

Direct Action, Subsidiarity and the Counterhegemonic: Three Case Studies of
Antipoverty Activism in Twentieth Century Canada

by

David Alexander Thompson
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Supervisory Committee

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by

David Alexander Thompson
B.A., University of Victoria, 2004

Dr. Eric Sager (Department of History)

Supervisor

Dr. William Carroll (Department of Sociology/CSPT)

Co-Supervisor or Departmental Member

Dr. Richard Rajala (Department of History)

Departmental Member

Dr. Mark Leier (Department of History - Simon Fraser University)

Outside Member

Supervisory Committee

Supervisor

Co-Supervisor or Departmental Member

Departmental Member

Outside Member

Abstract

An analysis of three poor people's movements in twentieth century Canada serves to wrest the ideas and activist tradition of Canada's poor people from historical obscurity. Between 1932 and 1935, the Communist-inspired Vancouver unemployed councils engaged in direct actions to challenge Depression-era social policy, capital and the police. The arrival of the modern post-war welfare state did not end poverty; however, Vancouver antipoverty activists were circumscribed by society's relative affluence and organizational and sectarian debates within labour councils and the antipoverty movement. Finally, since 1989 the Toronto-based Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) has extended antipoverty activism to include the issues of immigrants, First Nations, women and children. Drawing on theorist Antonio Gramsci and the socialist-anarchist tradition, this thesis posits that direct action and a subsidiarity relationship between activists and their community are essential to the success and longevity of poor people's movements.

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List of Abbreviations

BCFL	British Columbia Federation of Labour
BCFU	British Columbia Federation of Unemployed
CAW	Canadian Auto Workers Union
CCF	Co-operative Commonwealth Federation
CCL	Canadian Congress of Labour
CMHC	Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation
CP	Communist Party
CPC	Communist Party of Canada
CUPE	Canadian Union of Public Employees
LMUC	Lower Mainland Unemployment Committee
MBU	Marine and Boilermakers Union
NCUC	National Committee of Unemployed Councils
NDP	New Democrat Party
NUWA	National Unemployed Workers Association
OCAP	Ontario Coalition Against Poverty
RCWU	Relief Camp Workers Union
TDRC	Toronto Disaster Relief Committee
UAC	Unemployed Action Committee
UC	Unemployed Council
WUL	Workers Unity League
VDTLC	Vancouver and District Trades and Labour Council
VDUC	Vancouver and District Unemployed Council
VUA	Victoria Unemployed Association

“I’m with you”:

Theorizing Poor People’s Activism in Twentieth Century Canada

“I’m with you.”

From out of the crowd of curious onlookers emerged a balding man with a Kropotkinian beard. He stood between riot police and a band of homeless “punks,” evicted from their Kensington Market warehouse squat.

“I’m with you,” the man said, grasping Kolin’s hand.

“Look I’m kind of busy right now,” replied an incredulous Kolin.

“No, I’m with you.”

Refusing to disperse, the lingering protestors and the outsider were thrown into a paddy wagon. As they sweated for four hours in the mobile sauna on that day in June 1997, Kolin learned more about his new friend. Gaetan Heroux, a member of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) and veteran social worker in the Dundas-Sherborne District, shared his personal experiences with poverty and his commitment to serve others who feel socially and economically persecuted. Later that summer Gaetan and Kolin brought OCAP and the Kensington punk communities together to hold a mass squeegee rally. Kolin joined the OCAP executive and expanded the organization’s confrontational approach into the Kensington-Parkdale region. Kolin credits Gaetan and other OCAP activists for encouraging him to continue engaging in direct action against state-sanctioned poverty with three amicable and unequivocal words, “I’m with you.”

Antipoverty activists, like Gaetan, have declared their solidarity with destitute Canadians during pivotal economic-social crises throughout the twentieth century. In

what context and what conditions have antipoverty activists mobilized their communities? What forms of direct action and demands were developed to challenge neglectful governments, businesses and a majority of Canadians who tended to dismiss a poor person's plight as a personal failing? What is the historical relationship between poor people's activism and Canada's left-wing, labour, socialist and social democratic movements?

Kolin, Gaetan and OCAP emerge from and build on an activist tradition largely ignored by Canadian academics. This thesis attempts to fill the gap by examining three moments in the tradition of direct action. Chapter One, " 'By Our Deeds We Win Our Needs:' The Unemployed Councils of Greater Vancouver, 1932-34" charts the resistance of Communist-led antipoverty activists at the apex of the Great Depression. How did the revolutionary ideology, bureaucracy and Soviet influence of the Communist Party of Canada (CPC) affect the terrain of Vancouver's antipoverty activists? The second case study investigates the resurgence of poor people's organizations in Vancouver during the post-war recessions of 1949-50 and 1958-1962. In the years of post-war affluence, Communist activists and anti-red, social democratic labor councils offered two competing conceptions of the aims and tactics of an unemployed organization. Lastly, since 1989 the Toronto-based OCAP has built its reputation on direct action casework and large-scale "anti-capitalist" protests against businesses and all levels of government. OCAP has been ally and enemy to the NDP, unions and other left organizations. OCAP's ideology is one of action that strives to create a public space for poor people to express their needs, ideas and abilities.

