Liberals promised in response to the perceived threat from the CCF and a general Canadian demand for social welfare programs, the policies were doomed to provide much less. Postwar prosperity, combined with a "declining interest in reform, particularly on the part of business and medical elites, contributed to the federal government's unwillingness to pursue reform vigorously." Alvin Finkel, "Paradise Postponed: A Re-examination of the Green Book Proposals of 1945," 120.
- 13 See, for example, Walter D. Young, "The CCF: The Radical Background." Young explores the urban socialist and labour elements that supported and characterized the CCF movement and brought the party to power in Saskatchewan in 1944. In "CCF Town and Country," Kenneth McNaught argues that "the movement of the 'Thirties sprang from urban labour, the Christian social gospel of the Protestant churches, and . . . the radical urban intellectuals—as well as from the soil of the wheat belt" (213).
- 14 See, for example, David Laycock, *Populism and Democratic Thought in the Canadian Prairies, 1910–1945*.
- 15 Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*, 6. Piven and Cloward's classic study was first published in 1971.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 17 See Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*, 29–42.
- 18 Much of the literature exploring the gendered aspects of unemployment relief focuses on the differences in how relief policy was applied to unemployed men and women. See, for example, Theresa Healy, "Engendering Resistance: Women Respond to Relief in Saskatoon, 1930–1932"; Katrina Srigley, "Working Lives and Simple Pleasures: Single, Employed Women in a Depression-Era City, 1929–1939"; Denyse Baillargeon, *Making Do: Women, Family, and Home in Montreal During the Great Depression*; Margaret Hobbs, "Equality and Difference: Feminism and the Defence of Women Workers During the Great Depression," and "Gendering Work and Welfare: Women's Relationship to Wage-Work and Social Policy in Canada During the Depression"; Margaret Hobbs and Ruth Roach Pierson, "A Kitchen That Wastes No Steps . . . : Gender, Class, and the Home Improvement Plan, 1936–40"; Ruth Roach Pierson, "Gender and the Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada"; Laura Hollingsworth and Vappu Tyyska, "The Hidden Producers: Women's Household Production During the Great Depression"; and Mary Patricia Powell, "A Response to the Depression: The Local Council of Women of Vancouver."

- 19 Joan Scott made this point some twenty years ago in “Gender: A Useful Category of Analysis.”
- 20 On these relational elements of masculinity, see Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800*, 2.
- 21 Lara Campbell, “Respectable Citizens of Canada: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in the Great Depression, Ontario.”
- 22 Cynthia Comacchio, “A Postscript for Father: Defining a New Fatherhood in Interwar Canada,” 394. For recent Canadian work on fathers more generally, see Robert Rutherford, “Fatherhood and the Social Construction of Memory: Breadwinning and Male Parenting on a Job Frontier, 1945–66; Elizabeth Jane Errington, *Wives and Mothers, School Mistresses and Scullery Maids: Working Women in Upper Canada, 1790–1840*, 73–76; John Demos, “The Changing Faces of Fatherhood”; Frederick W. Bozett and Shirley M. H. Hanson, eds., *Fatherhood and Families in Cultural Context*; Glen H. Elder, Jr., John Modell, and Ross D. Parke, eds., *Children in Time and Place: Developmental and Historical Insights*; and Robert L. Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History*.
- 23 R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*.
- 24 A useful review of the origins of the male breadwinner role can be found in Colin Creighton, “The Rise of the Male Breadwinner Family: A Reappraisal.” On Canada in particular, see Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*. See also Cynthia Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family: Domesticity in Canada, 1850–1940*, and Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*. As Griswold argues, many men who lost the means to earn wages also lost their self-respect. Some stopped trying to find work, others left their families out of a sense of shame, and others still began to drink heavily, hoping to forget their troubles. He cites a 1940 survey of American households according to which more than 1.5 million husbands walked out on their wives and families during the Depression years. Griswold suggests that state and federal relief and welfare initiatives were aimed at compensating for the effects of the loss of the male breadwinner role.
- 25 Sara Horrell and Jane Humphries, “Women’s Labour Force Participation and the Transition to the Male Breadwinner Family, 1790–1865,” 89. See also Ivy Pinchbeck, *Women Workers and the Industrial Revolution, 1750–1850*, and Creighton, “The Rise of the Male Breadwinner Family.”
- 26 See E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, 55, and “Learning About Manhood: Gender Ideals and the Middle-Class Family in Nineteenth-Century America.” Historian Michael Kimmel locates the earliest emergence of the term *breadwinner* in the period 1810–20. At that time, the term meant “taking care of one’s family.” Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, 20. The “breadwinner ethic” is discussed extensively in Michael Gordon, “The Ideal

Husband as Depicted in the Nineteenth Century Marriage Manual,” and in Griswold, *Fatherhood in America*, 10–33.

- 27 Anna Clark, “The New Poor Law and the Breadwinner Wage: Contrasting Assumptions,” 261. Emphasis in the original.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 262. Historian José Harris assesses the situation differently, asserting that many union leaders were suspicious of the National Insurance Act. José Harris, *Unemployment and Politics: A Study in English Social Policy, 1886–1914*, 328.
- 29 Horrell and Humphries, “Women’s Labour Force Participation,” 113.
- 30 Martha May, “The Historical Problem of the Family Wage: The Ford Motor Company and the Five Dollar Day,” 404.
- 31 *Ibid.* This conclusion was related to the rise and professionalization of new medical experts.
- 32 Sociologist Wally Seccombe makes an argument similar to that of Martha May, showing how the economic and social dislocation flowing from the First Industrial Revolution forced the emerging British working class to rely on multiple family earning strategies that saw all family members contributing to the household income. In the late nineteenth century, however, following the Second Industrial Revolution, men’s wages rose and arguments for the family wage gained ground, leaving women and children to play smaller roles in the paid labour force. But not all members of the family experienced their working and non-working lives in the same way, nor were their interests and goals necessarily the same. In “Gender and Labor History: Learning from the Past, Looking to the Future,” historian Ava Baron suggests that because “men and women were differently situated in the family, the workplace, and the community, their experiences of these institutions may have diverged” (6). Bettina Bradbury likewise points out that in Canada, “power and rights were not evenly distributed within any families” through the second half of the nineteenth century.

Seccombe’s conclusions about industrializing Britain largely confirm Bradbury’s research on industrializing Montréal. Marking the period between 1861 and 1881, Bradbury argues, “was the growing importance of wage-earning offspring and the increasing likelihood that sons and daughters in their teens and twenties would remain at home and contribute their wages to the family.” Without this income to top up the family head’s wages, complemented by women’s careful shopping and ability to stretch wages, “poverty, even starvation, would have been chronic.” But near the end of the century, the situation began to change. By 1891, adult children, especially males, were increasingly boarding on their own outside of the family home. At the same time, fewer families were sending children under the age of fifteen out to work. Behind these shifts in the family economy was a stronger economy that resulted in higher wages and new capitalist labour requirements that offered

- smaller, more marginal roles to women. Bettina Bradbury, *Working Families: Age, Gender, and Daily Survival in Industrializing Montreal*, 220.
- 33 See Mark Rosenfeld, “‘It Was a Hard Life’: Class and Gender in the Rhythms of a Railway Town, 1920–1950.” This role division contrasts sharply with the rural experience, where men and women worked together on the family farm, although typically at different jobs. See, for instance, Bradford James Rennie, *The Rise of Agrarian Democracy: The United Farmers and Farm Women of Alberta, 1909–1921*.
 - 34 Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers*, 2. As historians like Molly Ladd-Taylor point out, however, all “maternalists” did not necessarily share the same goals or approaches. Ladd-Taylor distinguishes between “sentimental maternalists” and “progressive maternalists.” Molly Ladd-Taylor, *Mother-Work: Women, Child Welfare, and the State, 1890–1930*, 136. Neither should historians assume that maternalist discourses and actions were expressed only through notions of a bourgeois domesticity, thus neglecting, say, working-class notions of domesticity.
 - 35 Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, “Womanly Duties: Maternalist Politics and the Origins of Welfare States in France, Germany, Great Britain, and the United States, 1880–1920,” 1079.
 - 36 In *Engendering the State*, Christie argues that with the Depression, the maternalist discourse changed to a decidedly paternalist one. Alvin Finkel disagrees with this analysis, noting that Christie fails to properly account for class differences among welfare recipients or the roles of big business and the Mackenzie King administration. For a useful overview, see Alvin Finkel, “Welfare for Whom? Class, Gender, and Race in Social Policy.”
 - 37 Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800–1991*, 236. This figure, of course, says nothing about women’s long-time contributions to the family economy—that is, the work women performed that did not appear on censuses and other government records, including planting gardens and tending livestock to help meet families’ dietary needs, mending old clothing, taking in and looking after boarders, and generally managing the household. For more on these contributions, see Bradbury, *Working Families*.
 - 38 Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919–1939*, 113.
 - 39 *Ibid.*, 125–27. Historian Gerald Friesen suggests that most families in Prairie cities almost certainly relied on supplementary earnings in addition to the main breadwinner’s wages. Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, 288.
 - 40 Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 288.

- 41 This is, of course, assuming a distinction between a breadwinner ideal and the reality for most working-class people, many of whom could not sustain anything approaching the ideal. See Christie, *Engendering the State*; Margaret Jane Hillyard Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920–1997*, 202–3; and Palmer, *Working-Class Experience*.
- 42 Comacchio, *The Infinite Bonds of Family*, 122–30. See also Srigley, *Breadwinning Daughters*.
- 43 Little, *No Car, No Radio*, 204. For similar attitudes in the United States, see Peter N. Stearns, *Be a Man! Males in Modern Society*, 127, and James A. Doyle, *The Male Experience*, 42.
- 44 In *No Car, No Radio*, Margaret Jane Hillyard Little likewise argues that “the model of a male breadwinner with dependent wife and children underwent tremendous stress during this period” (204).
- 45 Across Canada, for example, the number of urban dwellers gained steady ground against the number of rural dwellers, especially during the opening decades of the twentieth century. In 1901, the nation’s urban-rural split stood at roughly 2 million to 3.4 million, respectively. Ten years later, the disparity was much reduced, at 3.3 million to 3.9 million. By 1921, Canada’s urban and rural populations were in a near dead heat at approximately 4.4 million each. In 1931, for the first time, the urban population was larger, with approximately 5.6 million urban and 4.8 million rural Canadians. See Statistics Canada, Summary Tables, “Population, Urban and Rural, by Province and Territory,” <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/101/cst01/demo62a-eng.htm>.
- 46 Edward K. Spann, in *The New Metropolis: New York City, 1840–1857*, follows closely these critical mid-century years that saw New York City emerge as the leading metropolis of a fast-growing industrial and cultural powerhouse nation. At the same time, he does not neglect the city’s increasingly impoverished working-class and immigrant populations. See also Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788–1850*.
- 47 See William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West*.
- 48 On Toronto, see Donald Campbell Masters, *The Rise of Toronto, 1850–1890*, and Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture*. On Montréal, see Bettina Bradbury and Tamara Myers, eds., *Negotiating Identities in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Montreal*.
- 49 Donald G. Wetherell, “Making New Identities: Alberta Small Towns Confront the City, 1900–1950,” 176.

- 50 See, for example, Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 205–11; Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 158–59; and Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History*, esp. chap. 6.
- 51 See also Stanley K. Schultz and Clay McShane, “To Engineer the Metropolis: Sewers, Sanitation, and City Planning in Late Nineteenth-Century America”
- 52 Alan F. J. Artibise, “City-Building in the Canadian West: From Boosterism to Corporatism.”
- 53 See, for example, Carolyn Strange *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880–1930*, and Joan Sangster, *Girl Trouble: Female Delinquency in English Canada*.
- 54 This is a problem that continues to bedevil western cities although the natural resources fuelling their economies have changed.

1 *The Rise of the City Relief Machines*

- 1 “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” PAM, P2542, file 5, was a report produced by the Winnipeg Unemployment Relief Committee.
- 2 [Testimony of] Representatives of single, unemployed men before Cabinet, 10 July 1936, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 996.
- 3 At a meeting with provincial officials, a Saskatoon delegation “stressed the point that unemployed from the smaller towns and villages were accustomed to flock into the cities in the winter months, thus aggravating the general situation.” Provision of Relief Work Is Requested,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 November 1929. See also “City Warns Unemployed Men Seeking Work. . . .” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 4 January 1930. One common municipal response was to call a meeting with provincial officials. See, for example, “City to Urge Unemployment Parlay Soon—Council Passes Motion Asking Gov’t to Call Conference,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 29 October 1929.
- 4 Stockholders lost roughly \$40 billion in stocks and shares during the autumn of 1929. Sean Dennis Cashman, *America Ascendant: From Theodore Roosevelt to FDR in the Century of American Power, 1901–1945*, 242.
- 5 Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, 384. See also Graham D. Taylor and Peter A. Baskerville, *A Concise History of Business in Canada*, 372.
- 6 “Editorial,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 11 December 1929.
- 7 Unemployment Committee Report, 23 December 1929, SA, D500 III 895.

- 8 “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” 3. See also Barbara Roberts, “Shovelling Out the Unemployed,” 2. Roberts describes the Canadian Union of Municipalities circulating letters among city councils nation-wide, seeking information on local relief costs and practices in an effort to make a compelling case for federal unemployment relief aid in the autumn of 1929.
- 9 See James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941*, 14. For a fuller history of unemployment dating from classical times through the Middle Ages and into the twentieth century, see John A. Garraty, *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy*.
- 10 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 14. See also Peter A. Baskerville and Eric W. Sager, *Unwilling Idlers: The Urban Unemployed and Their Families in Late Victorian Canada*; John Taylor, “Relief from Relief: The Cities’ Answer to Depression Dependency”; and John Herd Thompson and Allen Seager, *Canada 1922–1939: Decades of Discord*.
- 11 During the recession of 1921–22, the City of Winnipeg helped more than twelve thousand people who were affected by unemployment. During the winter of 1931–32, the city helped over thirty-seven thousand people in a single month—more than three times as many.
- 12 “Relief of Unemployment in Manitoba Either by Direct Relief or Relief Works,” 15 February 1932, PAM, G8032, Reports, 1931–32.
- 13 A. B. McKillop, “A Communist in City Hall,” 41.
- 14 Taylor and Baskerville, *A Concise History of Business in Canada*, 371.
- 15 “Relief of Unemployment in Manitoba Either by Direct Relief or Relief Works.”
- 16 “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” 9–11. James M. Pitsula shows how the same practices were employed in Regina, where “the Regina Welfare Bureau did not distribute relief to the unemployed. This function was left to the Civic Relief Board, which was appointed by City Council.” James M. Pitsula, “The Saskatchewan Voluntary Sector in the Context of Social Enterprise: A Case Study of Family Service Regina,” 19.
- 17 Special relief officer H. F. McKee explained the way it worked to David Mitchell, the city commissioner: “All relief . . . except certain specified exceptions such as medical attention and transportation, is divided on a three-way basis between the Federal Government, the Provincial Government, and the Municipality, and no relief is given unless the division is made on that basis. The result is that all our accounting and regulations must be carried out co-operatively as between the three parties participating. In fact, every move we make is conducted on that basis, and we are fortunate so far, that we have been able to keep harmony in the Department through the sound common

sense of the officers dealing with the other.” Letter from McKee to Mitchell, 8 February 1933, EA, RG II, class 149, file 19.

- 18 James G. MacGregor, *Edmonton: A History*, 132. There is, of course, a much more engaging and complicated story (and an expansive historiography) behind the appearance of Europeans in the interior. See, for example Arthur J. Ray, *Indians in the Fur Trade: Their Role as Trappers, Hunters, and Middlemen in the Lands Southwest of Hudson Bay, 1660–1870*; J. M. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian-White Relations in Canada*; Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815*; and Theodore Binnema, *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains*.
- 19 “Edmonton Becomes a City,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, 9 November 1904.
- 20 MacGregor, *Edmonton*, 139.
- 21 Carl Betke, “The Development of Urban Community in Prairie Canada, Edmonton,” 165–78. Betke describes in some detail the early character of the city, drawing mainly on newspaper reports from the *Edmonton Bulletin* and focusing on the years 1897, 1906, 1913, and 1921.
- 22 *Ibid.*, 49–52.
- 23 *Ibid.*, 139–40. James H. Gray, in *Red Lights on the Prairies*, describes the booming conditions in Edmonton in 1906:

There was work in abundance in Edmonton for anybody with physical stamina or any kind of skill. There were pick-and-shovel jobs without limit—mining coal, digging up and gravelling the streets, excavating basements, and putting in the miles of sewer and water mains that were dug every year. By 1906 there was no way to keep up with the building boom. Not only had the new provincial government embarked on a massive construction program, but private enterprise was putting in warehouses, factories, railway shops, yards, and office buildings. Topping it all was the house building boom in all the bright new subdivisions. It got so far out of hand that many of the new houses went in without even foundations, let alone sewer connections. (103–4)
- 24 Real estate speculation was one of the principal economic activities in the city at the time. As an example of this aspect of the boom town, a Red Deer farmer purchased ninety feet of front footage in the downtown core for \$13,500 in 1905 and sold it for \$31,500 less than one year later. Betke, “The Development of Urban Community,” 184.
- 25 *Ibid.*, 170–73; MacGregor, *Edmonton*, 167 and 301. For a full discussion of early civic elites, see Alan F. J. Artibise, “Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities, 1871–1913.” Artibise points out that “while the role of municipal governments and business organizations in altering the rate and pattern of urban development on the prairies was certainly limited by outside forces, the growth, shape, and character of the five major cities owes [*sic*] much to

the policies devised and vigorously applied by these bodies in response to the possibilities and problems that emerged for their communities” (211). In Saskatoon, the most important like-minded bodies were the Board of Trade, the Saskatoon Club, and the Saskatchewan Power Company. The membership of all three groups overlapped and represented the influential business voice in the city. For descriptions of the work of these groups, see Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon: The First Half-Century*, 92–100. See also Gerald Friesen’s account of urban elites on the prairies in *The Canadian Prairies*, 286–87.

- 26 Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 286. See also L. D. McCann, “Urban Growth in Western Canada, 1881–1961,” and Paul Voisey, “The Urbanization of the Canadian Prairies, 1871–1916.” For a consideration of early boosterism and its relationship to city playgrounds and parks, see Susan Evelyn Markham, “The Development of Parks and Playgrounds in Selected Canadian Prairie Cities, 1880–1930.”
- 27 By spring 1906, the Edmonton-area Dominion Immigration Agent estimated a daily arrival of three to five hundred people into the city. MacGregor, *Edmonton*, 153. Not all of these would stay in the city, of course, as many stopped in Edmonton only long enough to claim their 160-acre parcel of land in rural Alberta.
- 28 Gray, *Red Lights on the Prairies*, 104–10. James Gray estimates that by 1911, some eighty-five hundred single men were living and working in the city, which at that time had a total population of a little more than twenty-five thousand. See also A. F. Dreger, *A Most Diversified Character: A Pioneer’s Memories of Early Strathcona and Edmonton*; Owen D. Jones, “The Historical Geography of Edmonton, Alberta”; Catherine C. Cole, “Garment Manufacturing in Edmonton, 1911–1939”; and Bob Hesketh and Frances Swyripa, eds. *Edmonton: The Life of a City*.
- 29 Quoted in Betke, “The Development of Urban Community,” 290–91.
- 30 One important early union was the Carpenters and Joiners, who, in April 1906, sought an eight-hour day and a minimum \$3 daily wage, and threatened to strike if the city would not comply. The union was successful. See *ibid.*, 224–25, and MacGregor, *Edmonton*, 156.
- 31 Carl Betke, “The Original City of Edmonton: A Derivative Prairie Urban Community,” 326.
- 32 Piali Das Gupta, “Well Within the Margins: Prostitutes in Edmonton, 1904–1939,” 33–34. Das Gupta drew on various censuses that relate to the working-class composition of the city in the first decade of the twentieth century.
- 33 Betke, “The Original City of Edmonton,” 312.
- 34 *Ibid.*, 311–12.

- 35 MacGregor, *Edmonton*, 184. Saskatchewan had similar figures. As historian Bill Waiser points out in “The Myth of Multiculturalism in Early Saskatchewan” (61), Saskatchewan was primarily a white, Protestant, Anglo-Canadian province.
- 36 Quoted in Lewis H. Thomas, “Saskatoon, 1883–1920: The Formative Years,” 240.
- 37 *Ibid.*, 241.
- 38 John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History*, 72 and 86.
- 39 Thomas, “Saskatoon, 1883–1920,” 247–48.
- 40 Jean E. Murray, “The Contest for the University of Saskatchewan.” See also Michael Haydon, “The People’s University? The University of Saskatchewan and the Province of Saskatchewan,” 215.
- 41 Artibise, “Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities,” 418.
- 42 Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 323.
- 43 *Ibid.*, 106.
- 44 Quoted in Thomas, “Saskatoon, 1883–1920,” 256.
- 45 Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 11–14. One dealer reportedly made an average of \$600 per day during the height of the boom in 1912.
- 46 Saskatoon applied for and received city status from the provincial government on 1 July 1906, increasing its borrowing power from 10 to 20 percent of assessment.
- 47 Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 322.
- 48 MacGregor, *Edmonton*, 204.
- 49 Between 1912 and 1914, the city paved thirty streets and graded another 155, laid and paved seventy more miles of sidewalks, and doubled the length of water mains. Furthermore, by 1913, the municipal authorities’ propensity toward annexation of territories outside the city in anticipation of future growth had saddled the city with serious sanitation problems in forty-seven new but far-flung subdivisions. MacGregor, *Edmonton*, 202.
- 50 Hans P. Werner, “Integration in Two Cities: A Comparative History of Protestant Ethnic German Immigrants in Winnipeg, Canada and Bielefeld, Germany, 1947–1989,” 36–37.
- 51 Jim Silver, “The Origins of Winnipeg’s Packinghouse Industry: Transitions from Trade to Manufacture,” 19.

- 52 Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 276. For an overview of Winnipeg's early development, see David J. Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike*, esp. chap. 1.
- 53 Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 210–11. Friesen quotes from Randolph Richard Rostecki, "The Growth of Winnipeg, 1870–1888" (MA thesis, University of Manitoba, 1980), 29–49. See also Don Nerbas, "Wealth and Privilege: An Analysis of Winnipeg's Early Business Elite," 47; Kurt J. Korneski, "Liberalism in Winnipeg, 1890s–1920s: Charles W. Gordon, John W. Dafoe, Minnie J. B. Campbell, and Francis M. Beynon"; and Alan F. J. Artibise, *Winnipeg: A Social History of Urban Growth, 1874–1914*, and *Winnipeg: An Illustrated History*.
- 54 Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 211. Historian Brian McKillop describes the development of Winnipeg's geographic-ethnic-class divide this way: "The city, like the province itself, was the product of two waves of immigration: the first mainly Anglo-Saxon, British, and Ontarian from roughly 1870 to 1890, and the second, predominantly eastern European, from 1890 to 1914. The result was that the city developed a 'we-they' dichotomy both spatially and in its prevailing political ethos. Winnipeg had been built around a railroad and a river, and the coming of this second, 'different' set of immigrants dictated that henceforth there would be a 'wrong' side of the tracks and a 'right' side of the river." McKillop, "A Communist in City Hall," 41.
- 55 Thomas W. Dickens, "Winnipeg, Imperialism, and the Queen Victoria Diamond Jubilee Celebration, 1897," 1.
- 56 W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, 301.
- 57 Winnipeg Development and Industrial Bureau, Fourth Annual Report, 1910, 145.
- 58 Alan F. J. Artibise, ed., *Gateway City: Documents on the City of Winnipeg, 1873–1913*, 265.
- 59 "All People's Mission Annual Report, 1908–09," 199. Winnipeg's All People's Mission was formed in the early 1890s and, beginning in 1899, served as the official charitable arm of the Methodist General Board of Missions. Alan Artibise notes that the Mission was only one of many similar charities until 1907, when J. S. Woodsworth assumed its leadership and turned it into the city's pre-eminent charitable organization. The Mission catered to Native and foreign-born people, regardless of religious background. For more on Woodsworth, see Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914–1928*, and Kenneth McNaught, *A Prophet in Politics: A Biography of J. S. Woodsworth*.
- 60 See Rebecca Coulter, "Teenagers in Edmonton, 1921–1931: Experiences of Gender and Class," 32–35; David Leadbeater, "The Development of Capitalism in the Area Currently Called Alberta"; Morris Zaslow, *The Opening of*

the Canadian North, 1870–1914, 54, 62–63; and Liza Piper, *The Industrial Transformation of Subarctic Canada*.

- 61 Garraty, *Unemployment in History*, 12–30. American political economists Richard Vedder and Lowell Gallaway note that “the word ‘unemployment’ did not even exist during most of the [nineteenth] century.” Richard K. Vedder and Lowell E. Gallaway, *Out of Work: Unemployment and Government in Twentieth-Century America*, 1.
- 62 Garraty, *Unemployment in History*, 15–16. See also Sheilagh Ogilvie, “Guilds, Efficiency and Social Capital: Evidence from German Proto-Industry?” Ogilvie argues that the uses of guild training—and particularly certification—served to “exclude identifiable groups (unmarried women, women generally, bastards, those with certain religious affiliations) thereby reducing competition against guild members” (308). The skills training that guilds insisted upon was, in Ogilvie’s view, less about maintaining quality control and more about maintaining members’ status and work availability.
- 63 Garraty, *Unemployment in History*, 29.
- 64 Rondo Cameron, an influential economic historian, argues that underlying the agricultural crisis of the period was “the failure of agricultural technology to advance significantly (to meet the growing demands for food by an increasing population), with a consequent stagnation or probably even a decline in agricultural productivity.” Rondo Cameron, *A Concise Economic History of the World: From Paleolithic Times to the Present*, 106.
- 65 Garraty, *Unemployment in History*, 42–56.
- 66 Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts*, 252–53.
- 67 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 68 *The Vindicator*, January 1877, quoted in Keyssar, *Out of Work*, 3.
- 69 Keyssar, *Out of Work*, 3.
- 70 *Ibid.*, 5. British historian John Welshman adds to the idea of unemployability by arguing that until 1914, the concept “embraced those unable and those unwilling to work.” Through the 1920s, both of these categories were perceived as belonging to a “social problem group.” In the context of the 1930s, however, British social policy-makers became increasingly concerned with the role of long-term unemployment in contributing to an unwillingness to work. See J. Welshman, “The Concept of the Unemployable,” 598. For the Canadian experience, see Peter A. Baskerville and Eric W. Sager, *Unwilling Idlers: The Urban Unemployed and Their Families in Late Victorian Canada*, and Jennifer Anne Stephen, *Pick One Intelligent Girl: Employability, Domesticity, and the Gendering of Canada’s Welfare State, 1939–1947*.

- 71 As the editor of the *Star-Phoenix* explained early in 1930, “It has generally been understood that the granting of casual or temporary relief to persons out of work or otherwise distressed is the business of . . . municipalities.” “Ottawa and Unemployment,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 11 January 1930. See also Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*; John Taylor, “Relief from Relief: The Cities’ Answer to Depression Dependency”; and Frederic M. Miller, “National Assistance or Unemployment Assistance? The British Cabinet and Relief Policy, 1932–33.”
- 72 Mariana Valverde, “The Mixed Social Economy as a Canadian Tradition.” See also James M. Pitsula, “The Mixed Social Economy of Unemployment Relief in Regina During the 1930s.” Joey Noble explores an earlier iteration of private charity in the nineteenth century as a function of class fear in “Classifying the Poor: Toronto Charities, 1850–1880.” In a similar vein, sociologist Paula Maurutto, in *Governing Charities: Church and State in Toronto’s Catholic Archdiocese, 1850–1950*, illustrates how Toronto’s Catholic churches worked together with and became increasingly entrenched in provincially and municipally organized welfare bureaucracies to exercise control over relief recipients. At the same time, both Toronto’s Catholic Archdiocese and the provincial government used the increasingly bureaucratized welfare system to control the day-to-day activities of local Catholic charitable organizations.
- 73 Valverde, “The Mixed Social Economy,” 36.
- 74 *Ibid.*, 43; “legislative machinery” is from *The Globe*, 27 February 1874.
- 75 Letter from H. F. McKee to Commissioner D. Mitchell, 8 February 1933, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 19. See also Shelley Anne Marie Bosetti-Piche, “The Interest of Edmonton Club Women in Education Health and Welfare, 1919–1939.”
- 76 Betke, “The Development of Urban Community,” 75.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 43–44. See also Edmund H. Dale, “The Role of Successive Town and City Councils in the Evolution of Edmonton, 1892 to 1966.”
- 78 This sketch of Winnipeg’s early welfare history is derived from “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” 18–45. On Aids to Dependent Children programs in Manitoba, see Lorna Hurl, “The Politics of Child Welfare in Manitoba, 1922–1924.”
- 79 “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” 3.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 81 In Edmonton, private charities included the Salvation Army, the Canteen Fund, the Canadian Legion, the Red Cross Society, the *Edmonton Bulletin*’s “Not Forgotten Fund,” the *Edmonton Journal*’s “Sunshine Society,” the Knights of Columbus, the Royal Society of St. George, the Northumberland and Durham Association, the Order of the Royal Purple, the King Albert Society, the Elk’s Lodge, the Imperial Order of the Daughters of Empire (IODE),

and the All People's Church. "Proposes Appointment of Social Service Exchange," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 January 1930. In 1905, Edmonton spent \$493 on relief and welfare. MacGregor, *Edmonton*, 147. Saskatoon's private charitable organizations included church groups like the St. Vincent de Paul Society and women's groups like the IODE. Kerr and Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 161.

- 82 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 26.
- 83 Ibid.
- 84 Udo Sautter, "The Origins of the Employment Service of Canada, 1900–1920," 90.
- 85 Ibid., 95.
- 86 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 20.
- 87 Ibid., 25.
- 88 Report of Winnipeg Emergency Unemployment Relief Office, 1921–1922, p. 1, PAM, G8067. Although the report does not explicitly say so, the sort of relief offered by the city suggests that it was mainly single men who called at the city's wood yard that winter to apply for relief. Married men with families, for instance, would have needed groceries, not meal tickets, and accommodations at the Immigration Hall would not have been helpful because married men with families typically had homes in the city.
- 89 Ibid., 30–31.
- 90 *Labour Gazette*, May 1921, 682.
- 91 By January 1922, three hundred to five hundred men could be found daily cutting and sawing wood for their relief.
- 92 See reports in the *Edmonton Journal*, 3 March, 4 March, and 21 March 1922.
- 93 Lynn MacKay notes that the practice of less eligibility predates the phrase. In her study focusing on the year 1817 at the St. Martin in the Fields workhouse, for instance, she notes that "although parish officials did not actually use this phrase [of less eligibility] in 1817/18, they were certainly adhering to the principle that conditions in the house should be less eligible than those obtaining in the community at large." Lynn MacKay, "A Culture of Poverty? The St. Martin in the Fields Workhouse, 1817," 217.
- 94 Quoted in Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 6. See also Mimi Abramovitz, *Regulating the Lives of Women: Social Policy from Colonial Times to the Present*. According to Abramovitz, "From the start, social welfare policy has been shaped by the work ethic and the belief that the provision of benefits to able-bodied persons will weaken their motivation to work" (1).

- 95 MacKay, "A Culture of Poverty," 209.
- 96 Report of Emergency Unemployment Relief Office, 1921–1922, 33.
- 97 *Ibid.*, 16.
- 98 Commissioner's Report No. 1-1931, 5 January 1931, SA, D500 III 880.
- 99 Letter from Chief Engineer Archibald to City Commissioner Leslie, 24 December 1929, SA, D500 III 895.
- 100 Minutes of Conference Proceedings, 1 March 1930, LAC, RG 27, vol. 3133. It should be borne in mind that few unemployment figures, whether in this book or elsewhere, are entirely reliable. Unemployment figures were collected according to different criteria with little regard for uniformity. Often, the number of unemployed recorded in any given urban centre constituted only those persons who registered for unemployment relief. But even this number is problematic because numbers of registered unemployed persons shifted according to seasonal rhythms. Numbers also typically did not include women or the underemployed (which actually meant unemployed for many). Generally speaking, most researchers during the Depression reckoned that at the Depression's lowest point (1933), some 30 percent of Canada's working population was unemployed. But this number is also problematic because the Depression's effects were felt unevenly across the country, hitting different regions harder at different times. This non-uniformity might in part be explained by the effects of different economic structures. In the Prairie West, for instance, the low point of the Depression did not arrive until 1937, a time when much of the country had already been on the mend for several years.
- 101 At that early stage, Saskatoon did not yet count single men; city authorities assumed they could get along on their own on farms.
- 102 Minutes of Conference Proceedings, 1 March 1930. Equally arresting are the costs of relief work to the city. According to the minutes, Winnipeg spent \$27,000 on relief works over the whole of the 1928–29 winter season. By the close of the 1929–30 season, this amount had jumped to \$200,000. The *Edmonton Bulletin* subsequently reported that Winnipeg had 373 married men on relief in 1928 and 285 in 1929. "Winnipeg Relief Period Extended," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 15 April 1930.
- 103 "Gov't Gives Work to 200 on Pen Site," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 9 January 1930. See also "Unemployment Bill Is \$600 Daily," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 29 January 1930; "Relief Work to Stop Here April 10," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 4 April 1930; and "Contentious Matters Face City Council," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 22 March 1930.
- 104 "Contentious Matters Face City Council." Winnipeg's relief costs increased just as dramatically, from \$150,000 in 1929–30, to \$1.6 million in 1930–31, to \$4.2 million in 1931–32. Report of Operations and Costs Year Ending December

31st 1933, PAM, G8032, Yearly Reports, City of Winnipeg Unemployment Relief Department.

- 105 “To the Aldermen and Citizens of the City of Edmonton: Report of the City Commissioners,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, Budget Report, 26 November 1929. Saskatoon’s relief expenditures increased just as rapidly: from 1930 to 1933, the city’s annual spending on relief was \$13,000, \$186,000, \$433,000, and \$590,000, respectively. Estimates for 1934 came to \$625,000, although the city’s commissioner thought “that may be a low estimate.” Memo of Conference Between Members of Saskatoon’s City Council and Saskatchewan Premier J. T. M. Anderson, 7 February 1934, SA, 1069-1209. Winnipeg spent \$64,282 on direct relief over the winter of 1929–30. The following winter, the city spent \$1,007,614, or more than sixteen times the cost of the preceding winter. Annual Report, Destitution and Unemployment Relief for the Fiscal Year May 1st 1930 to April 30th, 1931, PAM, G8030, Reports, 1931–32.
- 106 See Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 153–55; Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*; Taylor, “Relief from Relief”; Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*; Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History*; and Michiel Horn, *The Great Depression of the 1930s in Canada*.
- 107 For general treatments of the Depression on the Prairies, see, for example, Palmer and Palmer, *Alberta*, 244–80; Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, 279–302; and Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies*, 382–417.
- 108 All three cities, however, also supplied mining, lumbering, and other resource extraction operations. See Donald G. Wetherell, “Making New Identities: Alberta Small Towns Confront the City, 1900–1950,” 180–81; Leonard K. Eaton, “Winnipeg: The Northern Anchor of the Wholesale Trade”; and A. F. Burghardt, “A Hypothesis About Gateway Cities.”
- 109 “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” 2.
- 110 “Relief of Unemployment in Manitoba Either by Direct Relief or Relief Works.” Winnipeg officials also made comparisons in this document with the only large Canadian centre to the West: “But Winnipeg, unlike comparable larger centres in the East, lacked both the age and diversity of many of the key activities of a long established community life, or the unusual variety of resource and activity of Vancouver.”
- 111 Prior to 1932, according to James Struthers, relief was mainly confined to the unskilled (whom Struthers defines as “a class generally believed to lack the Protestant virtues of self-reliance, thrift, and sobriety”). Struthers argues that after 1932, “skilled workers and middle-class members of society had exhausted their assets after three years of unemployment and depression. The result was a noticeable change in the type of people coming onto the dole.” Winnipeg’s report appears to confirm this characterization. Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 74. See also Denyse Baillargeon, “If You Had No Money, You Had No

Trouble, Did You? Montreal Working-Class Housewives During the Great Depression.”

- 112 “A Report on Unemployment in Winnipeg, 1932,” PAM, G8030 Unemployment.
- 113 “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” 14.
- 114 American historian Timothy J. Gilfoyle notes that “increasingly, urban political historians not only reject the ‘machine’ paradigm for its biographical, episodic, and manichean treatments of urban politics, but remain critical of reducing politics to issues of symbolism and culture.” Timothy J. Gilfoyle, “White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History,” 185. Among the critics is Jonathan C. Teaford in “Finis for Tweed and Steffens: Rewriting the History of Urban Rule.”
- 115 “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” 11. Distinguishing between specifically Depression-related unemployment relief and other welfare services made sense. For one thing, senior government contributions to municipal relief efforts made the same distinction. It was easier, in other words, for municipalities to keep monies directed toward Depression-related unemployment problems separate from those that fell under other private, municipal, and provincial arrangements. This was especially true in the wake of a series of important federal unemployment relief acts passed by the Bennett-led Conservatives between 1930 and 1934. These acts authorized the federal government to enter into cost-sharing arrangements with provinces and municipalities for the provision of unemployment relief to, among others, unemployed urban dwellers.
- 116 “Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934,” 10–11.
- 117 *Ibid.* By way of comparison, Winnipeg’s Social Welfare Commission, which administered non-Depression-related welfare services, claimed a total of only 860 “open” cases in the spring of 1934 and helped an average of roughly five hundred people each month at a cost of \$200,000 per year. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
- 118 The Civic Relief Department, Under T. S. Magee, Deals with Ordinary Indigents, (Town Act), Mothers’ Allowance Cases, Old Age Pensions, and Neglected Children, 8 February 1933, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 19.
- 119 Letter from H. F. McKee to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 8 February 1933, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 19. McKee explained the way relief functioned in Edmonton in response to a query from the Home and Property Owners’ Association.
- 120 Letter from H. F. McKee to David Mitchell, 2 February 1933, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 19. The city spent nearly \$65,000 dollars during November 1932 on groceries, rent, fuel, light and water, clothing, and medical costs. The relief costs for the entire year of 1932 came to just over \$1 million.