This thesis contends that poor people's organizations survive and succeed based on the relationship between activists and the specific communities they represent and serve.¹ Basing direct actions on social and economic problems explicitly identified by poor people is essential to the strength, success and longevity of antipoverty organizations. Their credibility is bolstered with each victory won by and for the poor. Collective protests, whether they are rallies, marches or riots, are successful to the extent antipoverty activists share their solidarity and express their demands with the larger political community. Ideologically, extended debates and appeals to theories of revolutionary Communism, social democracy or liberalism tend to be divisive and neutralize poor people's movements unless they can be readily translated into effective non-partisan actions.

To begin unpacking the historical antecedents to Gaetan Heroux's declaration of "I'm with you" it is necessary to provide a brief overview of the relevant literature on poverty and class in Canada. While historians and social scientists have focused on the *reactions* of State policy, social workers, and social organizations to the problems of poverty and class relations, the perspectives of antipoverty activists have escaped detailed scrutiny. Nonetheless the existing scholarship provides a useful topography on which to situate poor people's organizations. In particular the works of Antonio Gramsci and "neo-Gramscian" theorists, such as Canadian historian Ian McKay, present a compelling elucidation of the hegemonic milieu of liberal capitalism and the possibilities of

¹ In this vein, I am indebted to William Carroll and R.S. Ratner's espousal of "three analytically distinct tasks" of effective counterhegemonic entities: community building and the construction of collective identities; empowering constituents and "prefigur[ing] alternative ways of life;" and finally, "mobilizing and engaging in collective action to press for tangible changes in cultural discourses and social relations." See William Carroll and R.S. Ratner, "Sustaining Oppositional Cultures in 'Post-Socialist' Times: A Comparative Study of Three Social Movement Organisations," *Sociology* 35:3 (August 2001), 605.

resistance. McKay's Gramscian notion of a Canadian "liberal order" sets the historiography of government social policy and poverty resistance in relief.

Antipoverty activists are not always anti-liberal order theorists. However, through their affiliation with left organizations and their direct action encounters with the capitalist liberal state they have explored the limits and contradictions of their contemporary social order. They can be seen as actors in what McKay calls the leftist project of "living otherwise". "Living otherwise means engaging with the life-and-death, down-to-earth issues as they present themselves. Living and reasoning otherwise means the mobilization of resources to handle the emergences of everyday life."² A neo-Marxist interpretation of liberal social policy provides fruitful insights into poor people's movements. The Gramscian preoccupation with the character of leadership reveals the internal dynamics of Canada's antipoverty struggles.

Hegemony derives from the Greek word (*ἡγεμονία*) for leadership and was first used to describe the authority or dominance of one state or group over another. For the Sardinian Marxist Antonio Gramsci, hegemony was a historically relative socio-political phenomenon wherein social groups (for him, Marxist class divisions) employ both coercion and consent (based on the Machiavellian Centaur) in order to achieve and maintain cultural and economic leadership.³ Gramsci challenged Marxist privileging of economics as the central site of hegemony; instead the state and capitalism as a project of rule are informed by social and cultural norms. Thus hegemony is a leadership that relies on an economic, juridical, legislative, cultural and ideological programme in a constant

² Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada's Left History* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 4.

³ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, edited by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 12.

bid to capture and maintain a position of dominance. When serious challenges to hegemony occur, leaders will seek to invalidate their competition, or find measures to co-opt the unrest; in Gramscian theory this is called a “passive revolution.”

There exists a rich body of literature applying Gramsci’s hegemony to the particular problems of post-World War Two western capitalism. Through their efforts, neo-Gramscians have made some important contributions to Gramsci’s original definition. Jonathan Joseph of the British Realist School balances Gramsci’s humanist conception of hegemony with a structuralist one. Joseph suggests hegemony is the interplay between structures and humans that create, reproduce and preserve a form of social control, “for hegemony is not confined to civil society but does indeed operate through the institutions of the state, particularly through the process of legitimization, as is shown through the operation of state bodies like parliament and the judicial system.”⁴ Under Joseph’s reinterpretation, Canada’s antipoverty activist can be seen as challenging not just the bullheadedness of millionaire Prime Minister William Bennett or Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman, but the whole set of state institutions, laws, and financial markets that support and legitimate positions of authority.