- 121 Letter from H. F. McKee to David Mitchell re: Administration Relief Costs, 7 December 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 17.
- 122 “Unemployed Threaten to Take Action,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 7 May 1934. See also Jeff O’Brien, Ruth W. Millar, and William P. Delainey, *Saskatoon: A History in Photographs*, 59–60.
- 123 Minutes, Civic Relief Board Files, 24 November 1932, SA, 1009. The numbers were up considerably from the same month one year before. During a typical week in November 1931, the city provided relief to 717 families at a cost of \$4,482, averaging \$6.25 per family.
- 124 Teaford, “Finis for Tweed and Steffens,” 138. As Teaford notes, up to the 1970s, historians of city politics were preoccupied with the boss-reformer dialectic, neglecting the important roles played by city comptrollers (who drafted budgets), city engineers (who planned sanitation and waterworks systems), city solicitors (who advised city councils on all legal matters and drafted bylaws), and “the whole staff of professional bureaucrats (who conducted the day-to-day business of running the city)” (138).
- 125 Unemployment Relief Reports, PAM, G8030.
- 126 “Civic Board for Relief Now Mooted,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 20 September 1932.
- 127 The description of Edmonton’s Special Relief Department activities is drawn from “Conduct of the Relief Department,” 8 February 1933, EA, RG II, class 149, file 19.
- 128 Ibid. The investigation branch employed a small group of workers comprising five investigators in the field, a “special man with a car,” an interpreter, a “record man,” and one chief inspector in charge of the work.
- 129 The work of city investigators was complemented by two inspectors employed by the province, but their reports and files were deposited at the Special Relief Department offices along with those produced by the city’s own investigative team.
- 130 Gabriel Kolko, *The Triumph of Conservatism: A Reinterpretation of American History, 1900–1916*; James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900–1918*. See also C. Wright Mills, *The Power Elite*; G. William Domhoff, *The Powers That Be: Processes of Ruling-Class Domination in America*; and Kim McQuaid, “Corporate Liberalism in the American Business Community, 1920–1940.”
- 131 For early Winnipeg politics, see, for example, A. Ross McCormack, “Radical Politics in Winnipeg: 1899–1915”; J. E. Rea, “Political Parties in Civic Power, Winnipeg 1919–1975”; and A. B. McKillop, “The Socialist as Citizen: John Queen and the Mayoralty of Winnipeg, 1935.”

- 132 See Bob Jessop, *The Capitalist State: Marxist Theories and Methods*; Rhonda F. Levine, *Class Struggle and the New Deal: Industrial Labor, Industrial Capital, and the State*; and Nicos Poulantzas, *Political Power and Social Classes*.
- 133 Theda Skocpol and Edwin Amenta, "Did Capitalists Shape Social Security?" 572.
- 134 See especially Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy in the United States*.
- 135 Some critics argue that Skocpol's distinction between her "old" approach and her new "polity-centred" approach constitutes nothing more than a return to an earlier "pluralist" approach to state-in-formation theory. See Francis Fox Piven's review of Skocpol's *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers* in *American Political Science Review* 87, no. 3 (1993): 791. See also G. William Domhoff, *Who Rules America? Power and Politics*.
- 136 Wetherell, "Making New Identities," 181. Wetherell's definition recalls Benedict Anderson's ideas about the process of imagining communities, a process that seeks to subsume difference under the false (or imagined) cohesiveness of a nation, accomplished especially through print media (print-capitalism). See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. See also Alan F. J. Artibise, "Continuity and Change: Elites and Prairie Urban Development, 1914–1950" and "In Pursuit of Growth: Municipal Boosterism Development in the Canadian Prairie West, 1871–1913." For a more recent American treatment of city boosters, see Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis*.
- 137 "A Report on Unemployment in Winnipeg, 1931," p. 4, PAM, G8030 Unemployment. Many city relief records are rife with similar phrases.
- 138 "Family Welfare in Greater Winnipeg, 1934," 8.
- 139 *Ibid.*
- 140 *Ibid.*, 14.

2 *The Anatomy of City Relief*

- 1 Linda Gordon, "The Welfare State: Towards a Socialist-Feminist Perspective," 186.
- 2 See Theresa Healy, "Engendering Resistance: Women Respond to Relief in Saskatoon, 1930–1932"; David DeBrou and Aileen Moffett, eds., *Other Voices: Historical Essays on Saskatchewan Women*; Alice Kessler-Harris, *In Pursuit of Equity: Women, Men, and the Quest for Economic Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America*; Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*; Linda Gordon, "The Welfare State" and *Pitied but Not*

Entitled: Single Mothers and the History of Welfare, 1890–1935; Margaret Jane Hillyard Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920–1997*; Patricia M. Evans and Gerda Wekerle, *Women and the Canadian Welfare State: Challenges and Change*; Jane Ursel, *Private Lives, Public Policy: 100 Years of State Intervention in the Family*; and Ruth Roach Pierson, “Gender and the Unemployment Insurance Debates in Canada.”

- 3 For earlier expressions of these competing images of married and single men, see, for example, Howard Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture*; Vincent Bertolini, “Fireside Chastity: The Erotics of Sentimental Bachelorhood in the 1850s”; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, 115; and Karen Lystra, *Searching the Heart: Women, Men, and Romantic Love in Nineteenth-Century America*, 31. One contradiction here is that, at least in the American context, the single man on the move was also the single man on the make, representing the promise of the American Dream and embodying the mythology of the rugged frontier.
- 4 See, for example, Diane Sainsbury, *Gender, Equality and Welfare States*, 28–29; Nancy Fraser, *Unruly Practices: Power, Discourse, and Gender in Contemporary Social Theory*, 144–60; Barbara J. Nelson, “The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State: Workman’s Compensation and Mothers’ Aid”; and Diana Pearce, “Welfare Is Not for Women: Why the War on Poverty Cannot Conquer the Feminization of Poverty.”
- 5 Linda Gordon, “Social Insurance and Public Assistance: The Influence of Gender in Welfare Thought in the United States, 1890–1935,” 20. In “The Origins of the Two-Channel Welfare State,” an examination of workmen’s compensation and mothers’ aid, American historian Barbara J. Nelson describes a similar effect, although she calls it a “two-channel welfare state.”
- 6 Suzanne Mettler, “Dividing Social Citizenship by Gender: The Implementation of Unemployment Insurance and Aid to Dependent Children, 1935–1950,” 304. Mettler argues that whatever the initial policy framers’ intentions, the characters of both Unemployment Insurance programs and Aids to Dependent Children programs were subject to administrative arrangements. How they were carried out “on the ground,” in other words, determined their status. Unemployment Insurance programs were “most readily harnessed by national administrators” (305). This boosted their status in American society. Aids to Dependent Children programs, however, were more likely to fall under the guidance and control of local or state administration, and their status deteriorated as a result.
- 7 “Will Present City’s Stand on Unemployment,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 December 1929.
- 8 Ibid.

- 9 "Hair Outlines Plans to Meet Unemployment," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 29 November 1929.
- 10 "Digest of Relief Operation, 1931-32," SA, 1069-1522, file 2; see also letter from W. R. Clubb to Gideon Robertson, 2 December 1930, PAM, G 8030, Unemployment 1930-31.
- 11 See Andrea Tanner, "The Casual Poor and the City of London Poor Law Union, 1837-1869," esp. 188, and Steve King, "'It Is Impossible for Our Vestry to Judge His Case into Perfection from Here': Managing the Distance Dimensions of Poor Relief, 1800-1840."
- 12 Report of Conference Regarding Unemployment, 11 June 1931, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 1003.
- 13 Letter from Premier Brownlee to Walter Smitten, Commissioner of Labour, 5 December 1930, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 515A.
- 14 Report of Conference Regarding Unemployment, 11 June 1931.
- 15 "We Meet with Innumerate Cases Just Like This," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 29 December 1929.
- 16 Letter from W. R. Clubb to Gideon Robertson, 2 December 1930. Clubb wrote: "Applications for relief have been received from three thousand seven hundred and sixty-three single men of whom three hundred and ninety-six were refused assistance under the residence ruling."
- 17 Letter from Civic Relief Probation Officer Gutteridge to Commissioner David Mitchell, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 1. Another relief investigator's report showed similar numbers. The investigator claimed that of two hundred men investigated, only 28 percent were legitimate city charges. Report of Relief Investigator F. H. Drayton to T. S. Magee, 24 February 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 1.
- 18 Letter from Commissioner Mitchell to T. S. Magee, 1 April 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 1.
- 19 Letter from Comptroller J. Hodgson to Commissioner David Mitchell, 28 January 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 1.
- 20 Letter from Mayor Knott to Premier Brownlee, 18 December 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 5.
- 21 Circular letter from Mayor Hair to all new candidates for alderman, 17 November 1930, SA, D500 III 893.
- 22 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 16 November 1933, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 1067. See also Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 16 November 1933, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 1068. The minutes in file 1068

contain quotations from a letter written by the Deputy Minister of Railways, Labour, and Industries to the Civic Relief Board.

- 23 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 October 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 65.
- 24 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 October 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 75. This is the sole reference to Aboriginal people and municipal relief that I have come across for all three cities. This is surprising, given that the Aboriginal population in Saskatchewan alone was approximately fifteen thousand in 1931. One possible explanation is that municipal authorities saw Aboriginal people as falling within federal jurisdiction. See Robin Jarvis Brownlie, *A Fatherly Eye: Indian Agents, Government Power, and Aboriginal Resistance in Ontario, 1918–1939*. Another explanation, although there is no explicit evidence of such in the relief records, is racism, which among other things tended to render Aboriginal people invisible. In general, historians have explored little of the Aboriginal Depression experience, whether on or off the reserve. Olive Dickason's authoritative survey text, *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times*, makes no reference at all to Aboriginal people during the Depression. Neither does J. R. Miller's *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens* have much to say on the topic, except that a census of the Aboriginal population, taken during the early 1930s, showed an increase—not a decrease, as many expected—in their numbers. This was significant because, for the first time, Aboriginal policies “predicated on the eventual disappearance of Indians had become fatuous.” J. R. Miller, *Skyscrapers Hide the Heavens: A History of Indian–White Relations in Canada*, 213. Bill Waiser's *Saskatchewan: A New History* discusses the tendency of the Métis surrounding Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, to move into that city, support themselves for one year to meet the residence requirement, and then apply for relief. Waiser quotes Charlotte Whitton, who on her tour of western Canada in 1932 at the request of Prime Minister Bennett, “complained about ‘the half breed; a shiftless, gypsylike people who were a problem and a menace both to the Indian and white races with whom they mingle’” (291). For treatments of John B. Tootoosis, secretary of the League of Indians of Canada through the late 1920s and 1930s, see Laurie Meijer Drees, *The Indian Association of Alberta: A History of Political Action*, and F. Laurie Barron, *Walking in Indian Moccasins: The Native Policies of Tommy Douglas and the CCF*. Tootoosis was a grandnephew of the famous Cree Chief Poundmaker.
- 25 Letter from T. S. Magee to Mayor Knott, 5 January 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 7. See also the letter from H. F. McKee to City Commissioners, 31 December 1935, RG II, class 152, file 1, which relates eighteen cases of transient families in Edmonton as examples of larger trends. Each family was given “temporary relief” in the city. This did not mean that the city willingly paid for migrant family relief. In the spring of 1931, Edmonton relief officer Magee related the case of one man who had come from Vancouver with his family

the previous October: he was accepted on city relief, largely because his wife was pregnant with twins. The relief officer remarked, in the McKee letter to city commissioners, that “as this is only one of many similar cases permitted to come into the city during the winter and participate in our relief scheme it seems unthinkable that at the end of the season these transients should be left here to become full City responsibilities.”

- 26 Memo of Conference Between Members of Saskatoon’s City Council and Saskatchewan Premier J. T. M. Anderson, 7 February 1934, SA, 1069-1209.
- 27 Foreigners, by legal definition, were not citizens and thus were subject to legal exclusion from the rights enjoyed by citizens. See Robert Adamoski, Dorothy E. Chunn, and Robert Menzies’s “Introduction” to *Contesting Canadian Citizenship: Historical Readings*, in which the editors of this volume conclude that “decisions about inclusion or exclusion relied heavily on conceptions and definitions of ‘citizenship’” (1).
- 28 In Winnipeg, city council recommended deportation for any “foreigner” who was unemployed and had been in the city for less than five years (“Relief of Unemployment in Manitoba Either by Direct Relief or Relief Works,” 15 February 1932, PAM, G68032, Reports, 1931–32). For additional discussion of such policies, see Barbara Roberts, “Shovelling Out the Unemployed,” as well as her study *Whence They Came: Deportation from Canada, 1900–1935*. For a useful exploration of nativism in western Canada, see Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: Nativism in Alberta*, and, on anti-Semitism in particular, Harold Troper and Irving Abella, *None Is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe, 1933–1948*.
- 29 “Hair Outlines Plans to Meet Unemployment,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 29 November 1929.
- 30 Report of Conference Regarding Unemployment, 11 June 1931.
- 31 Memo from Mr. R. English, Department of Municipal Affairs, to Mr. V. W. Smith, Chairman, Relief Committee, 1 June 1931, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 515B.
- 32 Meeting of Committee upon Relief to Unnaturalized Unemployed Persons, 3 November 1931, SA, 1069-1521, file 1.
- 33 Letter from W. R. Clubb to Gideon Robertson, 2 December 1930.
- 34 *Ibid.*
- 35 Memo attached to report of the Medical Health Officer, “Regarding the Deportation of Sick and Destitute Immigrants,” January 1930, SA, 1069-1521, file 15.
- 36 *Ibid.*

- 37 “Foreigners Not Keen on Settlement,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 17 May 1932.
- 38 Letter from T. S. Magee to David Mitchell, 21 May 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 3.
- 39 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 October 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 63.
- 40 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 November 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 129.
- 41 Letter from A. W. Haddow to Commissioner David Mitchell, 6 June 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 3.
- 42 Residence Requirements, Relief, 29 May 1935, EA, RG II, class 152, file 1.
- 43 Memorandum of Joint Meeting Between Premier Brownlee, Deputy Mayor Baker, President of the Edmonton Chamber of Commerce W. W. McBain, City Commissioner D. Mitchell, and City Engineer A. W. Haddow, 14 July 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 4.
- 44 Letter from Premier Brownlee to Mayor Davidson, 1 May 1931, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 515A.
- 45 Letter from W. R. Clubb to Alderman Maybank, 12 June 1931, PAM, G8030, Unemployment 1930–31.
- 46 In Connection with Prosecutions Already Reported on re: Applicants for Relief Unlawfully Obtaining Supplies by Misrepresentation, 18 April 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 2.
- 47 See, for example, “A Report on Unemployment in Winnipeg, 1932,” PAM, G8030, Unemployment; and “Rowland Declares War on Frauds,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 23 March 1932.
- 48 See Denyse Baillargeon, “Indispensable, but Not a Citizen: The Housewife in the Great Depression.” Baillargeon’s research on Montréal housewives suggests that married women served a “social stabilizing” role in that urban society.
- 49 American historian Theda Skocpol agrees, arguing in that the United States, from around 1900 through to the early 1920s, created “a maternalist welfare state, with female-dominated public agencies implementing regulations and benefits for the good of women and their children” (2). In Skocpol’s view, it was the generous post–Civil War assistance and benefits to returned soldiers that set a precedent for state aid to deserving recipients (in the case of the soldiers, in recognition of their contribution to the nation) and prompted women activists to lobby during the Progressive Era for mothers’ pensions, based on their contributions to the nation’s reproductive health. See Theda Skocpol, *Protecting Soldiers and Mothers: The Political Origins of Social Policy*

in the United States. See also Cynthia Comacchio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900–1940.*

- 50 Christie, *Engendering the State*, 215. For useful (and sometimes contrasting) assessments of Christie's work, see Dominique Marshall's review of *Engendering the State* in *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 4 (2001): 754–58, and Alvin Finkel's treatment of *Engendering the State* in "The State of Writing on the Canadian Welfare State: What's Class Got to Do with It?"
- 51 Letter from H. F. McKee to Commissioner David Mitchell, 23 August 1934, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 17.
- 52 Report of Conference Regarding Unemployment, 11 June 1931.
- 53 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 24 April 1934, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 1339.
- 54 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 29 May 1934, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 1384.
- 55 "City Council to Adopt New Scheme of Giving Relief," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 26 March 1932.
- 56 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 October 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 67.
- 57 Letter from Acting City Clerk to City Commissioners, 14 February 1933, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 19.
- 58 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 October 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 76.
- 59 Letter from Margaret Kee to ADM MacNamara, 20 February 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief.
- 60 Letter from T. S. Magee to David Mitchell, 2 September 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 4. Magee had earlier been asked to investigate practices at the single women's branch of city relief as a result of complaints made by the Canadian Labour Party.
- 61 "For Shame," letter to the editor, *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 14 May 1932.
- 62 Information Obtained from a Few of Those Interviewed re: Domestic Work on Farms and in the Country, 17 February 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Letter from Greater Winnipeg Unemployment Advisory Board to W. R. Clubb, Minister of Public Works, 21 July 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment.

“This need,” the board reported, “will become greater as the period in which recipients are on relief lengthens.”

- 65 Memo from H. F. McKee to Commissioner David Mitchell, 20 January 1933, EA, RG II, class 149, file 19.
- 66 Memo from H. F. McKee to Commissioner David Mitchell on conduct of the Relief Department, 8 February 1933, EA, RG II, class 149, file 19.
- 67 Letter from Carl Berg to Mayor Knott, 8 June 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file II. The problem became even more dire during the winter months. In Winnipeg, men called to “buck wood” at the city’s wood yard for their relief had, according to the unemployed, “insufficient clothing,” causing them to have to stop work. Adding insult to injury, the men were cut off relief. Letter from ADM of Public Works to Chairman and Members of Winnipeg’s Civic Unemployment Relief Committee, 19 February 1932, PAM, G8030, Unemployment.
- 68 Letter from Acting City Clerk to City Commissioners, 14 February 1933.
- 69 Memo from H. F. McKee to City Commissioner, 20 January 1933.
- 70 Report of Operations and Costs, Year Ending December 31st, 1932, PAM, G8032, Reports, 1931–32.
- 71 Letter from Greater Winnipeg Unemployment Advisory Board to W. R. Clubb, Minister of Public Works, 21 July 1933.
- 72 Report of Operations and Costs, Year Ending December 31st, 1931, PAM, G8032, Reports, 1931–32.
- 73 Letter from Greater Winnipeg Unemployment Advisory Board to W. R. Clubb, Minister of Public Works, 21 July 1933.
- 74 Letter from W. T. Kennedy, president of the Northern Shirt Company, to W. R. Clubb, 7 December 1932, PAM, G8030, Unemployment.
- 75 Letter from A. R. Ivey, secretary of the Retail Merchants Association of Canada, to W. R. Clubb, 3 December 1932, PAM, G8030, Unemployment.
- 76 Letter from F. S. Wright to Commissioner David Mitchell, 16 December 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 17. Winnipeg faced similar complaints almost two years later from the Greater Winnipeg Shoe Repairers’ Association, who protested the city’s use of unemployed shoe repairmen and requested that “the entire business be distributed to the local shops on a voucher system.” See “Council Minutes,” 9 October 1934, WA.
- 77 Letter from H. F. McKee to David Mitchell, 22 December 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 17.