Other neo-Gramscians, attracted by the philosopher’s unorthodox Marxist position, have recast hegemony in light of non-economic forms of domination. Often tempering their analyses with Michel Foucault’s work on power/knowledge and the subjectification of bodies and selves, authors as diverse as Richard Day, Jon Sanbonmatsu and Ian McKay pluralize hegemony by revealing overlapping forms of

⁴ Jonathan Joseph, *Hegemony: A Realist Analysis* (London: Taylor and Francis, 2002), 30.

domination based on gender, disability, ethnicity and class.⁵ While class-based exploitation was the ostensible reason for poor people's movements, a hypothetical question ought to be posed: In what ways have Canada's antipoverty activists been sensitive to other mutually-reinforcing forms of exploitation existing within their community?

How might Gramsci's theory of hegemony, drawn from the experiences of the Italian state, provide the historical context for antipoverty activists in twentieth century Canada? Beginning with the publication of his much debated article, "A Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," Ian McKay has sought to understand Canada as a "historically specific project of rule," through the application of Gramscian theory.⁶ McKay contends that Canadian hegemony can be described as the mutual interaction between capital and a liberal ideology.⁷ A "reconnaissance" of the liberal order explicitly acknowledges a hegemony that is not ahistorical but has been shaped and reshaped by the complex interactions between actors, ideologies and institutions.⁸ Drawing on Quebec historian Fernande Roy, McKay defines liberalism as the glorification of the individual through the holy trinity of liberty, equality and property.⁹ Individual property ownership, argues McKay, has confined liberty and equality to an exclusive membership. From the 1867 BNA Act trumpeting "peace, order

⁵ Richard J.F. Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005); Jon Sanbonmatsu, *The Postmodern Prince: Critical Theory, Left Strategy, and the Making of a New Political Subject* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004). For McKay's most thorough integration of Gramsci and Foucault see Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

⁶ Ian McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," *Canadian Historical Review* 81:4 (December 2000), 620.

⁷ McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 51.

⁸ McKay, "Liberal Order Framework," 637. Gramsci also invoked the militarily symbolic word "reconnaissance" to describe the "accurate" revolutionary strategy for probing the unique "structure of civil society" within every state. See Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 238.

⁹ McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 59.

and good government” to the liberal construction of unemployment insurance to the neoliberal dismantling of the welfare state, social policy has framed the responsible, peaceable, working individual as the actor deserving of liberty and equality. But the liberal order extends beyond social policy as a project of internalization. That is, poor people, under the liberal order, have been encouraged to see their status as their “own fault”, if only they worked harder, saved money, and purchased wisely they might wrest the benefits of liberty and equality for their personal enjoyment.¹⁰ As Georges Campeau observed, “the responsibilities of the unemployed have generally taken precedence over their rights.”¹¹

Canadian antipoverty activists have been subject to the emphatic treatment of a liberal hegemony via charities, government welfare and social policies. From Jean Jacques Rousseau’s discourse on the “Origin of Inequality”, “Do good to yourself with as little evil as possible to others,”¹² to Richard Rorty and Judith Shklar’s belief that “liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do,”¹³ liberalism’s adherents have long viewed empathy as part of their founding doctrine. But compassion must also be seen as a process of “othering” that diminishes the extent to which poor people can become agents of their own emancipation. Within the liberal hegemony are powerful justifications: human rights, compassion and tolerance. A counterhegemonic reconnaissance reveals liberal rights discourse as part of an order that co-opts and neutralizes poor people’s dissent.

¹⁰ McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 53.

¹¹ Georges Campeau, *From UI to EI: Waging War on the Welfare State*, translated by Richard Howard (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 179.

¹² Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses* (New York: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1963), 185.

¹³ Keith Jenkins, *On “What is History?”* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 113.

In the Canadian writing on social policy and the welfare state we find plenty of evidence and arguments that fit within a neo-Gramscian interpretation. Social historians have criticized all three levels of Depression-era government for their failure to provide for poor Canadians; the adequacy of post-Depression unemployment insurance and other forms of welfare; and the degree that neoliberal policies have abandoned the perceived social duty of the state. Starting with Henry Cassidy, Leonard Marsh and Charlotte Whitton, the history of professional social policy developers and analysts and their proposals for rational state planning weigh heavily in academic discourse.

However, welfare historians have also measured the ability of non-state organizations and movements to lobby and exact concessions from the state. James Struthers discusses the role of Local Councils of Women, trade unionists, welfare rights groups, social workers and others on the creation of social policy.¹⁴ Dominique Jean illuminates family resistance to the administration of family allowances.¹⁵ While emphasizing gender rather than class, Nancy Christie recognizes the creation of social policy as the interaction between government, women, organized labour, churches and non-government organizations.¹⁶ Nonetheless, Christie fails to address the extent to which women and antipoverty activists accepted or rejected the gendered nature of social policy. Lamenting that social policy analysis has “understated class dimensions” in

¹⁴ James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983); James Struthers, *Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

¹⁵ See Dominique Jean, “Family Allowances and Family Autonomy: Quebec Families Encounter the Welfare State, 1945-1955,” in Bettina Bradbury, ed., *Canadian Family History: Selected Readings* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1992), 401-437.