- 78 “Work Will Be Given to Childless Married Men,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 27 May 1932. Perhaps not surprisingly, it appears that nothing came of this suggestion.
- 79 Memo from H. F. McKee to Commissioner Mitchell on Conduct of the Relief Department, 8 February 1933.
- 80 “Tenant Held for Taking Seized Goods,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 17 May 1932.
- 81 “City Council to Adopt New Scheme of Giving Relief.” On 11 May 1932, the city called for tenders from local food suppliers. See “Grocery Tenders Are Called For,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 11 May 1932.
- 82 “City Council to Adopt New Scheme of Giving Relief.”
- 83 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 December 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 335.
- 84 Letter from the West Side Business Men’s Association to City Council, 8 January 1934, SA, 1069-1099, file 8.
- 85 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 10 November 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 149.
- 86 A provincial relief investigation committee in Alberta outlined other problems associated with instituting a more flexible voucher system. Responding to a general complaint raised by the unemployed that “the voucher system does not permit relief recipients to purchase direct from farmers, or take advantage of bargains,” the committee responded that “it would therefore be necessary to reduce the face value of the relief voucher if arrangements were made to obtain food at lower prices. The relief recipient would not benefit from such an arrangement; the farmer would not benefit, and the retailer, who is a tax-payer, would be the loser. Any change in this respect would involve the paying of cash relief and the possible abused which might arise.” Report of the Relief Committee Appointed by Order-in-Council 437-38, 22 December 1938, p. 19, Alberta Folklore and Local History Collection, University of Alberta Libraries.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Ibid. See also Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 September 1933, Civic Relief Board Files, file 937.
- 89 Max Foran, “Crucial and Contentious: The American Market and the Development of the Western Canadian Beef Cattle Industry to 1948,” 458.
- 90 Roy C. Barnes, “The Microfoundations of Corporatist Intervention: Dairying’s Collective Action Problems in Canada and England During the 1930s Depression,” 428.

- 91 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 16 November 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 173.
- 92 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 23 January 1933, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 427.
- 93 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 10 November 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 149. Winnipeg's unemployed had similar complaints. Resolutions passed by the Labor Women's Group of Greater Winnipeg, for instance, argued that "great hardships are wrought on those families receiving relief in kind of work performed, instead of standard wages; endless suffering has been caused to many men, women, and children who have had to walk miles through lack of the necessary funds to pay for transportation; those receiving relief could often economize by buying in cheaper markets than they are at present permitted to take advantage of." Letter from Mrs. M. L. Aiken, Secretary, Labor Women's Group of Greater Winnipeg to the Hon. W. R. Clubb, Minister of Public Works, 3 June 1931, PAM, G8030, Unemployment, 1930-31.
- 94 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 21 September 1933, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 937. See also Magda Fahrni's "Counting the Costs of Living: Gender, Citizenship, and a Politics of Prices in 1940s Montreal." Fahrni's supposition that housewives in the 1940s "made a public, political statement out of what might once (during the Depression, for instance) have been regarded as a shameful situation, to be hidden at all costs" (485) is not necessarily borne out so easily among female shoppers in (at least) the urban Prairie context. There, women clearly had no qualms about expressing their dissatisfaction with relief groceries, stigma or not. See also Susan Porter Benson, "Living on the Margin: Working Class Marriages and Family Survival Strategies in the United States, 1919-1941"; Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950*; and Ruth Frager, "Politicized Housewives in the Jewish Communist Movement of Toronto, 1923-1933."
- 95 Report of Operations and Costs Year Ending December 31st, 1932, PAM, G8032, Yearly Reports, City of Winnipeg Unemployment Relief Department.
- 96 Unemployment Report 1932, PAM, G 8030, Unemployment.
- 97 Letter from F. S. Wright to Commissioner Mitchell, 16 December 1932.
- 98 Letter from H. F. McKee to Provincial Labour Commissioner W. Smitten, 12 April 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 9.
- 99 Letter from H. F. McKee to City Council, 27 December 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 14.
- 100 Letter from ADM MacNamara to President of McGill University, 20 March 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment.

- 101 Letter from Greater Winnipeg Unemployment Advisory Board to W. R. Clubb, Minister of Public Works, 21 July 1933. For discussions of investigators “teaching” housewives cleanliness and home economics, see also Sean Purdy “Building Homes, Building Citizens: Housing Reform and Nation Formation in Canada, 1900–1920,” and Margaret Hobbs and Ruth Roach Pierson, “A Kitchen That Wastes No Steps . . . : Gender, Class, and the Home Improvement Plan, 1936–40.”
- 102 Various responses to Winnipeg’s inquiries, 9 May 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment. In the opinion of Dr. Stielbeling, of the US Department of Agriculture’s Bureau of Home Economics, the food schedule was somewhat less than wholly sufficient: “I think that the diets undoubtedly would satisfy the minimum requirements of different dietary essentials, but they do not allow any wide margin for safety.”
- 103 Letter from Lucy H. Gillett, Superintendent, Nutrition Bureau, the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, to Mr. A. MacNamara, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Public Works, 3 May 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment.
- 104 Letter from Mildred D. Goodeve, Nutritionist, Child Welfare Association of Montréal, to ADM MacNamara, 26 April 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment.
- 105 Letter from Marjorie Bell to ADM MacNamara, 18 April 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment.
- 106 Quoted in letter from Greater Winnipeg Unemployment Advisory Board to W. R. Clubb, Minister of Public Works, 21 July 1933.
- 107 Quoted in letter from H. F. McKee to David Mitchell, 6 January 1933, EA, RG II, class 149, file 18.
- 108 Report of the Relief Committee Appointed by Order-in-Council 437-38, 22 December 1938, p. 19, Alberta Folklore and Local History Collection, University of Alberta Libraries.
- 109 Letter from T. S. Magee to David Mitchell, 31 January 1931, EA, RG II, class 5, file 1.
- 110 Ibid.
- 111 Letter from T. S. David Mitchell, 20 January 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 1.
- 112 Meal ticket valid at Olympia Café, n.d., EA, RG II, class 149, file 3.
- 113 Bill from H. Edwardson to City, 21 May 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 3.
- 114 Letter from T. S. Magee to City Commissioner, 29 August 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 4.

- 115 Letter from Dr. R. B. Jenkins to City Commissioner, 22 March 1933, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 20.
- 116 Letter from T. S. Magee to David Mitchell, 21 May 1931.
- 117 Ibid. The four meal tickets were intended to last the men from Thursday to Saturday.
- 118 Ibid.
- 119 Unemployment Committee Report, 27 May 1931, EA, RG 11, class 5, file 3.
- 120 Letter from H. F. McKee to David Mitchell, 2 August 1932, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 13.
- 121 Petition by fifteen restaurant keepers in City protesting mass feeding, n.d., and Letter from Knott to barristers representing café owners, 14 November 1932, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 26.
- 122 Petition to City Council, n.d., Resolution on the Soup Kitchen (Henry Johnson, Chairman), EA, RG 11, class 149, file 26.
- 123 Unemployment Committee Report, 13 May 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 3.
- 124 [Testimony of] Representatives of single, unemployed men before Cabinet, 10 July 1936, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 996.
- 125 Ibid.
- 126 Report of the Relief Committee Appointed by Order-in-Council 437-38, 22 December 1938, p. 14.
- 127 [Testimony of] Representatives of single, unemployed men before Cabinet, 10 July 1936.
- 128 Letter from Winnipeg Trades and Labor Council to A. MacNamara, Single Unemployed Commission, 28 December 1932, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief 1932.
- 129 Letter from Premier Bracken to R. B. Bennett, 22 April 1932, PAM, G8036.
- 130 Letter from Premier Brownlee to R. B. Bennett, 9 May 1933, PAA, Premiers' Papers GR 1969.0289, file 514C.
- 131 Letter from City Treasurer to City Commissioner, 1 April 1932, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 9.
- 132 Telegram from Mayor Knott to Senator Griesbach, 1 April 1932, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 9.
- 133 Telegram from Mayor Knott to Premier Brownlee, 1 April 1932, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 9.

- 134 See, for example, the letter from Ambrose Bury to City Council, 6 February 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 7.
- 135 Memorandum of meeting with R. B. Bennett, 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 3.
- 136 Letter from City Clerk Tomlinson to Premier Anderson, SA, 1069-1521, file 3. It is not clear whether the province actually did “make a profit.” Nor is it clear at what percent interest the province was able to secure loans for the cities. Whatever the case, however, the situation conveys the sense that the provinces were carrying on as though this were a normal business transaction. Edmonton likewise sought low-interest loans through the provincial government. For example, Mayor Knott wrote to Premier Reid about “seeking [a] one million dollar loan from the federal government through your good offices. In this connection it is felt that the loan applied for of \$1,000,000 should be granted at as low a rate of interest as possible.” Letter from Knott to Reid, 16 July 1934, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 1025.
- 137 “Provincial Government Pays \$243,000 for Relief,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 21 March 1930. Calgary had received \$54,000, in contrast to Edmonton’s \$35,000.
- 138 Letter from T. S. Magee to Commissioner David Mitchell, 18 November 1931, EA, RG II, class 5, file 149.
- 139 “Unemployment Policy,” PAM, G8032, Reports, 1931–32.
- 140 Letter from William Carnill to Mayor Knott, 31 March 1932, EA, RG II, class 7, file 149.

3 *Building Cities*

- 1 See the report in the *Winnipeg Free Press*, 18 August 1932, and “Laying the Corner Stone at the Winnipeg Auditorium by His Excellency the Governor-General the Earl of Bessborough—Thursday, August 18th, 1932,” PAM, G8032. The container has since been removed from the cornerstone and now rests inside the main auditorium building for public viewing. Curiously, the program, prepared by the city clerk’s department five days before the ceremony, accorded no role to any of the workmen who actually built the auditorium. Yet, on the day of the ceremony, it was the head stonemason, Harry Whiteley, and George Farmley, bricklayer, who together laid the stone on the bed of mortar.
- 2 Of course, not all urban improvements carried out as unemployment relief projects have survived. Some, like Edmonton’s extensive paving, grading, and gravelling efforts, have long since disappeared beneath the more modern asphalt and concrete of a growing metropolis. Others, like Saskatoon’s brushing work—clearing away unwanted vegetation from the edges of

ravines—satisfied immediate local improvement needs, but their effects did not last much past the next season. And others still, like Edmonton’s Rat Creek Bridge, have since been demolished and replaced by newer structures.

- 3 See James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941*.
- 4 As we shall see in the following chapter, most men typically received no more than about one week’s work in five or six, whereas direct relief was distributed much more widely. Historical considerations of Canada’s Depression experience have paid small attention to unemployment relief projects. The American literature is much richer, probably because of the prominence of various New Deal programs like the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), the Federal Emergency Relief Administration (FERA), and the Works Progress Administration (WPA).
- 5 Bonnie Fox Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration, 1933–1934: The Business of Emergency Employment in the New Deal*, viii. American historian Ellis W. Hawley, in *The New Deal and the Problem of Monopoly: A Study in Economic Ambivalence*, describes a similar development in other New Deal programs, especially the National Recovery Administration, which was led by efficiency and planning types.
- 6 Schwartz, *The Civil Works Administration*, viii.
- 7 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 77.
- 8 Part of this story, too, lies in the steps that city planners took to convince city ratepayers and citizens to support and even share their public works visions. Before embarking on any major work relief project, for example, city officials (and often newspaper editors) had first to pass money bylaws through their respective municipal government boards (which, in turn, gauged “public” opinion by holding a vote among the city’s ratepayers).
- 9 Edmontonians, for instance, viewed the rapid population growth in Calgary as a serious threat to their own prospects. By 1905, Edmonton and Strathcona combined had a population of 11,400 compared to Calgary’s 12,000. Over the next half decade, the populations of both Edmonton and Calgary would triple in size. See Howard Palmer and Tamara Palmer, *Alberta: A New History*, 138. Saskatoon was also typically engaged in rivalries with its sister city to the south, Regina. See Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon: The First Half-Century*.
- 10 John H. Archer, *Saskatchewan: A History*, 162. As Don Kerr and Stan Hanson point out, though, as late as 1908 Saskatoon was still pumping its raw sewage into the South Saskatchewan River, an incredibly dangerous and gallingly short-sighted practice that resulted in several typhoid deaths. See Don Kerr and Stan Hanson, *Saskatoon*, 57, 90–92.

- 11 Archer, *Saskatchewan*, 162.
- 12 Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 159–60.
- 13 James G. MacGregor, *Edmonton: A History*, 147.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 327.
- 15 W. L. Morton, *Manitoba: A History*, 304.
- 16 *Ibid.*, 304–6. Morton notes that “the generation of power and the manufacture of gas remained scattered among a number of small firms, and when the rapid growth of the city began at the [nineteenth] century’s end the supply of power became quite inadequate” (306).
- 17 Winnipeg Board of Trade, Twenty-sixth Annual Report, 7 February 1905, 92.
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *Ibid.*
- 20 Palmer and Palmer, *Alberta*, 209–10.
- 21 As Jonathan Teaford notes, however, the early and growing reliance of Midwestern cities on automobile production also meant that these cities suffered from the vagaries of the automobile industry generally. Through the 1930s, for instance, cities in the Midwest suffered from the decreasing demand for automobiles. Jonathan C. Teaford, *Cities of the Heartland: The Rise and Fall of the Industrial Midwest*, 103–4.
- 22 See Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History*, 275. Edmonton and Saskatoon similarly benefited from both railway construction and the access to regional, national, and continental markets that those railway links offered. See Palmer and Palmer, *Alberta*, chap. 8, and Waiser, *Saskatchewan*, chaps. 11–13.
- 23 In 1920 and 1921, the provincial and federal governments contributed one-third of the cost of winter public works construction in Canadian cities as an unemployment relief measure. In 1925, the Province of Alberta contributed one-quarter of the costs of labour associated with public works construction, and in 1926, the province paid for food and lodging for single men in Edmonton. See *Labour Gazette*, August 1921, 999, where the Federal Department of Labour reported a Dominion grant to Saskatoon of \$1,482 on the understanding that this would account for one-third of relief expenditures in the city. The provincial and municipal governments would contribute a further third each.
- 24 Arthur Meighen, for example, considered unemployment to be “beyond the power of local, or even national, control,” but he authorized federal monies to pay one-quarter of the extra costs associated with winter work relief. Privy

Council Order 3831, 7 October 1921, quoted in Leslie Pal, *State, Class, and Bureaucracy: Canadian Unemployment Insurance and Public Policy*, 142.

- 25 See, for example, “The Relief of Unemployment,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 25 August 1930: “The conference recommends that local councils, provinces, and the Dominion should embark on or continue construction of public works and highways, encourage private corporations to carry on building and maintenance, and place advance orders for supplies and equipment.”
- 26 “Prevention of Unemployment,” *Manitoba Free Press*, 6 November 1929.
- 27 Letter from Deputy Minister Thomas Molloy to City Commissioner Leslie, 16 December 1929, SA, D500 III 895. See also “Cooperation Called For,” 11 December 1929; “Government Will Assist Winnipeg in Unemployment,” 14 December 1929; and “Special Work Is Planned for the Destitute Unemployed,” 23 December 1929, all in the *Edmonton Bulletin*.
- 28 Unemployment Committee Report, 23 December 1929, SA, D500 III 895.
- 29 Report of the Committee Appointed by Unemployment Conference to Enquire into Shelter for the Unemployed, 23 December 1929, SA, D500 III 893. At the time of the committee meeting, Saskatoon’s assessment of the number of unemployed was 661: 347 married men and 314 single men.
- 30 Letter from Deputy Minister Thomas Molloy to City Commissioner Leslie, 11 December 1929, SA, D500 III 895.
- 31 Ibid.
- 32 Ibid.
- 33 Letter from Chief Engineer Archibald to City Commissioner Leslie, 24 December 1929, SA, D500 III 895.
- 34 Quoted in Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 46.
- 35 See Memo for City Commissioners re: Unemployment Relief, Calgary Meeting, 24 August 1931, EA, RG 11, class 160, file 1. Under section 92, the provinces were responsible for unemployment relief.
- 36 Work relief programs were almost always referred to as “emergency” undertakings. This term reflected widespread assumptions during the early 1930s that the economic downturn would be short-lived and temporary, as is illustrated by the fact that Bennett’s unemployment relief acts of 1930 and 1931 both expired after one year. See Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, chap. 2.
- 37 Letter from A. W. Haddow to Commissioner Mitchell, 18 June 1931, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 515B.
- 38 Letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 31 December 1931, EA, RG 11, class 160, file 2.

- 39 “Federal Money Now Available; To Pay 50 Percent,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 5 September 1931.
- 40 See, for example, the memo from Chief Engineer Haddow to City Commissioner Mitchell, 29 March 1934, EA RG II, class 160, file 6. The engineer reminded the commissioner that, during the past year, the provincial and federal governments had contributed one-third of the cost of direct relief to relief labour on city projects. See also the letter from Mayor Daniel Knott to O. L. McPherson, Alberta Minister of Public Works, 22 January 1934, EA RG II, class 160, file 6. In his letter, Mayor Knott insisted that “both the Provincial and Dominion Governments should contribute one-third each of the direct labor costs only” on various local improvement projects in Edmonton. See also letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 20 October 1932, EA, RG II, class 160, file 3. The engineer expressed his hope that a “policy along lines of last winter is followed, in which expenditures for materials are included (in agreement with provincial and federal governments). . . . It would be to the advantage of the city to carry out public works which would be needed in any event in the immediate future.”
- 41 It might be added, however, that Commissioner Leslie “expressed the view that no expenditure for new bridges should be made until sufficient increase in population warrants it. Under present conditions, he believed, Saskatoon had sufficient bridges to meet requirements. Compared to other cities, Saskatoon is not too badly off.” “Bridge Building Is in Future Plans,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 17 May 1930.
- 42 The *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix* described support for the bridge project among the city’s ratepayers in an editorial on 28 October 1931: “While the ratepayers are not unanimous in their opinion as to the desirability of undertaking such an ambitious project at this time, opposition to the project has not been particularly noticeable.” Although this is hardly a ringing endorsement for the project, the city’s ratepayers approved of the city’s plan at two separate debenture bylaw votes. At the first vote in November 1931, ratepayers passed the debenture bylaw by a margin of four to one (4,679 for and 1,150 voted against). The second debenture bylaw, voted on in February 1932, passed by an even wider margin (2,347 to 292).
- 43 Letter from D. E. McDonald to O. L. McPherson, 13 February 1934, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 310. “Labor men” refers to skilled workers.
- 44 Petition from Cromdale Community League presented to Edmonton City Council, 23 November 1931, EA, RG II, class 12, file 5. Spokespeople for the community leagues purported to represent the views—broadly speaking—of the people living in this or that community. Typically, the community would organize a meeting, inviting anyone from the community interested in the issue at hand. A discussion would then take place, and a set of resolutions would be produced and direction given to the spokesperson to inform the city council of the community’s thoughts on the matter. The *Edmonton Journal*

editorial staff suggested a wooden bridge because although it would only last about twenty years (not as long as a steel bridge), it would require more labour. Most of the steel fabricating would be done elsewhere. See "Bridge," *Edmonton Journal*, 30 January 1931.

- 45 Petition from Highlands Community League presented to Edmonton City Council, 3 December 1931, and Petition from Westmount Community League presented to Edmonton City Council, 4 December 1931, EA, RG II, class 12, file 5.
- 46 Petition from Eastwood Community League presented to Edmonton City Council, 8 December 1931, EA RG II, class 12, file 6.
- 47 Petition from Local Council of Women presented to Edmonton City Council, 27 November 1931, EA RG II, class 12, file 6.
- 48 Petition from Edmonton Art Club presented to City Council, 8 December 1931, EA RG II, class 12, file 6.
- 49 Council Report, 14 December 1931, EA, RG II, class 12, file 6.
- 50 The degree of disagreement on work relief projects tends to confirm the conclusions of historians Jonathan Teaford, David Hammack, and Harold Platt. Summarizing their arguments, Timothy Gilfoyle writes: "Modern city services and infrastructures created new municipal agencies and special-interest factions that transcended neighborhood and ethnic loyalties, dramatically altering forms of municipal authority. Even elites were never monolithic. Rather, they were internally divided, constantly competing, and shifting alliances depending on the issues involved. The provision of services and infrastructures in late nineteenth-century cities was, in Teaford's words, an 'unheralded triumph.' Engineers thus replace elective officials in the political narrative of the city." Timothy J. Gilfoyle, "White Cities, Linguistic Turns, and Disneylands: The New Paradigms of Urban History," 185. See also Jonathan C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870–1900*; David Hammack, *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century*; and Harold Platt, *City Building in the New South: The Growth of Public Services in Houston, Texas, 1830–1915*, and *The Electric City: Energy and the Growth of the Chicago Area, 1880–1930*.
- 51 Letter from S. W. Campbell to Premier Bracken, 3 October 1930, PAM, G8036, Norwood Bridge.
- 52 Letter from R. G. Graham to W. R. Clubb, 24 February 1932, PAM, G8032, Winnipeg Auditorium.
- 53 Letter from C. W. Alston, Poole Construction Company, to Edmonton Mayor and Commissioner, 9 January 1932, and letter from Chief Engineer to Commissioner, 13 January 1932, EA, RG II, class 12, file 9.