¹⁶ See Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

favour of “discourse,”¹⁷ Alvin Finkel reframes the formation of the welfare state as “a response to popular pressures, but in the context of class-divided societies with particular stratifications of class and gender and sometimes ethnicity.”¹⁸ Despite the efforts of welfare historians there remains little understanding of the ways in which poor people have reacted to evolving social policies or the ideas and actions of poor people who have confronted the welfare system.

While social policy historians have recognized that welfare is both a form of social control and a potential field for insurgency, there is no equivalent in Canada to Piven and Cloward’s seminal work on U.S. poor people’s movements. Analyzing U.S. unemployed protests during the Depression, the civil rights movement of the 1950s and their own involvement in unemployed activism in the late 1960s, Cloward and Piven have provided a structuralist interpretation of antipoverty direct action: “The occasions when protest is possible among the poor, the forms that it must take, and the impact it can have are all delimited by the social structure in ways which usually diminish its extent and diminish its force.”¹⁹ Social unrest and economic structural crises, according to Coward and Piven, create the possibilities for aliberal alternatives to social welfare. From such a perspective, “what was won must be judged by what was possible.”²⁰

Given the limits of possibility how did poor people win at all? To listen to mainstream liberal pundits one would conclude that in a democratic society public

¹⁷ Alvin Finkel, “The State of Writing on the Canadian Welfare State: What’s Class Got To Do With It?,” *Labour/Le Travail* 54 (2004), 174.

¹⁸ Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006), 12.

¹⁹ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements: Why they Succeed, How they Fail* (New York: Random House, 1979), 3. For their analysis of U.S. welfare policies as a form of social control, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (Toronto: Random House, 1971).

²⁰ Piven and Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements*, xiii.

involvement is confined to reasoned debate, constitutional and legal appeals, electoral and party politics, and conventional forms of lobbying such as letters, petitions and public meetings. But to be socially engaged also includes the angry and impassioned protests of the poor in the streets or at home, on the lawns of legislature or at the doors of the welfare office. While poor people have resorted to legitimate lobbying, their lack of representation in the higher echelons of political power has historically prompted some to look beyond conventional channels and engage in forms of direct action.²¹ According to April Carter, direct action can be defined as “essentially nonviolent methods of noncooperation, obstruction or defiance.”²² Nonviolent, direct action can include sabotage or violence against property and for some, violence can be justified in defence and retaliation against aggressive police and security forces.²³ Although generally activists are peaceable, authorities have the legal means to charge the civil disobedient with crimes ranging from “trespassing” to “causing a disturbance.” Poor people’s direct actions in Canada have included occupations of private (buildings and property) and public spaces (governmental offices, city halls, parliaments, parks, streets) via squats, marches, demonstrations and sit-ins. Usually accompanied by a list of demands, direct actions can address both individual grievances and collective struggles. In either case, direct action relies on the collective to empower the poor individual. Symbolism and

²¹ For an example of a “legitimate” form of poor people’s protest during the depression see the letters to R.B. Bennett in L.M. Grayson and Michael Bliss, eds., *The Wretched of Canada: Letters to R.B. Bennett, 1930-1935* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

²² April Carter, *Direct action and democracy today* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 1. Carter stresses nonviolence to delineate direct action as a strategy distinct from “armed uprising or guerilla warfare.”

²³ Piven and Cloward ascribe to this opinion although they recognize that poor people rarely use violence in practice because the risks of incarceration, etc. are too high. However, “some of the poor are sometimes so isolated from significant institutional participation that the only ‘contribution’ they can withhold is that of quiescence in civil life: they can riot.” See Piven and Cloward, *Poor People’s Movements*, 18-19; 25.

drama through direct actions draw public attention and media with the aim of influencing popular opinion and social policy.

Curiously, drawing on liberal treatises from Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* to John Rawls' *Theory of Justice*, Carter makes the didactic claim that direct action is consistent with modern liberalism's efforts to spread democracy, egalitarianism and political rights.²⁴ Direct action is justified in a liberal society, argues Carter, when "liberal democracies are very imperfectly either liberal or democratic."²⁵ However, since liberalism, in its tradition of tolerance, is committed to peaceful and democratic ends, direct action should not entail coercion, as "abandoning liberal methods can be seen as a threat to liberal politics."²⁶ To embed direct action into the body of liberal thought Carter misinterprets anarchist and socialist influences on the concept of direct action, downplays the coercive powers of a liberal capitalist state and fails to acknowledge the influence of property in liberal discourse.²⁷ Indeed, many of Canada's antipoverty activists embraced direct action because it presented a threat to liberal politics. Nonetheless, Carter's liberal interpretation of direct action may illuminate why certain activists have remained enticed by elements of liberalism while still engaging in antipoverty direct action.