- 54 These sorts of indicators of the general health of a city's economy still remain important. See City of Saskatoon, "Housing Indicators for Saskatoon," and Alan F. J. Artibise, "Boosterism and the Development of Prairie Cities, 1871-1913."
- 55 See, for example, "These Large Construction Projects Would Advance Winnipeg's Key Position," *Manitoba Free Press*, 13 September 1930, and "Get for Edmonton Permanent and Useful Civic Improvements at 25% of the Cost," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 10 November 1931.
- 56 "A Time for Confidence," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 27 November 1929.
- 57 Letter from W. H. Carter to ADM A. MacNamara, 8 September 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief.
- 58 Letter from Mellish to Mayor Knott, 29 June 1934, EA, RG 11, class 160, file 7. One Edmonton citizen certainly agreed with the Builders' Exchange. "Why not put people to work for wages instead of giving them \$50 to \$100 a month relief?" he suggested to Edmonton's city council in July 1935. Letter from S. Szczepanic to City Council, 7 July 1935, EA, RG 11, class 160, file 9.
- 59 Letter from F. A. Graham, Manager, Western Supplies Limited, to His Worship the Mayor and Members of the City Council, 14 December 1932, EA, RG 11, class 160, file 8.
- 60 Ibid. With increasing regularity, desperate businessmen, especially those involved in the building trades, began offering their services on credit in exchange for guarantees of payment in better times. Prime Minister Bennett wrote Manitoba's Premier Bracken in April 1933: "Representatives of the construction industry in Canada met me the other day and discussed the unemployment problem from the construction standpoint. They expressed the opinion that there were some firms in Canada who would not be unwilling to expend their own resources in carrying on construction works for the provinces and postpone payment until a later date if interest upon their investment in the work was paid annually." Letter from Bennett to Bracken, 8 April 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief.
- 61 Letter from Saskatchewan Association of Architects to Saskatoon City Council, n.d., SA, 1069-043. The Manitoba Association of Architects wrote Manitoba's Premier Bracken a similar letter. See letter from E. Fitz Munn, Secretary, to Premier Bracken, 1 September 1931, PAM, G8030, Unemployment, 1930-31.
- 62 Letter from E. R. Howes, Manager, Canada Ingot Iron Company, to Manitoba Minister of Public Works, 16 September 1931, PAM, GR 1609/GSO 123 G8036. The minister of Public Works assured the company that "every effort is being made to make as equitable a distribution of our business as possible." But he also pointed out that "practically all relief work purchases come within the jurisdiction of the Municipalities," so the complaint was better directed at the

Winnipeg Unemployment Relief Committee. Letter from Manitoba Minister of Public Works to E. R. Howes, Manager, Canada Ingot Iron Company, 24 September 1931, PAM, GR 1609/GSO 123 G8036.

- 63 Letter from Building Trades Council of Winnipeg and Vicinity to Province of Manitoba, 12 September 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief. The idea, clearly widespread on the urban Prairie, that work relief was, despite its higher costs, more beneficial to relief recipients than “doles” set cities like Edmonton, Saskatoon, and Winnipeg within a much wider context of similar ideas elsewhere. American historian William W. Bremer, for example, discovered similar assumptions animating New Deal work relief programs: “If general economic recovery and the physical well-being of the unemployed had been their overriding concern, then New Dealers might have appropriately supported massive deficit expenditures for direct relief to give jobless people money to support the economy and themselves.” William W. Bremer, “Along the American Way: The New Deal’s Work Relief Programs for the Unemployed,” 637.
- 64 Letter from R. Maybank to Secretary Unemployment Relief Committee, 11 March 1931, PAM, G8030, Unemployment, 1930–31.
- 65 Ibid.
- 66 Letter from Chief Engineer to City Commissioner, 31 December 1931, EA, RG 11, class 160, file 2.
- 67 “No Citizen to Go Without Food, Is Promise of Mayor,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 8 July 1930. As time wore on and the Depression deepened, of course, it became increasingly difficult to justify (or afford) the more costly work relief. By October 1932, Saskatoon’s mayor had softened his earlier firm opposition to direct relief: “I am opposed to the idea of giving direct relief, without at least exploring other avenues first.” “Hair Is Opposed to Direct Relief,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 12 October 1932.
- 68 Unemployment Relief Policy, 1930–31, PAM, G8032.
- 69 Letter from Mayor Clarke to City Council, 15 June 1935, EA RG 11, class 160, file 9.
- 70 Letter from Mayor Clarke to City Council, 8 July 1935, EA RG 11, class 160, file 10.
- 71 Letter from ADM MacNamara to William Clubb, 29 October 1931, PAM, GR 1609/G SO123, G 8036.
- 72 Letter from Chief Engineer Archibald to City Commissioner Mitchell, 6 February 1931, EA, RG 11, class 5, file 1.
- 73 Letter from Hereford to MacNamara, 20 February 1932, PAM, G8067, Unemployment Relief 1931–32.

- 74 Minutes of meeting, 4 September 1930, PAM, G8036, Norwood Bridge.
- 75 "Seek Federal Aid in Erection of Bridges," *Manitoba Free Press*, 5 September 1930.
- 76 Minutes of meeting, 4 September 1930.
- 77 Ibid.
- 78 "Seek Federal Aid in Erection of Bridges."
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Minutes of meeting, 4 September 1930.
- 81 Ibid.
- 82 Ibid.
- 83 "Seek Federal Aid in Erection of Bridges."
- 84 "These Large Construction Projects Would Advance Winnipeg's Key Position."
- 85 "Street Railway Offers \$50,000 for Bridges," *Manitoba Free Press*, 24 October 1930.
- 86 "Memorandum of Agreement Entered into This First Day of October 1930," PAM, G8030 Unemployment 1930-31.
- 87 "Deadlock in Bridge Project Threatened," *Manitoba Free Press*, 13 October 1930.
- 88 "Council to Deal with Bridge Bylaw Monday," *Manitoba Free Press*, 25 October 1930.
- 89 "To Allocate Cost of Norwood Bridge Today," *Manitoba Free Press*, 18 November 1930.
- 90 "Councils Approve Bridge Legislation," *Manitoba Free Press*, 25 November 1930.
- 91 City Council Report on Norwood and Main Street Bridges, 19 December 1930, PAM, G8036, Norwood Bridge.
- 92 "Contract for Steel for Bridge Is Let," *Manitoba Free Press*, 4 December 1930.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 Council Minutes, 13 October 1930, SA, D500 III 895.
- 95 Letter from Mayor Hair to Alderman Eddy, 3 October 1930, SA, D500 III 895.
- 96 Letter from City Solicitor to Secretary of the Board of Railway Commissioners, 29 October 1930, SA, D500 III 895. A November press release from the federal Department of Public Works read: "Negotiations opened

with Canada's two large railway companies, both cooperated and agreed to advance their contemplated construction and improvement programs from one to three years, the Government agreeing to compensate them to the extent of paying interest on the estimated capital expenditure for a period of eighteen months at the rate of five percent per annum." Press release, 5 November 1930, LAC, RG 27, vol. 2264, File: Unemployment Relief, Press Releases, 1930-31.

- 97 "Cost to City May Be Great Is View Held," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 23 September 1930.
- 98 "Next Year's Plans," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 9 September 1930.
- 99 "910,000 for City Works, 1931," *Edmonton Bulletin*, 17 September 1930.
- 100 M. J. Roberts, "The Motor Transportation Revolution."
- 101 *The Canada Year Book 1933*, Table 36, "Number of Motor Vehicles Registered in Canada, by Province, calendar years 1907-32," Part VI: Motor Vehicles, p. 686, http://www66.statcan.gc.ca/eng/acyb_c1933-eng.aspx.
- 102 See, for example, Thomas K. McCraw, *American Business, 1920-2000: How It Worked*, 10-27.
- 103 Although Robertson had been unable to visit Saskatoon personally, members of the city's council travelled to Regina to discuss their local unemployment situation.
- 104 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 53.
- 105 Letter from Mayor Hair to J. A. Merkely, Minister of Railways, Labor, and Industries, 4 August 1931, SA, 1069-1573, file 3.
- 106 Letter from City Clerk Tomlinson to Deputy Minister Thomas Molloy, 14 December 1932, SA, 1069-221, file 1.
- 107 Memorandum of meeting between Mayor Hair, City Commissioner Leslie, and Chief Engineer Archibald, 15 July 1931, SA, 1069-1573, file 3.
- 108 Letter from Chief Engineer Archibald to City Commissioner Leslie, 18 September 1931, SA, 1069-1573, file 1.
- 109 Report of Special Meeting of the Standing Committee on Unemployment, 4 November 1931, SA, 93-002-35 1069-219, file 3.
- 110 Editorial, "The Saskatoon Bridge," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 26 October 1931.
- 111 "City Indignant as True Situation Is Revealed by Report," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 27 October 1931. The report suggested that the provincial government favoured the cheaper \$500,000 sewerage disposal plant over the \$1.2 million bridge project.

- 112 Quoted from Anderson's statement to the press, "Sask. Gov't to Push Bridge Proposal," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 28 October 1931.
- 113 Report of Special Meeting of Standing Committee, 4 November 1931.
- 114 SA, 1069-219, file 1, Bridge Construction Files, December 1931.
- 115 "Sask. Gov't to Push Bridge Proposal."
- 116 "Bridge Bylaw Given Big Majority," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 24 November 1931. There were 4,679 votes in favour and 1,150 against.
- 117 "Bridge Building Can Go Ahead Is Mayor's Message," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 12 December 1931.
- 118 "New Concrete Bridge at Saskatoon over South Saskatchewan River," *Canadian Engineer: A Weekly Paper for Civil Engineers and Contractors*, 21 March 1933, 6, Saskatchewan Provincial Archives, C. J. Mackenzie fonds MG 56, box 2, file 12-2.
- 119 This was fairly standard on most relief projects. See W. J. C. Cherwinski, "The Formative Years of the Trade Union Movement in Saskatchewan," 126.
- 120 "New Concrete Bridge at Saskatoon over South Saskatchewan River," 6.
- 121 Ibid.
- 122 "Wage Rates on Broadway Bridge Project Ranging from 45 Cents per Hour for General Labour to One Dollar per Hour for Electricians," SA, 1069-219, Bridge Construction Files, file 12.
- 123 "New Concrete Bridge at Saskatoon over South Saskatchewan River," 6.
- 124 Ibid., 6. During those eleven weeks, the temperature in Saskatoon never rose above 0°F (about -18°C), and "for several days at a time temperatures below minus 40 F [-40°C] were recorded."
- 125 Ibid., 6.
- 126 Ibid., 8.
- 127 Ibid., 6.
- 128 Ibid., 7.
- 129 Letter from Haddow to City Commissioners, 18 June 1931, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 515 B.
- 130 Whatever the reason for the disparity between Edmonton's and the other two cities' more ambitious work relief plans, Edmonton authorities' response to the Unemployment and Farm Relief Act was certainly consistent with their hesitancy the previous year to embark on large work schemes under

the auspices of the earlier Unemployment Relief Act. In fact, Edmonton's City Commissioner Mitchell appeared to confirm this when, in presenting the chief engineer's list of new projects in autumn 1931 to city council, he remarked, "So large an expenditure of capital money could not possibly be entertained by the City on its own account in its present financial condition but a modified program might be considered provided a large percentage of the cost were assumed by Federal and Provincial authorities with a view to providing work especially for unemployed married men who are residents of the City." Letter from City Commissioner David Mitchell to Aldermen, 18 August 1931, EA, RG II, class 160, file 1.

- 131 Ibid.
- 132 Letter from Haddow to Mitchell, 24 August 1931, EA, RG II, class 160, file 1. It is not clear whether Haddow's suggestion was ever implemented.
- 133 Letter from Public Works Minister Clubb to Mayor Webb, 10 October 1931, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief 1930-31.
- 134 Ibid.
- 135 Letter from ADM MacNamara to Winnipeg City Council, 29 October 1931, PAM, GR1609/G S0123 G8036.
- 136 Ibid.
- 137 Letter from Minister Clubb to City Clerk M. Peterson, 24 February 1932, PAM, G8035 Auditorium. The minister also suggested that "the board of architects be asked to go into the matter very thoroughly and endeavour to make savings which would bring the building within the estimated cost of Nine Hundred and Thirty Two Thousand."
- 138 Letter from Northwood to Civic Unemployment Relief Committee, 15 February 1932, PAM, G8035, Auditorium.
- 139 Letter from R. G. Graham to W. R. Clubb, 24 February 1932, PAM, G8036 Winnipeg Auditorium.
- 140 Telegram from Premier Bracken to Premier Brownlee, 26 December 1929, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 310.
- 141 Telegram from J. M. Davidson to Premier Brownlee, 27 December 1929, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 310.
- 142 Telegram from Brownlee to Bracken, 30 December 1929, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 310.
- 143 Letter from Brownlee to Bracken, 2 January 1930, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 310. Brownlee's source for this information, the Western Canada Fuel Association, had earlier informed him that most coal used

by Manitoba industrial plants, schools, and other buildings came from the United States.

- 144 Letter from Brownlee to Bracken, 9 January 1930, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 310.
- 145 Letter from Building Superintendent McDonald to Public Works Minister McPherson, 13 February 1934, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 310.
- 146 Letter from W. A. Griesbach to Mayor Knott, 26 June 1934, EA, RG II, class 160, file 7.
- 147 As noted earlier, the Broadway Bridge opened to public traffic on 11 November 1932, but it had been substantially finished by early October. Winnipeg's Civic Auditorium, meanwhile, was almost finished by May 1932, but the city delayed its official opening so that the governor general could lay the building's cornerstone during his Winnipeg visit in August.

4 *Unemployed Men at Work*

- 1 Letter from City Clerk Tomlinson to Charlotte Whitton, 6 January 1931, SA, 1069-2055, file 8.
- 2 For interpretations of Whitton's thought, see James Struthers, "A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s," and P. T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, a Feminist on the Right*.
- 3 Letter from Tomlinson to Calgary's city clerk, 12 January 1931, SA, 1069-2055, file 8. Had she known these facts, Whitton almost certainly would have felt that her suspicions that local relief administrations were incapable of dealing with the problem of unemployment in any coherent, unified, or useful way were confirmed.
- 4 Letter from A. W. Haddow to Commissioner David Mitchell, 31 December 1931, EA, RG II, class 160, file 2.
- 5 Unemployment Relief Report, 27 December 1932, EA RG II, class 149, file 17. In a typical week in January 1931, Edmonton had some 1,800 married men on relief and typically offered work to only 250 each week. Assuming proper rotation, allowing each man the same amount of work, each man would work only one week out of every seven. See Reports on Relief Work for weeks ending 3 January, 11 January, 19 January, 24 January, 7 February, 14 February, and 21 February 1931, EA, RG II, class 5, file 1.
- 6 Even when the cities embarked on major public works construction projects such as Saskatoon's Broadway Bridge or Winnipeg's Civic Auditorium, each

man assigned to the job typically worked little more than one or two weeks out of every six. During those not infrequent times when no major relief job was in progress, unemployed men on relief might work even less than that. Cities did not, moreover, require all residents on relief to work. Women, whether married or single, were not considered for employment even on lighter relief work, such as street sweeping, much less on major projects. See P. H. Brennan, “Thousands of Our Men Are Getting Practically Nothing at All to Do: Public Works Relief Programs in Regina and Saskatoon, 1929–1940.”

- 7 See, for example, M. B. Katz, *The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare*, 5–16, and Alexander Keyssar, *Out of Work: The First Century of Unemployment in Massachusetts*.
- 8 It is important to note here, however, that cities only rarely initiated relief camps for single men on their own; more often, the cities agitated for camps to be set up by the senior governments. This speaks in some ways to Michael B. Katz’s idea that welfare in the American context performed several tasks, including “relief of misery [and] preservation of social order and discipline.” Michael B. Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America*, xi. As we shall also see, cities employed other modes to remove single unemployed men from their borders, including offering them only the meanest work relief, regularly cutting them from the relief rolls each spring, and lobbying the senior governments to institute farm work programs and relief camps in rural areas.
- 9 Unemployed married men employed on major work relief projects were expected to arrive at the work site on time for their shifts and report directly to the job foreman giving out orders for the day. City officials evidently believed that, at day’s end, workers would return home to their families as both proud heads of households and main providers.
- 10 Letter from Ronald Hooper to W. R. Clubb, 10 November 1932, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief.
- 11 Quoted in Michael R. Goeres, “Disorder, Dependency and Fiscal Responsibility: Unemployment Relief in Winnipeg, 1907–1942,” 166.
- 12 Letter from T. S. Magee to R. C. Rathbone and R. Campbell, Special Relief Office, 2 March 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 2. By the end of March 1931, Edmonton’s relief office was cutting approximately 150 single men from the relief rolls every three days. Letter from Magee to R. C. Rathbone, 21 March 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 2. On 22 March 1932, for instance, Edmonton relief officials cut single men from the relief rolls because “spring work is beginning to show signs of opening up and we feel now that these men are able to care for themselves.” Memo from R. Campbell and R. C. Rathbone to Commissioner Mitchell, 22 March 1932, EA, RG11, class 149, file 8.

- 13 See, for example, James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941*, 81–82, and Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and Regina Riot*, 25–40. See also Report of Operations and Costs Year Ending December 31st 1933, PAM, G8032, Yearly Reports, City of Winnipeg Unemployment Relief Department. Winnipeg stopped including single men in its yearly reports on unemployment in the city after the federal government took responsibility for them in November 1932. Edmonton's Special Relief Department confirmed in February 1933 that “the single unemployed man is now under the care of the Federal Relief Commission, Chairman A. S. Mackenzie.” Letter from H. F. McKee to David Mitchell, 8 February 1933, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 19.
- 14 Garraty suggests that the “pyramids and the Temple of Karnak in Egypt and the Temple of Jerusalem, may have been built as public work-relief projects.” John Garraty, *Unemployment in History: Economic Thought and Public Policy*, 12–13. The idea in those days, according to Garraty, was that the very poor should not starve, but neither should they be given support without labouring for it.
- 15 Most historians agree that the first European example of the workhouse emerged in Amsterdam during the 1590s. As J. F. Harrington suggests, it may be no coincidence that the first workhouses appeared in a country such as the Netherlands, where Calvinistic religious philosophies dominated. See J. F. Harrington, “Escape from the Great Confinement: The Genealogy of a German Workhouse,” 312n8. However, other scholars question this conclusion, pointing to the emergence of workhouses in non-Protestant countries shortly after their opening in Amsterdam.
- 16 See, for example, Katz, *In the Shadow of the Poorhouse*, 3. Katz estimates that “in most places, three, four, or more times as many—received public outdoor relief in any year as were admitted to poorhouses.” Historian Mary MacKinnon notes that only 12 to 15 percent of English and Welsh paupers were finding relief at the workhouse by the 1860s. This percentage increased to a high of between 20 and 30 percent by the early 1900s. Mary MacKinnon, “English Poor Law Policy and the Crusade Against Out-Relief,” 604.
- 17 Sonya O. Rose, *Limited Livelihoods: Gender and Class in Nineteenth Century England*, 53.
- 18 Marjorie Levine-Clark, “Engendering Relief: Women, Ablebodiedness, and the New Poor Laws in Early Victorian England,” 111. It should be said, however, that voices advocating women's unfitnes for paid work were answered by competing voices from political economists and “self-interested factory owners” who argued that women should work for the “good of society and the economy” (111). Even single women—whether they were widows, had been deserted, or had never married—could typically access relief only through “their” men, either their husbands or their fathers.

- 19 George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890–1940*, 354.
- 20 “A Working Girl,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 7 May 1932. If “A Working Girl” was still working when she penned the letter, then it remains unclear whether she counted herself among the one out of ten who was *not* working merely to satisfy their own desires.
- 21 Letter from D. Mansfield to T. S. Magee, 28 February 1931, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 515A.
- 22 Letter from Whaley to Hair, 7 July 1931, SA, 1069-1521, file 3.
- 23 Letter from Archibald to Hair, 9 July 1931, SA, 1069-1521, file 3.
- 24 Letter from A. G. M. Wallace to City Council, 16 October 1931, SA, 1069-2055, file 1. It is difficult to tell how widespread responses like these to the notion of women working on relief jobs was, although historian Lara Campbell refers to similar letters in Ontario during the 1930s, suggesting that they were not uncommon. Lara Campbell, “Respectable Citizens of Canada: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in the Great Depression, Ontario,” 170–75.
- 25 “Married Women Workers,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 28 June 1930.
- 26 An earlier literature often emphasized the importance of “crises in masculinity” at various points in history. This approach has since met with considerable criticism, however, mainly because the notion of a “crisis” in masculinity suggests that masculinity is an unchanging concept rather than a socially constructed one, constantly being formed and reformed, deconstructed and reconstructed. See, for example, Michael Kimmel, “The Contemporary ‘Crisis’ of Masculinity in Historical Perspective”; R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 84; and Katharine V. Snyder, “A Paradise of Bachelors: Remodelling Domesticity and Masculinity in the Turn-of-the-Century New York Bachelor Apartment,” 250.
- 27 See Connell, *Masculinities*; Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*; E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*; Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds., *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*; Ava Baron, “On Looking at Men: Masculinity and the Making of a Gendered Working-Class History”; Joy Parr, “Gender History and Historical Practice”; and Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880–1917*.
- 28 Letter from Mayor James Douglas to Aldermen, 18 August 1931, EA, RG II, class 160, file 1.
- 29 Letter from City Commissioner Mitchell to Aldermen, 18 August 1931, EA RG II, class 160, file 1.

- 30 “Council to Plan Distribution of Work Wednesday,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 15 September 1931.
- 31 Letter from Chief Engineer Archibald to City Commissioner Leslie, 18 September 1931, SA, 1069-1573, file 1.
- 32 “Relief Plan Adopted by City Chiefs,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 19 December 1929.
- 33 “Call Tenders for Second Sewer Unit,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 2 January 1930. See also “Only Married Men Will Be Employed on Project,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 5 September 1931.
- 34 “Federal Money Now Available,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 5 July 1930.
- 35 “Married Men Only Will Be Employed,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 30 June 1930. See also letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to Commissioner David Mitchell, 23 August 1934, and letter from Alderman Farmilo to Council, 1 October 1934, EA RG II, class 160, file 8.
- 36 Letter from W. H. Carter to A. MacNamara, ADM of Public Works, 8 September 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief, file 44.
- 37 Relief Office Report on Earnings of Trucks and Teams, 15 March 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 8.
- 38 Ibid.
- 39 Ibid.
- 40 Letter from City Commissioner to Canadian Legion, 12 December 1930, SA, 1069-2055, file 8.
- 41 “Mayor Hair Nails Story by Scarlett: Did Not Tell Men to Rustle for Meals, He Declares,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 10 July 1930.
- 42 Letter from Harold McKee to Commissioner David Mitchell, 23 August 1934, EA, RG II, class 160, file 8.
- 43 Letter from Ronald Hooper to W. R. Clubb, 10 November 1932.
- 44 Building Trades Council of Winnipeg and Vicinity Submission on Building Construction vs. Direct Relief, 12 September 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief.
- 45 It is difficult to gauge the UEMA’s size because its membership shifted over time and it is not clear how it measured its own membership.
- 46 For an important examination of masculinity and soldiering, see Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War*. On the incorporation of citizenship into the relationship between manliness and soldiering, see R. Claire Snyder, *Citizen-Soldiers and Manly Warriors: Military*

Service and Gender in the Civic Republican Tradition. Snyder argues that, at certain points in the American past, soldiers have represented themselves as citizens on the basis not of blood or birthright but rather of their civic practices, including fighting and engaging in other martial activities. She also emphasizes what Judith Butler has called the “performative” practices through which gender, including particular types of masculinity, is constructed. See Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

- 47 Unemployment Committee Report, 2 July 1931, EA, RG 11, class 149, file 4, 1931 [file 13]. Veteran’s groups like the UEMA clearly made their claims against the cities as men who had fought for King and Country and who therefore deserved better treatment than other unemployed men. In a sense, their claims represented a masculine citizenship based on their service to Canada and the British Empire.
- 48 Letter from George Greenfield to Mayor Douglas, 10 August 1931, EA, RG 11, class 150, file 8.
- 49 Letter from George Smith to Mayor Douglas, 13 August 1931, EA, RG 11, class 150, file 8.
- 50 Letter from James Burnard to Mayor Douglas, 21 July 1931, EA, RG 11, class 150, file 15.
- 51 “Relief Wage Is 45 Cents,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 15 September 1931.
- 52 Letter from T. S. Magee to R. C. Rathbone, 2 March 1931.
- 53 Letter from Mike Aychuk to Premier Brownlee, 14 January 1932, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 516B. Writing of Britain during the latter half of the nineteenth century, historians Anna Clark and Sonya Rose argue that notions of respectability within the working class increasingly turned on the image of the married male breadwinner—a figure who was defined, at least in part, in opposition to the single man. Single men thus became, by definition, unrespectable vis-à-vis married men’s respectability. See Sonya O. Rose, “Respectable Men, Disorderly Others: The Language of Gender and the Lancashire Weavers’ Strike of 1878 in Britain,” and Anna Clark, “The Rhetoric of Chartist Domesticity: Gender, Language and Class in the 1830s and 1840s.” In particular, Clark’s examination of Chartist rhetoric shows how “by evoking domesticity, Chartists could uphold working-class manhood, appeal to women, and extract concessions from the state” (63). Domesticity, of course, implied a home with a wife and children—the opposite, in other words, of the single man’s experience.
- 54 In an interview, Alice Kessler-Harris spoke about how, during the Depression, married women were pushed out of jobs they needed and sometimes resorted to similar practices in order to keep working: “And so there are instances, for example, of women divorcing their husbands or separating from their husbands to keep their jobs, pretending they weren’t married, postponing

marriages, and so on.” New River Media Interview with Alice Kessler-Harris, *The First Measured Century*, n.d., <http://www.pbs.org/fmc/interviews/kesslerharris.htm>.

- 55 “Many on Relief Childless, Rowland Presumes Large Number Got Married Here to Obtain Assistance,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 18 March 1932.
- 56 “City Council to Adopt New Scheme of Giving Relief,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 26 March 1932.
- 57 Letter from Clerk to Central Council on Unemployment, 27 November 1933, SA, 1069-1099.
- 58 Letter from H. F. McKee to City Commissioner, 2 February 1933, EA, RG II, class 149, file 19. It might be noted, though, that the city relief officer could (and did) make some allowance when children were involved.
- 59 Ibid. The city’s unemployed, not surprisingly, disagreed. On 14 February 1933, a United Workers’ Council appeared before the city council “protesting against single men on relief being refused relief upon getting married.” The city chose to “take no action” on the complaint. Letter from City Clerk to City Commissioners, 14 February 1933, EA RG II, class 149, file 19.
- 60 “Pledge to Repay Must Be Signed for City Relief,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 13 October 1932.
- 61 “Gets Relief by Fraud; Draws One Extra Month,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 29 February 1932.
- 62 Ibid.
- 63 “City Council to Adopt New Scheme of Giving Relief.” It is not clear where the men got the marriage certificates.
- 64 “Shirkers to Get No Consideration,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 4 September 1931.
- 65 Letter from Bracken to Bennett, 12 April 1933, PAM G8030, Unemployment Relief.
- 66 Report of Operations and Costs Year Ending December 31st 1933.
- 67 Resolution Adopted by the Highlands and District Community League to Be Submitted to Edmonton City Council, from Secretary M. N. Gilman, 7 April 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 3.
- 68 Letter from Chas. Ed. K. Cox to Mayor Daniel Knott, 20 September 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 5.
- 69 Letter from W. H. Carter, Carter-Halls-Aldinger Company Limited, to A. MacNamara, Assistant Deputy Minister of Public Works, 8 September 1933, PAM, G8030, Unemployment Relief.

- 70 Letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to Commissioner David Mitchell, 20 October 1932, EA, RG II, class 160, file 3. Virtually the same list of potential works was produced again the following spring and then again in December. Letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to Commissioner David Mitchell, 12 May 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 3; List of Needed Public Works Prepared by Chief Engineer Haddow, 12 December 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 5.
- 71 Letter from Commissioner Mitchell to City Council, 24 October 1932, EA, RG II, class 160, file 3.
- 72 Letter from Commissioner Mitchell to City Council, 11 July 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 4.
- 73 Letter from ADM of Labour Department to R. Jacobs, Chairman, Winnipeg Unemployment Advisory Board, 25 May 1933, PAM, G 8030, Unemployment Relief.
- 74 Memo of Conference Between Members of Saskatoon's City Council and Saskatchewan Premier J. T. M. Anderson, 7 February 1934, SA, 1069-1209.
- 75 Edmonton's city commissioner outlined these limitations to the city council in the summer of 1933; however, the limitations were well known long before that. See Letter from Commissioner Mitchell to City Council, 11 July 1933.
- 76 Letter from Commissioner Mitchell to City Council, 24 October 1932. It might be added, however, that the cities sometimes secured loans from the federal government to carry out works under the direct relief scheme. Late in 1934, for instance, Edmonton received a \$500,000 loan from the federal government to help finance its local improvement programs using labour taken from the ranks of the city's unemployed married men. Letter from Premier Reid to Mayor Knott, 13 September 1934, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 1025. The city had initially asked for \$1 million. Letter from Knott to Reid, 16 July 1934, EA, RG II, class 160, file 7.
- 77 Letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to Commissioner David Mitchell, 3 December 1932, EA, RG II, class 160, file 3. See also the letter from Mitchell to Haddow, 11 July 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 4. By August, the city hoped to begin a \$100,000 program of work, to include grading and gravelling, curb and walk work, sewers, watermains, and parks work. The program was, however, entirely contingent on the city's financial situation. "Our chief difficulty in the matter," Edmonton's city commissioner admitted to Chief Engineer Haddow, "is that of making the necessary financial arrangements to provide the money. At the moment, we are awaiting information from some of the bond dealers as to whether it would be possible to arrange for the issue of either treasury notes or debentures for a limited amount sufficient to meet the cost." Letter from Commissioner David Mitchell to Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow, 1 August 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 4.

- 78 Report from H. F. McKee to City Commissioners, results of survey of work schemes in Winnipeg, Vancouver, Saskatoon, and Regina, 9 July 1935, EA, RG II, class 160, file 10.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Ibid.
- 81 “Must Work If They Want Bridge Jobs,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 11 May 1932.
- 82 “Intimidation by Jobless Alleged,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 5 May 1932. The city relief officer estimated that the men were earning the equivalent of forty to eighty cents per hour.
- 83 “Blain Says Relief Gang Is Loafing,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 19 April 1932.
- 84 Minutes of Civic Relief Board Meeting, 20 April 1932, SA, Civic Relief Board Files, file 181.
- 85 “Blain Says Relief Gang Is Loafing.”
- 86 “River Bank Work No Use, Leslie Says,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 27 May 1932.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 “Intimidation by Jobless Alleged.”
- 89 “Must Work If They Don’t Want Bridge Jobs,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 11 May 1932.
- 90 “Intimidation by Jobless Alleged.”
- 91 Letter from H. F. McKee to David Mitchell, 8 February 1933.
- 92 Mayor Daniel Knott to O. L. McPherson, Alberta Minister of Public Works, 22 January 1934, EA, RG II, class 160, file 6.
- 93 Letter from City Commissioner David Mitchell to H. F. McKee, 12 July 1934, EA, RG II, class 160, file 7.
- 94 Letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to Commissioner Mitchell, 10 January 1933, EA, RG II, class 160, file 3.
- 95 Ibid. The men would arrive at the relief office on their first working day. There, they would receive one streetcar ticket and their orders for the day. Once at the worksite, the men met with the onsite foreman, who directed them to their work gang. At the end of the day, the foreman would give the men two more streetcar tickets, one to get home and another to return to another worksite the following day.
- 96 Letter from Alderman Farmilo to Mayor and Commissioner, 7 November 1934, EA, RG II, class 160, file 8.

- 97 See, for example, letter from City Clerk to City Commissioner relating worker delegation demands, 13 December 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 17.
- 98 Edmonton Chamber of Commerce Resolution submitted to Edmonton City Council, 9 August 1933, EA, RG II, class 149, file 24.
- 99 Letter from H. F. McKee to City Commissioner, Special Relief Department's Answer to Various Relief Complaints, etc., 21 May 1934, EA, RG II, class 149, file 31.
- 100 Letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 16 May 1934, EA, RG II, class 160, file 7.
- 101 Ibid.
- 102 "740 Gather for Parade of Jobless," *Edmonton Journal*, 16 May 1934.
- 103 "Men Refusing to Work Will Lose Food Cards; Showdown on Monday" *Edmonton Journal*, 18 May 1934. See also *Calgary Daily Herald*, 18 May 1934, p. 1.
- 104 *Calgary Daily Herald*, 21 May 1934, p. 1.
- 105 "Men Refusing Work May Lose Relief," *Edmonton Journal*, 18 May 1934.
- 106 "Stool-Sitting 'Shoppers' Picketing Scheme Planned," *Edmonton Journal*, 4 June 1934. The women also intended to occupy the time of clothiers to the exclusion of all other customers.
- 107 Letter from Edmonton National Labour Council Secretary R. Lemaitre to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 26 May 1934, EA, RG II, class 149, file 31.
- 108 Letter from A. Spence, Secretary of the Brotherhood of Railway Carmen of America, West Edmonton Lodge, to City Council, 19 May 1934, EA, RG II, class 149, file 31.
- 109 "Ex-Servicemen in Threat to Join Relief Strikers If Increase Not Granted" *Edmonton Journal*, 17 May 1934.
- 110 Ibid.
- 111 Ibid. The Union Jack reference is important because it speaks to a particular identity shared by veterans that involved membership in the Empire, Britishness, and an anti-communist stance.
- 112 "Quiet Returns in City Strike," *Edmonton Journal*, 22 May 1934.
- 113 Ibid.
- 114 "Urge Immediate Action on Public Works," *Edmonton Journal*, 18 May 1934.
- 115 Letter from Knott to Bennett, 23 May 1934, EA, RG II, class 149, file 31. Just the day before, relief officials reported that "only a few" recipients of some

- two hundred called to work actually showed up at the worksite. See “Quiet Returns in City Strike.”
- 116 “Sympathy March on Civic Block Fails Win Freedom for Men Taken During Attempt Block Garden Work,” *Edmonton Journal*, 28 May 1932.
- 117 Letter from Chief Engineer A. W. Haddow to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 15 July 1935, EA, RG II, class 160, file 9. For the work week of 3–7 June 1935, the engineering department called seventy-one men for their relief rotation, but only thirty-eight appeared at their assigned worksite. See letter from H. F. McKee to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 19 July 1935, EA, RG II, class 160, file 9.
- 118 Howard Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture*, 65.
- 119 Paul Laipson, “‘I Have No Genius for Marriage’: Bachelorhood in Urban America, 1870–1930,” 2.
- 120 *Ibid.*, 3. See other explorations of the hyper-masculine in, for example, Chauncy, *Gay New York*, 353–54, and Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*.
- 121 In *Violent Land: Single Men and Social Disorder from the Frontier to the Inner City*, historian David T. Courtwright explores the association of violence and single male culture from the late nineteenth century to the late twentieth. Courtwright argues that the real (as opposed to imagined) violence perpetrated by single men was the result of lethal combinations of high testosterone, easy access to guns and other weapons, and booze. This concoction, in Courtwright’s view, fuelled single men’s violence and society’s fears of it.
- 122 Quoted in Laipson, “‘I Have No Genius for Marriage,’” 284.
- 123 See, for example, Harry Hendrick, *Images of Youth: Age, Class, and the Male Youth Problem, 1880–1920*; Stephen Humphries, *Hooligans or Rebels? An Oral History of Working-Class Childhood and Youth, 1889–1939*; Craig Heron, “Boys Will Be Boys: Working-Class Masculinities in the Age of Mass Production” and “The High School and the Household Economy in Working-Class Hamilton, 1890–1940”; and John Springhall, *Youth, Popular Culture, and Moral Panics: Penny Gaffs to Gangsta–Rap, 1830–1996*.
- 124 David Bright, “The State, the Unemployed, and the Communist Party in Calgary, 1930–1935.”
- 125 Resolution Adopted by the Highlands and District Community League to Be Submitted to Edmonton City Council, from Secretary M. N. Gilman, 7 April 1933.
- 126 Report of the Finance Committee, 21 December 1929, SA, D500 III 895.

- 127 Letter from Police Chief Shute to Mayor Douglas, 10 December 1929, EA, RG II, class 150, file 141.
- 128 David Bright, "Loafers Are Not Going to Subsist upon Public Credulence: Vagrancy and the Law in Calgary, 1900-1914."
- 129 Letter from H. F. McKee, Manager, Special Relief Department, to A. A. Mackenzie, Chairman, Unemployment Relief Commission, 10 December 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 17.
- 130 Letter from H. F. McKee, Manager, Special Relief Department, to Commissioner David Mitchell, 23 March 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 8.
- 131 Jeffrey Ryan Suzik, "Building Better Men: Education, Training and Socialization of Working-Class Male Youth in the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942," 19.
- 132 Unemployment Policy, 1932, PAM, G8032, Reports, 1931-32.
- 133 Letter from Brownlee to R. Priestley, 28 April 1932, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 170A. See also Unemployment Relief Committee Minutes, 4 October 1931, WA.
- 134 Letter from P. S. White to Mayor Douglas, 22 August 1931, and reply of Douglas to White, 25 August 1931, EA, RG II, class 150, file 16. See also Cynthia Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition: Adolescence and Leisure in Interwar English Canada," 32.
- 135 Letter from Mayor Underwood to City Clerk, 13 September 1931, SA, 1069-1522, file 2.
- 136 "Shirkers to Get No Consideration."
- 137 Ibid.
- 138 "Cities Must Aid Farm Labour Plan," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 19 April 1932.
- 139 Unemployment Policy, 1932, PAM, G8032, Reports, 1931-32. For the remaining eight months of the contract, the farmer promised to pay the man a further five dollars per month. The scheme also offered five dollars per month to the farmer's wife, for the "extra work necessitated through keeping the hired man on the farm" would likely fall on her.
- 140 Letter from ADM of Public Works to Brown and Rutherford, Lumber Dealers, 27 April 1932, PAM, G8036.
- 141 Unemployment Relief, 28 March 1932, PAM, G8030.
- 142 Letter from P. Kostyniuk to Mayor Knott, 15 July 1931, EA, RG II, class 150, file 15.