The earliest and most committed espousal of direct action as a means for social change in an industrial-capitalist society came from the nineteenth-century anarchist community. Since 1876 anarchists have called direct action "propaganda by the deed." Thus through economic and social disruption, both participants and observers are

²⁴ Carter, *Direct Action*, 248.

²⁵ Carter, *Direct Action*, xi.

²⁶ Carter, *Direct Action*, 55.

²⁷ Carter, *Direct Action*, 29, 75.

challenged to think and act as anti-capitalists and anti-authoritarians. According to Voltairine de Cleyre,

Every person who ever thought he had a right to assert, and went boldly and asserted it, himself, or jointly with others that shared his convictions, was a direct actionist. Every person who ever had a plan to do anything, and went and did it, or who laid his plan before others, and won their co-operation to do it with him, without going to external authorities to please do the thing for them, was a direct actionist. All co-operative experiments are essentially direct actions.²⁸

The historical tradition of anarchist direct action includes the individual efforts of Alexander Berkman and his attempted assassination of a steel baron in 1892 to the collective labour disruptions of radical left organizations like the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Mark Leier's work on the British Columbia IWW in the early twentieth century is a rare scholarly analysis of leftist direct action in Canada. Leier provides evidence that IWW leaders adopted direct action strategies because they held little faith in electoral activity. Such a belief pitted IWW activists against B.C.'s social democrat bureaucracy. Through direct action, Bill Haywood and other IWW leaders insisted that "the day-to-day struggle showed workers how to fight and it taught them more profound lessons about the nature of power."²⁹ Unfortunately, no Canadian historian has adapted Leier's sympathetic and nuanced treatment of IWW direct action and the limits imposed on it by labour bureaucracies in light of twentieth century poor people's movements.

If anarchists were most explicit about engaging in forms of direct action, many Marxists were also developing an ideology of action. The famous eleventh "Thesis on

²⁸ Voltairine de Cleyre, "Direct Action." in *Anarchism: A Documentary History of Libertarian Ideas*, ed. Robert Graham (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 2005), 167.

²⁹ Mark Leier, *Where the Fraser River Flows: The Industrial Workers of the World in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1990), 94. For a deeper analysis of the ways in which the Vancouver labour bureaucracy co-opted and defeated IWW direct action efforts see, Mark Leier, *Red Flags & Red Tape: The Making of a Labour Bureaucracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

Feuerbach” is the genesis of the Marxian concept of direct action: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”³⁰ Gramsci also expressed in militaristic-guised terms two direct action strategies: one reformist, the other revolutionary. The *war of manoeuvre* is the war of reform, picking tenaciously at capitalism’s wounds, winning band-aid concessions and avoiding the reaction of the entire hegemonic body. “The war of manoeuvre subsists so long as it is a question of winning positions which are not decisive, so that all the resources of the State’s hegemony cannot be mobilized.”³¹ Conversely, a *war of position* aims to overthrow hegemony and alter the social sphere.³² This strategy requires patience and an evolving alternative philosophy.³³ Gramsci considered the *war of position* the most applicable to Western countries, “where ‘civil society’ has become a very complex structure and one which is resistant to the catastrophic ‘incursions’ of the immediate economic element (crises, depressions, etc.)”³⁴ While academics such as McKay concur with Gramsci that the war of position is the more appropriate strategy in twentieth century Canada, the experiences of antipoverty struggles suggest the two are not mutually exclusive.³⁵ Antipoverty activists who have expressed a commitment to a revolutionary *war of position* have traditionally used *wars of manoeuvre* as a vehicle to blockade the liberal hegemonic highway and “disseminate [their] different view of the social order.”³⁶

³⁰ Robert C. Tucker, ed., *Marx-Engels Reader*, second edition (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1978): 145.

³¹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 239.

³² Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 239.

³³ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 57.

³⁴ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 235.

³⁵ McKay, however, is cognizant that Canadian wars of position have often become “unfocused and compromised” through the co-optation of a liberal passive revolution. McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 75-76.

³⁶ McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 74.

That is, direct actions for reforms are the means of acting out, not merely interpreting, the possibilities of a socialist alternative.