- 143 Letter from Leo Bunting to T. S. Magee, 3 August 1931, EA, RG II, class 150, file 16.
- 144 Interview with Charles Henry McKinnon, February 1975, PAA, 75.77, Western Oral History Project.
- 145 Doctors wielded considerable power over single men's relief provision. Cities, for instance, relied on physicians' assessments of men's fitness for work on farms and in camps, and the contents of the physicians' reports could determine whether a man received any relief at all. In late 1931, for example, one single Winnipeg man went to work on a farm for five dollars per month but soon returned to the city after feeling ill. The Winnipeg doctor attending to relief cases examined the man and "denied he was sick." The man was subsequently cut off all city relief. The case, according to a group of unemployed protesters that converged at the provincial legislature in late February 1932, was not an isolated one. The protesters aimed their frustration at one relief doctor in particular, who had developed a bad reputation among the unemployed. "Dr. Harvey," the group asserted, "is incapable of carrying out his duties of passing upon the health of applicants for relief." Letter from ADM of Public Works to Chairman and Members of Winnipeg's Civic Unemployment Relief Committee, 19 February 1932, MA, G8030, Unemployment Relief Files.
- 146 "Shirkers Causing Trouble in Ranks Of City Jobless," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 10 January 1930.
- 147 Unemployment Relief, 28 March 1932, PAM, G8030.
- 148 Ibid.
- 149 "Demand for Harvest Aid Falling Off," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 16 September 1932.
- 150 Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada's National Parks, 1915-1946*, 50 and 89-107.
- 151 See the discussion in Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 48-84.
- 152 Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 310. The camp commandant had on file more than 150 forms completed by "professional drifters" from Halifax, Toronto, Montréal, Vancouver, Calgary, and Edmonton who had heard that the city was opening a camp. All were refused admission. The camp commandant's expectations of "respect for authority" fell apart in May 1933, on the occasion of a riot that was probably provoked when mounted RCMP officers charged the camp in an effort to quell what they perceived as a Communist insurrection within the camp.
- 153 Report Covering Operations of Exhibition Relief Camp, 6 May 1931, SA. It is not clear exactly how this last statement was meant to be read. As historians

have shown in other contexts, the toilet could be a place to relax away from the foreman's eyes, but it could also be place for illicit sexual liaisons. See, for example, Steven Maynard, "Through a Hole in the Lavatory Wall: Homosexual Subcultures, Police Surveillance, and the Dialectics of Discovery, Toronto, 1890–1930."

- 154 Report Covering Operations of Exhibition Relief Camp, 6 May 1931.
- 155 Ibid.
- 156 Letter from City Commissioner to T. S. Magee, 1 April 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 2. As the commissioner notes, in the spring of 1931 the number of single men in the camps increased steadily, from 796 (out of a total of 3,770) on 28 February, to 835 (out of 3,839) in early March, to a high of more than 1,000 by mid-April. The province also opened smaller camps at Barrhead and Ardrossen in early 1931.
- 157 Council Resolution, 8 April 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 2.
- 158 Letter from T. S. Magee to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 6 May 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 3.
- 159 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 51.
- 160 Letter from T. S. Magee to City Commissioner David Mitchell, 17 June 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 3.
- 161 Memo from R. English, Department of Municipal Affairs, to Smith, Chairman, Relief Committee, 1 June 1931, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 515B.
- 162 See, for instance, Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 52–53, and Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 87–88.
- 163 Memo from A. W. Haddow to Commissioner re: Unemployment Relief, Calgary Meeting, 19 August 1931, EA, RG II, class 160, file 1. It is not clear whether, by "practically suggested," the chief engineer meant that Bennett almost suggested cutting the men from the relief rolls or that Bennett's suggestion was practical. Either way, the effect was the same, making Edmonton officials believe that the federal government would take care of single unemployed men in camps.
- 164 See Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 55–84, for an extensive and sensitively drawn account of these operations. The national park initiatives included relief camps at Waterton Lakes, Elk Island, Jasper, and Banff National Parks, in Alberta; Prince Albert National Park, in Saskatchewan; and Riding Mountain National Park, in Manitoba.
- 165 Letter from T. S. Magee to Commissioner Mitchell, 24 June 1931, EA, RG II, class 149, file 4.

- 166 Memorandum Covering Discussion with Senator Robertson in Ottawa, 25 and 26 August 1931, PAM, G8030, Unemployment 1930-31. If the men remained on the job for three months, Robertson promised, the federal government would pay their way back to the city in the spring.
- 167 Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 58-62.
- 168 Telegram from Knott to Bennett, 22 April 1932, EA, RGII, class 160, file 3.
- 169 Letter from Brownlee to Murphy, 6 May 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 10.
- 170 Letter from Brownlee to Knott, 9 May 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 10.
- 171 Letter from Knott to Calgary Mayor Davison, 28 May 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 10.
- 172 Letter from City Commissioner to T. S. Magee, 3 February 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 7.
- 173 Letter from Harrison to Brownlee, 6 February 1932, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 516B. The president of Edmonton's branch of the Canadian Legion was only too willing to provide the proof:

It seems that the trouble, which I strongly believe was premeditated, arose between Heffer [a communist] and the foreman of the Camp to which the men were attached, which culminated in the former being fired by the said foreman, whereupon Heffer influenced the men referred to above to stop work and return with him to Edmonton. It seems that the foreman in question was of a very irritable nature and at times next to impossible to reason with. Heffer, learning of this, apparently used him [the foreman] as the "goat" and irritated the man until he [Heffer] was fired. I believe there is some justification in appealing for reinstatement of these men to relief, when one considers the fact that probably 90% of them are more or less uneducated and not knowing Heffer's "purpose" were easily influenced by a past master at his "art."

The situation concerned the premier enough that he wired local MP H. E. Spencer in Ottawa asking him to "kindly see Minister and advise if he will give instructions to take [the] men back at Jasper." Telegram from Premier Brownlee to H. E. Spencer, 8 February 1932, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 516B.

- 174 Letter from McKee to David Mitchell, 6 May 1932, EA, RG II, class 149, file 10.
- 175 See, for example, Waiser, *All Hell Can't Stop Us* and *Park Prisoners*.
- 176 See A. B. McKillop, "A Communist in City Hall."

5 *Local Responsibility in Decline*

- 1 As only one example of many, in late February 1934, Winnipeg's City Council informed the provincial government that "the City of Winnipeg is no longer able to assume any portion of the cost of direct relief." In May of that year, Saskatoon passed a resolution calling on the "Federal Government to assume full responsibility for unemployment relief." Minutes of Council, 27 February 1934, and Saskatoon Council Resolution forwarded to Winnipeg City Council, Minutes of Council, 8 May 1934, WA.
- 2 A voluminous literature on this topic includes Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada*; Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada*; James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941*; and P. E. Bryden, *Planners and Politicians: Liberal Politics and Social Policy, 1957–1968*.
- 3 In parallel fashion, historian Robert Wardhaugh describes in more general terms Ottawa's declining interest in the Prairie provinces as a result of the Depression and other national and international concerns: "The revamping of federalism and the constitution, the crisis in capitalism and the beginning of a new economic order, and the lengthening shadows of dictatorship and the threats of world war relegated Prairie concerns to the background. The crude political reality was that as the region became less influential and indeed, more burdensome, King's focus turned elsewhere: The West would never again receive the same attention from Ottawa." Robert A. Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 163.
- 4 See John Taylor's important article "Relief from Relief: The Cities' Answer to Depression Dependency," where Taylor argues that most of the early calls for full federal responsibility for unemployment relief came from the western cities. See also Keith Banting's wider discussion in "Canada: Nation-Building in a Federal Welfare State."
- 5 Minutes of Conference Proceedings, 1 March 1930, LAC, RG 27, vol. 3133.
- 6 Ibid. King did not elaborate on his remark about France. However, French unemployment figures may have painted a somewhat rosy picture. During the 1920s, French farmers had hired about two million foreign migrant workers. When the economy soured, many of these workers were dismissed and sent home, but their removal from the workforce was probably not reflected in unemployment statistics. In addition, in 1930, many French factories reduced workers' hours rather than laying workers off, and French employment figures did not generally include underemployed workers. Personal communication, Kenneth Mouré, September 2010.

- 7 Letter No. 10 for Council, enclosed in letter from Davison to Clarke, 7 December 1934, EA, RG II, class 105, file 1.
- 8 Proceedings of Conference of Representatives of Canadian Western Municipalities, Calgary, 28–29 January 1935, VA, 33 B-4, file 3. Fifty-three delegates, including mayors, aldermen, commissioners, managers, and councillors, together representing twenty-six cities, are listed as in attendance.
- 9 Ibid. The conference was divided into three main committees, Finance, Relief, and Taxation, and each of the three produced resolutions calling on the federal government to assume responsibility for relief. See also “Mayors Delve into Taxation and Relief Problems; Urge Ottawa Assume Total Relief Costs,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, 29 January 1935; “Credit at Cost by Central Bank Asked by Mayors,” *Globe and Mail*, 30 January 1935; and “Mayors Conference at Calgary,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 28 January 1935.
- 10 Letter from Davison to Clarke, 7 December 1934.
- 11 Letter from Clarke to Davison, 8 December 1934, EA, RG II, class 105, file 1. Clarke nevertheless approved of the newspaper’s report, deeming it effective in putting the issues facing the cities squarely in the public eye.
- 12 Letter from Saskatoon Mayor J. S. Mills to Edmonton Mayor Joe Clarke, [n.d.] January 1935, EA, RG II, class 70, file 1.
- 13 Finance Committee Resolution, Proceedings of Conference of Representatives of Canadian Western Municipalities, Calgary, 28–29 January 1935. In a handwritten note on Vancouver Mayor Gerry McGeer’s copy of the Finance Committee Resolution, the phrase “No thought of repudiation” follows the resolution that reads: “FURTHERMORE BE IT RESOLVED that all Western Provincial Governments be requested forthwith to pass legislation making it imperative upon all holders of existing debentures and coupons of Western Municipalities and School Boards to register their ownership with the various Provincial Secretaries or Ministers of Municipalities in each Province as a condition precedent to the cashing of any coupons or bond.”
- 14 Proceedings of Conference of Representatives of Canadian Western Municipalities, Calgary, 28–29 January 1935.
- 15 Telegram from Camillien Houde, Mayor of Montréal, Proceedings of Conference of Representatives of Canadian Western Municipalities, Calgary, 28–29 January 1935. Houde initially proposed to the western delegates a Dominion-wide meeting to take place in Ottawa. (The actual meeting took place in Montréal.) Houde first came to the idea of organizing a national conference of Canadian mayors during a visit to London, Ontario, to receive from that city as “Montreal’s first magistrate the parchment which conferred upon him all the privileges of citizenship.” Transcripts of Radio Canada Canadian Radio Commission Coast-to-Coast Broadcast by Mayors of Nine

Provinces, Dominion Conference of Mayors, 25–26 March 1935, PAA, Athelstan and Mary Bisset Collection, PR 1981.0330, box 1, file 32.

- 16 The Ontario Mayors Association resolution, unanimously passed by forty-four Ontario mayors, reads: “Whereas unemployment relief is a national problem: Therefore be it resolved that this conference goes on record in favour of petitioning the premier of Ontario to support the decision of the premier of our sister province of Quebec in his offer to the federal government that the full cost of this problem be paid by the provinces of Canada and the federal government share and share alike.” Camillien Houde pointed out in his telegram to the western mayors conference that “mayors of Quebec cities and towns affected by direct relief, thirteen altogether, met in my office in December and unanimously passed the following resolution: That the Dominion and Provincial Governments should immediately assume responsibility for direct relief.” Telegram from Camillien Houde, Mayor of Montréal, Proceedings of Conference of Representatives of Canadian Western Municipalities, Calgary, 28–29 January 1935. See also “Believes Government Preparing to Assume Relief Responsibility,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 29 January 1935.
- 17 The “five million citizens and 75 percent of the taxes” claim was a consistent feature during the Dominion Mayors Conferences of 1935, 1936, 1937, and 1938. See, for instance, “Mayors at Montreal Reach Solemn Verdict at Conference Today,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 26 March 1935; and “Honeyman Asks for Municipal Relief Strike,” *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 16 March 1937.
- 18 Letter from Bracken to Reid, 18 February 1935, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 834.
- 19 Letter from Patullo to Reid, 18 February 1935, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 834.
- 20 Letter from Gardiner to Reid, 16 February 1935, PAA, Premiers’ Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 834.
- 21 Considerable planning had gone into the meeting, indicating the importance that the mayors attached to the conference. The mayors soon struck an organizing committee that met in Montréal in mid-March to make arrangements for the mayors’ arrival later that month. Among those on the organizing committee was Edmonton alderman and future family court judge Athelstan Bisset, who collected materials associated with the conference, including information circulars that various individuals presented to each delegate, conference proceedings, and transcripts from a radio broadcast. See Dominion Conference of Mayors, PAA, Athelstan and Mary Bisset Collection, PR 1981.0330, box 1, file 32.
- 22 Comparative Statement of the Relief Situation in Canadian Municipalities in Relation to Municipal Finances Prepared by Department of Social Research,

McGill, for the Organization Committee, Dominion Conference of Mayors, Hotel Mount Royal, 25–27 March 1935, submitted 23 March 1935, VA, 33 C-4, file 14. Figures include dependents of heads of families and single persons, but indigents and workers engaged on relief works were excluded. Marsh made himself available throughout the conference to answer any questions that might arise from the numbers he produced. His figures are based on data from February 1935 or the nearest available date prior to February.

- 23 Comparative Statement of the Relief Situation in Canadian Municipalities in Relation to Municipal Finances.
- 24 Verbatim Report of Proceedings, Dominion Conference of Mayors, Morning Session, 25 March 1935, PAA, Athelstan and Mary Bisset Collection, PR 1981.0330, box 1, file 32, n.p. It might be pointed out here that the press made much of Houde's apparent threat simply to discontinue Montréal's direct relief payments as of 1 May 1935, forcing the federal and provincial governments either to continue paying for direct relief and make up the municipal shortfall or else to direct the police and militia to keep order. The press also claimed that some 50 percent of the nation's mayors were behind Houde's plan. Apparently, though, mayors in the Prairie provinces were not. None of these threats appeared in the verbatim conference proceedings, and the conference passed no resolutions to this effect. See "Conference of Mayors Explosive," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 25 March 1935, and "National Crisis Looms as Result of Failure to Secure Concessions," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 28 March 1935.
- 25 Verbatim Report of Proceedings, Dominion Conference of Mayors, Afternoon Session, 25 March 1935, p. 50 (Andrews) and p. 59 (Pinder).
- 26 Verbatim Report of Proceedings, Dominion Conference of Mayors, Evening Session, 25 March 1935. The precise wording of the resolution, as introduced by Mayor Houde, read: "NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED; by this Conference of Mayors representing all parts of the Dominion of Canada and directly representing approximately five millions of its population and more than seventy-five per cent of the taxes paid; THAT from and after the first day of April A.D. 1935 the Dominion Government take over and assume the entire cost of unemployment relief in the Dominion of Canada." Canadians who tuned into the Radio Canada Canadian Radio Commission Broadcast, which began at 9:15 p.m., heard the following: "The Canadian Radio Commission brings this evening a broadcast which will be of historic importance. For the first time the heads of Canada's great urban centres are meeting to discuss their problems. You will hear this evening nine three-minute addresses on the terrible problem of unemployment given by leading Mayors from nine Provinces of Canada." The addresses that followed sketched out the conditions in each mayor's city. See Transcripts of Radio Canada Canadian Radio Commission Coast-to-Coast Broadcast by Mayors of Nine Provinces, Dominion Conference of Mayors, 25–26 March 1935.

- 27 Verbatim Report of Proceedings Dominion Conference of Mayors, Evening Session, 25 March 1935, p. 91. The reference to the residual powers clause in section 91 of the British North America Act signalled the mayors' contention that the "Peace, Order, and Good Government" power gave the Dominion government the jurisdictional competence to assume responsibility for what might otherwise be considered a matter of local responsibility and therefore a provincial or municipal issue.
- 28 See Memorandum of Proceedings, Continuing Committee of the Dominion Conference of Mayors, 22 April 1935 to 10 March 1936, reprint of letter from Perley to Houde, 18 April 1935, VA, 33 C-4, file 14, pp. 1–2. See also, for example, "Acting Prime Minister Tells Delegation That Consideration Will Be Given but Problem Should Be Taken to Provincial Houses," *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 28 March 1935. The federal government continued to refuse to deal directly with city administrations despite the conference itself, the radio broadcast on the first evening of the conference, and a conference committee's trip to Ottawa on 26 March 1935 that included an invitation to MPs to participate in a special meeting in the Railway Committee Rooms in the House of Commons. See Verbatim Report of Proceedings, Dominion Conference of Mayors, Morning Session, 27 March 1935, pp. 191–93.
- 29 Telegram from Houde to Reid, 14 April 1935, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 835. Perley had been left in charge when Bennett "was effectively out of action from late-February to mid-May," owing both to an acute respiratory infection and to his attendance at the Silver Jubilee in London. Robert A. Wardhaugh, *Behind the Scenes: The Life and Work of William Clifford Clark*, 96.
- 30 Memorandum of Proceedings, Continuing Committee of the Dominion Conference of Mayors, 22 April 1935 to 10 March 1936, reprint of letters from Perley to Houde, 18 April 1935, and from Reid to Houde, 20 April 1935, VA, 33 C-4, file 14, pp. 1–2 and 3. Similar provincial expectations of an impending Dominion-provincial conference came from L. P. D. Tilley, premier of New Brunswick, and John Bracken, premier of Manitoba (see pp. 4 and 5).
- 31 Verbatim Report of Proceedings, Dominion Conference of Mayors, 27 March 1935, pp. 208–15. The motion to strike the committee passed easily, by a vote of 26 to 2. According to Winnipeg Mayor John Queen, Houde and the other mayors also invited the nation's premiers met with them later that spring "to present a strong and united demand to the Dominion Government for them to relieve the Municipalities from this [relief] expenditure." But, he lamented, "at that time, the provincial governments did not see they [*sic*] way fit to join in that Conference." Letter from John Queen, mayor of Winnipeg, to John Bracken, 22 July 1935, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 835. See also Camillien Houde's recapitulation of the 1935 Conference's activities in a letter to Gerry McGeer, mayor of Vancouver, 22 March 1936, VA, 33 C-4, file 14.

- 32 Telegram from Houde et al. to Reid, 10 April 1935, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 835. As chair of the Continuing Committee of the Dominion Conference of Mayors, Houde sent similar letters to the premiers of all nine provinces, as well as to Acting Prime Minister Sir George Perley. See Memorandum of Proceedings, Continuing Committee of the Dominion Conference of Mayors, 22 April 1935 to 10 March 1936.
- 33 Telegram from Houde et al. to Reid, 14 April 1935, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 835.
- 34 Memorandum of Proceedings, Continuing Committee of the Dominion Conference of Mayors, 22 April 1935 to 10 March 1936, p. 6.
- 35 *Ibid.*, pp. 13–14.
- 36 Reprint of letter from Camillien Houde, Chair, Continuing Committee of the Dominion Conference of Mayors to Mackenzie King, 13 December 1936, VA, 33 C-4, file 14, pp. 14–15.
- 37 Minutes and Resolutions, Dominion Conference of Mayors, Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, 23–25 March 1936, VA, 33 C-4, file 14, Relief Committee Resolution, pp. 1–2. Other resolutions passed at the conference included one urging the federal and provincial governments “to participate financially and administratively in a supervised policy to establish upon small acreages of agricultural and garden lands families now registered upon relief, as an unemployment measure, for the purpose of giving an opportunity to relief recipients to make themselves self-supporting and relieving the municipalities of permanently maintaining families on relief.” Another proposed “that the Government of Canada take the lead in establishing a uniform, centralized agency for the care, maintenance, training, and rehabilitation of the blind,” and still another suggested “asking the Dominion Government to consider the serious condition of the youth of the country and devise some scheme to alleviate their position.” See *ibid.*, General Resolutions, pp. 1–3.
- 38 “Relief Loans to Provinces \$111,000,000,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, 25 March 1936. Manitoba owed \$15,028,086; Saskatchewan, \$46,834,986; Alberta, \$22,779,000; and British Columbia, \$26,947,680.
- 39 Goldenberg would go on to enjoy a long career, first serving as labour arbitrator for the Canadian Labour Congress, later consulting on the Rowell-Sirois Commission and serving as a senator from 1971 to 1982, and finally chairing the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs in the lead-up to the Constitution Act of 1982.
- 40 Comparative Statement of the Financial Situation in Canadian Municipalities, Prepared by H. Carl Goldenberg, M.A., B.C.L., F.R., Econ.S. McGill University, for the Dominion Conference of Mayors, Ottawa, 1936, Table 5, submitted 22 March 1936, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 835. Goldenberg's figures are generally higher than those produced by Leonard Marsh the previous

year but are probably closer to the reality. Marsh projected expenditures for 1935 from the vantage point of February 1935, where Goldenberg presumably had access to more precise numbers gleaned from the cities later in the year. Goldenberg set Winnipeg's 1935 spending on relief at \$1,886,000 as compared to Marsh's \$1,556,000 and Edmonton's at \$545,543 as compared to Marsh's \$463,000. Saskatoon's relief spending—at \$290,671, according to Goldenberg's 1935 figures—fared slightly better than Marsh's estimate of \$305,000.

- 41 "Mayors in Conference Call on Ottawa Gov't for New Housing Plan," *Calgary Daily Herald*, 24 March 1936.
- 42 Minutes of the Meetings of the Joint Conference, Dominion Conference of Mayors and Union of Canadian Municipalities, Ottawa, 16–18 March 1937, VA, 33 D-2, file 3. The Dominion Conference of Mayors was not the first national mayoral association. In 1901, the mayors of Canada's larger centres had formed the Union of Canadian Municipalities to advocate chiefly for municipal issues, particularly matters relating to utilities. This association met yearly. In 1937, largely in order to avoid duplication of activities, the Dominion Conference of Mayors and the Union of Canadian Municipalities merged to form the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities (later the Federation of Municipalities).
- 43 Memorandum of Proceedings, Continuing Committee of the Dominion Conference of Mayors, 11 August 1936 to 15 March 1937, VA, 33 D-2, file 3, p. 3.
- 44 Circular letter from Bullock to mayors, 8 February 1937, VA, 33 D-2, file 3. In the interim, Stanley Lewis, mayor of Ottawa, became chair of the DCM's Continuing Committee.
- 45 Reports of the Chairman, Dominion Conference of Mayors, and the President, Union of Canadian Municipalities and of the Committee on Resolutions, the Committee on Amalgamation, and the Committee on Statistics, as approved by the Joint Conference, Ottawa, 16–18 March 1937, VA, 16 E-2, file 8.
- 46 Report of the Resolutions Committee of the Joint Meeting of the Dominion Conference of Mayors and the Union of Canadian Municipalities, 18 March 1937, VA, 33 D-2, file 3. The resolution reads: "THAT the Dominion Government forthwith increase their grants-in-aid by such amounts as are necessary to preserve the financial structures of the urban municipalities pending a proper redistribution of the costs of relief and of public revenues to permanently stabilize public assistance in Canada and the preparation of a scheme of work and wages to replace unemployment relief?" The amendment again calling on the federal government to take over and assume all relief costs was defeated at the conference. See also "Mayors Alter Relief Stand," *Globe and Mail*, 19 March 1937. Representatives presented to King and Cabinet the revised demands from Ottawa, Moose Jaw, Halifax, and Winnipeg.

- 47 Statistical Report, Unemployment Relief Costs, Canadian Municipalities, Prepared for the Dominion Conference of Mayors, 1937, Part 1, submitted 15 January 1937, PAA, Premiers' Papers, GR 1969.0289, file 835.
- 48 "Mayors to Ask Dominion Increase Relief Grants but Not Pay Entire Cost," *Winnipeg Tribune*, 18 March 1937.
- 49 Statistical Report, Unemployment Relief Costs, Canadian Municipalities, Prepared for the Dominion Conference of Mayors, 1937. Saskatoon's relief expenditures came to just over \$800,000; the city raised \$103,505 through taxation and borrowed \$142,000. Edmonton, in similar fashion, raised \$340,000 of its total relief expenditure that year of \$1,289,487.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 "Honeyman Asks for Municipal Relief Strike."
- 52 Ibid.
- 53 "Dominion Ready to Co-operate in Finance Inquiry," *Winnipeg Evening Tribune*, 17 March 1937.
- 54 For the mayors' perspective on the Rowell-Sirois Commission (officially the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations), see Tentative outline, General notes and memoranda, re: Proposed brief for Rowell Commission, 17 November 1937, VA, 33 D-2, file 3. After Mackenzie King called the commission in August 1937, the Central Management Committee of the new mayors' organization, the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities, busied itself preparing its brief. By November, the mayors had produced a tentative outline for presentation to the commission. In the main, the mayors' proposed brief focused on the fact that the "duties and responsibilities of municipalities have increased without a proportionate increase in the power to raise the revenue necessary to meet their new obligations." Municipal revenue generation through property taxes, the mayors argued, had been and continued to be "an inadequate basis of taxation." In the end, it seemed generally agreed that the mayors considered some sort of redistribution of taxation and other revenue-generation powers desirable. City authorities in Alberta told a similar story in their brief to the Rowell-Sirois Commission. See "Cities of Alberta: Submission to the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, 1938," Peel's Prairie Provinces, Bruce Peel Special Collections Library, University of Alberta, Peel 10478, <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/10478.html>.
- 55 Minutes of the First Annual Conference of the Canadian Federation of Mayors and Municipalities Held at the Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, 15-17 March 1938, Canadian Federation of Municipalities Archives. The mayors' resolution reads: "THAT pending the Dominion Government taking over, and assuming and discharging the full responsibility in the matter of unemployment relief, the said government on the expiration of the present agreements with

the respective provinces, enter into a new agreement with the provincial governments, whereby the Dominion Government assumes 50% of the cost of unemployment relief, including medical assistance and hospitalization, conditioned upon the provinces assuming at least 40% of the said costs.” See also “Mayors Demand Ottawa Pay Half Relief: Job Crisis Unabated They Hold,” *Globe and Mail*, 16 March 1938.

- 56 For more on the history of Canada’s relief camp experience, see Lorne Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State*, and Bill Waiser, *Park Prisoners: The Untold Story of Western Canada’s National Parks, 1915–1946*.
- 57 Quoted in Taylor, “Relief from Relief,” 18.
- 58 Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 89.
- 59 “Police, Mobs, in Bloody Fight Today,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 7 November 1932.
- 60 “Police Crush Hunger Marchers Here,” *Edmonton Bulletin*, 21 December 1932. Readers might make some allowance for the dramatic language, especially the word *rioter*. For a more complete description of the Edmonton Hunger March, see Eric Strikwerda and Alvin Finkel, “War, Repression, and Depression, 1914–1939,” chap. 4 in Alvin Finkel et al., *Working People in Alberta: A History*, 97–100.
- 61 Waiser, *Park Prisoners*, 86.
- 62 E. J. Hart, *J. B. Harkin: Father of Canada’s National Parks*, 401.
- 63 See descriptions of camp life in Victor Howard, “*We Were the Salt of the Earth!*”: *The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot*; Laurel Sefton MacDowell, “Relief Camp Workers in Ontario During the Great Depression of the 1930s”; and Waiser, *Park Prisoners* and *All Hell Can’t Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot*.
- 64 Quoted in Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us*, 35.
- 65 *Ibid.*
- 66 Quoted in Hart, *J. B. Harkin*, 403. The informant, Hart explains, was later revealed to be a “communist” sympathizer who had been expelled from the Riding Mountain camp.
- 67 Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us*, 37.
- 68 *Ibid.*, 42–43; Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 102. For a general examination of relief camps, see Brown, *When Freedom Was Lost*.
- 69 Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us*, 43.

- 70 Ibid., 43–55.
- 71 Ronald Liversedge, *Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek*, 83.
- 72 “B.C. Jobless Hold Relief Officials with Picket Lines,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, 8 June 1935. For detailed descriptions of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, see Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us*, and Victor Howard, “*We Were the Salt of the Earth!*” For an important rebuttal to Howard’s book by surviving Trekkers, see Robert Savage, Robert Jackson, Jean Shiels (Evans), and Ben Swankey, review of “*We Were the Salt of the Earth!*” and the author’s rejoinder, “Victor Howard Responds,” *Prairie Forum* 11, no. 2 (1986): 278–83 and 284–87.
- 73 See Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us*, 18–22, 220. My description of the Trek draws on Waiser’s account.
- 74 Robert B. Bryce, *Maturing in Hard Times: Canada’s Department of Finance Through the Great Depression*, 112.
- 75 David G. Bettison, *The Politics of Canadian Urban Development*, 61. James Struthers sets the figure at a slightly more conservative 75,000. As Robert Wardhaugh points out, though, “by 1933 housing construction had fallen to 31 per cent of the 1929 level.” Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 155; Wardhaugh, *Behind the Scenes*, 95.
- 76 Quoted in Bryce, *Maturing in Hard Times*, 163. John Bacher argues that the Depression itself ushered in a “new social approach to housing issues.” According to Bacher, the publication in 1932 of the Halifax Citizens’ Committee on Housing report and subsequent similar studies investigating housing problems in other cities “expressed the new ideals characteristic of the ideals of the Depression-era social housing advocates.” John C. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace: The Evolution of Canadian Housing Policy*, 67.
- 77 Wardhaugh, *Behind the Scenes*, 94–95. Bennett’s jurisdictional and cost concerns over housing policy had already been made known to Herbert A. Bruce in response to the Bruce Report, a study of housing problems in Toronto in 1934. See also Larry A. Glassford, *Reaction and Reform: The Politics of the Conservative Party Under R. B. Bennett, 1927–1938*, 164–65. Glassford notes that Ontario Lieutenant-Governor Dr. Herbert Bruce was also an early advocate for federal intervention in housing policy, especially affordable housing for the poor. J. S. Woodsworth was a similar advocate.
- 78 Bryce, *Maturing in Hard Times*, 163. Among the figures appearing before the Special Committee was Deputy Minister of Finance W. C. Clark, whose ideas would heavily influence the drafting of the Dominion Housing Act. Representatives of the Dominion Mortgage and Investment Association and the National Construction Council also appeared before the committee. Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing In Vancouver, 1919–1950*, 63–64. See also Wardhaugh’s treatment of the committee’s work in *Behind the Scenes*, 94–102.

- 79 Most cities had their share of so-called slums. A 1934 survey of housing in Winnipeg reported that of the nearly two thousand homes surveyed, roughly thirteen hundred had rooms used for both cooking and sleeping. Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, 73.
- 80 Bettison, *The Politics of Canadian Urban Development*, 61–65.
- 81 Quoted in *ibid.*, 62.
- 82 *Ibid.*, 61.
- 83 *Ibid.*, 63.
- 84 Minutes and Resolutions, Dominion Conference of Mayors, Chateau Laurier, Ottawa, 23–25 March 1936. They instead called for “a housing plan designed to correct the aforesaid conditions,” and they asked “that subsidies be provided for the purpose of eliminating slum conditions, by a process of rehabilitation, and by building new homes, for the purpose of adequately housing the people.” The mayors also unanimously declared the Dominion Housing Act a failure in terms of its capacity to generate new jobs. See “Mayors in Conference Call on Ottawa Gov’t for New Housing Plan”
- 85 As John Bacher notes, there were “several reasons for the disinclination of western lending institutions to participate. These included the provincial debt moratoria and adjustment legislation, the fact that old houses could be bought at prices cheaper than new, the costs of real estate taxation and appraisal, and the inadequate inspection facilities of firms that lacked established lending organizations.” Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, 111–12. Bacher also surveys the federal government’s experimentation with home improvements legislation.
- 86 Quoted in *ibid.*, 113.
- 87 *Ibid.*
- 88 *Ibid.*
- 89 Bettison, *The Politics of Canadian Urban Development*, 64.
- 90 See, for example, Special Issue on the Great Depression, *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 4 (1969).
- 91 For a recent assessment of Bennett’s tariff policies vis-à-vis Great Britain and the United States, see Anthony Patrick O’Brien and Judith A. McDonald, “Retreat from Protectionism: R. B. Bennett and the Movement to Freer Trade in Canada, 1930–1935.”
- 92 *Labour Gazette*, July 1936, 608–9.
- 93 *Ibid.* The federal government had entered into a special arrangement with the nation’s railway companies to this effect.

- 94 See Bryce, *Maturing in Hard Times*, 59. As Bryce notes, “The Dominion and provincial governments were hard pressed to find enough revenue or sources of credit to meet their essential regular expenditures, as well as those for relief.” In Alberta, while this was not an unemployment relief measure per se, the new Social Credit government at least promised each citizen a \$25 dividend. Some unemployed workers were nevertheless skeptical about the new government’s ability to deliver on its promise. A reporter spoke to one group of single, unemployed men—who were among the roughly three thousand who had descended on Edmonton in 1935—about their expectations: “Asked if they really believed that the time would come when a \$25 monthly dividend would be declared, the leader of the party smiled and said: ‘What if it isn’t? We have nothing to lose. We’ll have to spend the winter in camp anyway, so we might as well be in Alberta and be in on the ground floor if the dividend is declared.’” “3300 Single on Calgary, Edmonton Relief: Hundreds More in Camps Interested in S.C. Dividends,” *Calgary Daily Herald*, 3 December 1935.
- 95 Paul Boothe and Heather Edwards, *Eric J. Hanson’s Financial History of Alberta, 1905–1950*, 122.
- 96 Bill Waiser, *Saskatchewan: A New History*, 322.
- 97 Wardhaugh, *Mackenzie King and the Prairie West*, 198.
- 98 Alvin Finkel, *The Social Credit Phenomenon in Alberta*, 54.
- 99 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 141. Montréal Mayor Camillien Houde believed that the efforts of the earlier 1935 Dominion Conference of Mayors and its Continuing Committee had resulted in the federal government’s agreement to “increase its contribution to unemployment relief in the Provinces to the extent of 75% for a period of four months. It was specifically stated by the Federal Government that this action was taken for the purpose of assisting the Provincial Governments to relieve the burden of unemployment relief costs that had fallen upon the municipalities.” Letter from Houde to Gerry McGeer, mayor of Vancouver, 22 February 1936, VA, 33 C-4, file 14.
- 100 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 141.
- 101 P. T. Rooke and R. L. Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart: Charlotte Whitton, a Feminist on the Right*, 86. See also Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*.
- 102 Ken Moffat, *A Poetics of Social Work: Personal Agency and Social Transformation in Canada, 1920–1939*, 97.
- 103 Rooke and Schnell, *No Bleeding Heart*, 90.
- 104 Ibid.
- 105 Quoted in James Struthers, “A Profession in Crisis: Charlotte Whitton and Canadian Social Work in the 1930s,” 177.

- 106 For an insightful discussion relating to Charlotte Whitton, the needs of the unemployed, and the emerging profession of social work, see Struthers, “A Profession in Crisis.” Struthers concludes, “Ultimately, the skills Whitton made most attractive to government were those of a profession that could limit the costs of social welfare and keep a close surveillance over the unemployed. In return for such services, social workers could expect increasing employment within a burgeoning state sector. In effect, they, not the jobless, would become the chief beneficiaries of Canada’s ‘reformed’ system” (185).
- 107 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 143.
- 108 Ibid.
- 109 Ibid., 141–45.
- 110 Bryce, *Maturing in Hard Times*, 185.
- 111 Quoted in Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 144.
- 112 Diaries of Prime Minister William Lyon MacKenzie King, 7 December 1937, LAC, MG26-J13 (emphasis added).
- 113 Ibid., 30 March 1936.
- 114 Ibid., 3 September 1936.
- 115 Ibid.
- 116 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 155–57.
- 117 Diaries of Prime Minister William Lyon MacKenzie King, 20 December 1937.
- 118 Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, 96.
- 119 Ibid.
- 120 Bettison, *The Politics of Canadian Urban Development*, 67.
- 121 Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 191. A second housing act—the National Housing Act, passed in 1938—essentially expected the same sort of co-operation from municipalities (basically, that they refrain from passing any zoning or property tax bylaws that might discourage new home construction projects).
- 122 Bacher, *Keeping to the Marketplace*, 104.
- 123 Quoted in Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 191.
- 124 Quoted in *ibid.*, 179.
- 125 Each city’s appropriation was based on its population according to the 1937 census. At a rate of three dollars per resident, Edmonton, for example,

- qualified for \$237,500. Council Minutes, 1938, p. 265, EA. See also Bettison, *The Politics of Urban Development*, 67–68.
- 126 Summary of the Operative Provisions of the Municipal Improvements Assistance Act, 7 July 1938, SA.
- 127 “Contracts for Public Works Must Have Eight Hour Day, Fair Wage Clause,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 25 July 1938.
- 128 Letter from Mayor Pinder to Saskatchewan Premier Patterson, 18 November 1938, SA.
- 129 Council Minutes of the Standing Committee, 13 February 1939, Report 3/39, SA.
- 130 Letter from City Commissioner to Dr. A. MacG. Young, MP, 31 March 1939, SA.
- 131 Letter from City Commissioner to Chief Engineer Wier, 19 June 1939, SA. The total amount loaned to the city was just under \$200,000; this included funds for the pumping station standby, primary water mains, the electrical distribution building, a waterworks heating plant, sewer and watermains, paving on Lorne Avenue, and a new boiler at the power plant. List of Applications Forwarded to the Government Under the Municipal Improvements Assistance Act, 1938, 29 September 1939, SA.
- 132 Council Minutes, 13 July 1938, p. 265, EA.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 Council Minutes, 1 September 1938, p. 295, EA.
- 135 City Council Minutes, 1939, p. 67, EA.
- 136 Council Minutes, 24 July and 8 August 1939, WA.
- 137 *Municipal News*, Vancouver, BC, March 1939, 13.
- 138 “Broad Employment Program Planned Intimates Rogers Federal Minister of Labor,” *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*, 24 January 1939.
- 139 Patrick H. Brennan, “Thousands of Our Men Are Getting Practically Nothing at All to Do: Public Works Relief Programs in Regina and Saskatoon, 1929–1940,” 42.
- 140 Office of the City Engineer, Report on Construction Works as at 29th February 1940, SA. It remains unclear whether either Edmonton or Winnipeg participated in the Civic Improvement Act scheme.

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