Even *wars of manoeuvre* posed difficult questions about organization and leadership. As left-leaning antipoverty activists took to the streets throughout the twentieth-century, issues of inclusion, leadership and the structure of their movement followed closely on their heels. Within the tradition of antipoverty direct action the most common resolution to these problems was the principle “that decisions should be made at the level closest to those most directly affected by them,” or what McKay has dubbed “subsidiarity.”³⁷

A Marxian conception of subsidiarity is embedded in Gramsci’s prison penned prose. Between the subaltern and the organic intellectual, Gramsci proposed a model for the relationship between the subaltern and the organic intellectual that has rich applications for an analysis of Canadian antipoverty activists and the strength of their bond to their community. The subaltern requires a leader to instill discipline and loyalty for “only a very skillful political leadership capable of taking into account the deepest aspirations and feelings of the human masses can prevent disintegration and defeat.”³⁸ Thus the subalterns “are a force in so far as there is somebody to centralize, organize and discipline them” yet they also act as a litmus test – if the leadership is incapable of convincing the people of tactical solutions their relationship becomes acidic.³⁹ Accordingly Gramsci posed that between the leaders and the led there is an intermediary communicative responsibility that operates through consensus. The led express their marginalization - the leadership translates their expressions by encouraging collective

³⁷ McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 90.

³⁸ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 88.

³⁹ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 152.

political action - and the led participate for so long as they feel involved and represented.⁴⁰ The success and achievements of antipoverty organizations are conditioned by the degree to which activists have, at crucial points during the struggle, dispersed authority among the poor themselves.

The relationship between activists and their community has also been informed by the anarchist concept of mutual aid. Given their anti-authoritarianism, anarchism's most extreme adherents assumed an equitable society would have no need for authority in any guise. Taking for granted that decisions should be made by those most affected by them, anarchists linked direct action to the concept of mutual aid. Beyond love and sympathy was the scientific and ethical instinct of solidarity, argued Peter Kropotkin. Against the "fashionable individualistic creed of the day" Kropotkin believed mutual aid was the best means for resistance and "a better leader to progress than the war of each against all."⁴¹ Drawing on Kropotkin anarchists have argued that direct action fosters relationships of coexistence and mutual aid by informing and equipping the marginalized to take the initiative in seeking freedom and equality. Thus for anarchists, direct action "is not [just] a 'tactic'... it is a moral principle, an ideal, a sensibility. It should imbue every aspect of our lives and behaviour and outlook."⁴²

Citing fears of passive revolutions and co-optation by the elite, Cloward and Piven reject the left's humanist calls for leadership. The left, they suggest, has too often been obsessed with building bureaucracy instead of trumpeting mass, spontaneous

⁴⁰ Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, 153.

⁴¹ Peter Kropotkin, "Mutual Aid Amongst Ourselves," In *Mutual Aid a Factor in Evolution* (1902) http://dwardmac.pitzer.edu/Anarchist_Archives/kropotkin/mutaidch7.html (26 June 2006)

⁴² Murray Bookchin, *Towards an Ecological Society* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1980), 48.

defiance.⁴³ Thus, organization has neutralized poor people's movements: "Organizers not only failed to seize the opportunity presented by the rise of unrest, they typically acted in ways that blunted or curbed the disruptive force which lower-class people were sometimes able to mobilize."⁴⁴ Cloward and Piven provide persuasive evidence that as protest groups sought resources from the state and other legitimate institutions their ability to protest was compromised. Although the sociologists raise an important problem for antipoverty movements, their conception of leadership and bureaucracy lacks nuance. Leadership can be co-optive and disempowering but as has been suggested, a particular radical relationship between antipoverty activists and poor people may also be inspirational and invigorating. John Clarke, the founder of OCAP, shares Piven and Cloward's belief in the winning potential of unguided disruption but he believes "they are unduly dismissive of long-term organizing and overstate the power of spontaneity."⁴⁵

A quick overview of the secondary and primary sources utilized for each case study of antipoverty activism reveals that while academics have plumbed the depths of hegemonic social policy creation, the activists that pressured toe-dragging politicians have received short shrift in Canadian literature.

The history of the Vancouver unemployed councils relies on the councils' weekly paper, *Unemployed Worker*, Vancouver city relief and police records, and the contemporary local newspapers. Among the literature on Depression era CPC organizing, John Manley's national analyses of the CPC Worker's Unity League is the most

⁴³ Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*, xv.

⁴⁴ Piven and Cloward, *Poor People's Movements*, xxii.

⁴⁵ Justin Podur, "When the Class Line is Drawn, Which side will you Fall On," *ZNet* <<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=5456>> (3 May 2004).

comprehensive.⁴⁶ Focusing on Greater Vancouver and the city's relief administrations, theses by Bettina Bradbury and Todd McCallum highlight several of the major direct action demonstrations between 1929 and 1935.⁴⁷ Oral histories and biographies capture the voices of Depression-era antipoverty activists.⁴⁸ Only a few attempts have been made to rescue women's activism during the Dirty Thirties from historical obscurity.⁴⁹

However, a rich body of secondary literature explores the direct action of unemployed men from Vancouver's "jungles" to the Relief Camp Workers Union, from the On-to-Ottawa Trek to the 1938 Vancouver post office squat.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ See John Manley, "'Starve, be Damned!' Communists & Canada's Urban Employment, 1929-1939" *Canadian Historical Review* 79:3 (September 1998) and John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class During the Depression: The Workers Unity League 1930-1936" (Ph.d. Diss., Dalhousie University, 1985). Other CPC histories provide little more than a brief synopsis of CPC unemployed councils, focusing instead on labour disputes, the illegality of the party and bureaucratic and tactical debates. See, Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981); Ivan Avakumovic, *Communist Party in Canada: A History* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1975), 72-81; Lita-Rose Betcherman, *Little Band: The clashes between the Communists and the political and legal establishment in Canada, 1928-1932* (Ottawa: Deneau Publishers, 1982). For an in-depth study of direct action organizing in Depression-era Toronto see, Patricia V. Schulz, *East York Workers' Association: A Response to the Great Depression* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975).

⁴⁷ Bettina Bradbury, "The road to receivership: unemployment and relief in Burnaby, North Vancouver city and district and West Vancouver, 1929-1933" (MA thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1975); Todd McCallum, "'Still Raining, Market Still Rotten': Homeless Men and the Early Years of the Great Depression in Vancouver" (Ph.D. Diss., Queen's University, 2004).

⁴⁸ For autobiographies see, Steve Brodie, *Bloody Sunday, Vancouver - 1938: Recollections of the Post Office Sitdown of Single Unemployed* (Vancouver: Young Communist League, 1974); Ronald Liversedge, *Recollections of the On to Ottawa Trek*, edited by Victor Hoar (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1973) and Sydney Hutcheson, *Depression Stories* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1976). For an important biography on a CPC activist see, Ben Swankey and Jean Evans Sheils, *'Work and Wages'! A Semi-documentary Account of the Life and Times of Arthur H. (Slim) Evans, 1890-1944* (Vancouver: Trade Union Research Bureau, 1977). Oral histories include, Sean Griffin, *Fighting Heritage: Highlights of the 1930s Struggle for Jobs and Militant Unionism in British Columbia* (Vancouver: Tribune Publishing Company, 1985).

⁴⁹ For an excellent oral history on women's antipoverty activism see Betty Griffin and Susan Lockhart, *Their Own History: Women's Contribution to the Labour Movement of British Columbia* (Vancouver: United Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union and CAW Seniors Club, 2002); Secondary literature includes, Irene Howard, "'The Mothers' Council of Vancouver': Holding the Fort for the Unemployed, 1935-1938," *BC Studies* 69-70 (1986), 249-287; Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia*. (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992); and, Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Incorporated, 1989).

⁵⁰ Lorne Brown, *When Freedom was Lost: The Unemployed, the Agitator, and the State* (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1987); Victor Hoar, *On to Ottawa Trek* (Toronto: Copp Clark Publishing Company, 1970); Victor Howard, *"We Were the Salt of the Earth!": The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Regina:

Unemployment and antipoverty activism between World War Two and the more socially and politically tumultuous years of the late 1960s has slipped through the cracks of the historical record. Kevin T. Brushett's and Sean Purdy's analyses of poor people's agency as they protested slum clearance and urban renewal in Toronto are rare historical glimpses of antipoverty direct action during a post-war era of affluence.⁵¹ Thus, with the reminiscences of unemployed organizer Eric Waugh, Vancouver city records, Vancouver and District Labour Council fonds, the Communist newspaper *Pacific Tribune* and other contemporary media, this thesis wrests post-war Vancouver's unemployed activism from obscurity.

As a contemporary phenomenon OCAP has not faded from the purview of sociologists or the media. Alvin Finkel acknowledges OCAP as a location for poor people to resist liberal social policy.⁵² Tim Falconer situates OCAP as part of a new anti-globalization paradigm, yet fails to unearth the historical tradition of OCAP's antipoverty activism.⁵³ Similarly, Richard J.F. Day has used OCAP as an example of a Newest Social Movement (NSM) underpinned by an anarchist ideology.⁵⁴ Unfortunately Day's argument is buttressed in anarchist cynicism; Day rejects all forms of leadership and

University of Regina, 1985); Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can't Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Calgary: Fitzhenry and Whiteside, 2003).

⁵¹ Kevin T. Brushett, "Blots on the Face of the City: The Politics of Slum Housing and Urban Renewal in Toronto, 1940-1970" (Ph.D Dissertation, Queen's University 2001); Sean Purdy, "By the People, For the People: Tenant Organizing in Toronto's Regent Park in the 1960s and 1970s," *Journal of Urban History* 30:4 (2004), 519-548; Sean Purdy, "'Ripped Off by the System: Housing Policy, Poverty, and Territorial Stigmatization in Regent Park Housing Project in the 1960s and 1970s," *Labour/Le Travail* 52 (Fall 2003), 45-109.

⁵² Unfortunately Finkel's analysis is riddled with factual errors. He incorrectly dates OCAP's inception (1989 not 1995) and in June 2000 it was Joe Flaherty, not Ernie Eves who was evicted from his office. Eves would not face an OCAP eviction until campaigning for election in 2003. See Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada*, 306-307.

⁵³ Tim Falconer, *Watchdogs and Gadflies: Activism from Marginal to Mainstream* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2001), 29, 181-182.

⁵⁴ Richard J.F. Day, *Gramsci is Dead: Anarchist Currents in the Newest Social Movements* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 31-32.

conjuring Jean Baudrillard, resigns to the Western world's apathy: "The revolution has in fact occurred, the masses of the First World have chosen quiescence, and nothing we can do will change their behaviour for the better."⁵⁵ As a result, Day praises OCAP's logic of "affinity" or subsidiarity and their direct action casework but rejects a more nuanced understanding of leadership and ignores OCAP's many attempts to link their struggles to a larger counterhegemonic project for social change.

Alternatively, Bryan Palmer and David McNally expressly link OCAP to a tradition of antipoverty activism, the left, unions and a fragile counterhegemonic project.⁵⁶ In particular Palmer has acknowledged the way labour bureaucracies and the state have often co-opted and neutralized OCAP's capability to resist.⁵⁷ Although his theoretical preoccupation with Gramsci obscured the action-based commitments of OCAP, the late OCAP activist and York university professor, Norman Feltes' scholarly treatise explores the complicated terrain of subsidiarity and leadership within the antipoverty organization.⁵⁸ John Clarke, Jeff Shantz and other OCAP activists have also contributed to the historical record of their organization.⁵⁹ Finally, to distance this

⁵⁵ Day, *Gramsci is Dead*, 126.

⁵⁶ See, Bryan Palmer, "Riot Act: Reviving Protest in Ontario," *Canadian Dimension* 34:5 (September/October 2000), 29-34; Bryan Palmer, "Repression and Dissent: The OCAP Trials" *Canadian Dimension* 37:3 (May/June 2003), 12-16; David McNally, "OCAP Launches Campaign of Economic Disruption," *Canadian Dimension* 35:4 (July/August 2001), 12.

⁵⁷ Such an analysis carries over from Palmer's general history of the twentieth-century working class and his assessment of the 1983 B.C. solidarity strike. See, Bryan Palmer, *Solidarity: The Rise and Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1987); Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992).

⁵⁸ Norman Feltes, "The New Prince in a New Principality: OCAP and the Toronto Poor," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001), 125-157.

⁵⁹ Clarke has published an article specifically about Depression era organizing and its importance to OCAP. See, "Unemployed Movements of the 1930s: Lessons for Today," *Labour's Militant Voice* <<http://labormilitantvoice.com/arcPamphUnemployed.htm>> 12 December 1998. In addition, his published works include, John Clarke, "Anti-capital/antipoverty," *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 4 (June 2001); John Clarke, "The Meek Shall Inherit Diddle-Squat" *Briarpatch* 30:3 (2001), 9-13.; John Clarke, "The fight for housing moves for forward," *New Socialist* 38 (October-November 2002); John Clarke, "What's at Stake in the OCAP Trial?" *ZNet*

assessment from the more lurid prose of mainstream newspapers I interviewed nine OCAP activists and drew much of my material from OCAP radio, print and website propaganda.⁶⁰

Gaetan's expression of "I'm with you" encapsulates a partial and selective interpretation of Gramsci's theory of communicative responsibility as well as the anarchist conception of mutual aid. Gaetan's actions were born not of empathy but of solidarity – his community included those excluded under the Canadian hegemonic project. Antipoverty activists have gravitated towards the political left to create a social space that empowers poor people to make decisions, draw conclusions and act out against the frequently deaf, contradictory, top-down (in)tolerance of the liberal order. Antipoverty activists have never explicitly named the "liberal order" as the source of their oppression; however, through their direct actions and affiliation with other left organizations they have exposed the contradictions of liberal capitalist exclusionary social policy and its philosophical motivations.

<<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=3278>> (20 March 2003). Works by Jeff Shantz include, Jeff Shantz, "Fighting to Win!: Anarchists and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty," *Northeastern Anarchist* 4 (Spring 2002); and, Jeff Shantz, "Class Struggle Against borders in Ontario," *Northeastern Anarchist* 5 (December 2002).

⁶⁰ www.ocap.ca.

Chapter One: "By our Deeds We Win our Needs:"

The Unemployed Councils of Greater Vancouver, 1932-1934¹

Under the headline "Parade of Misery and Futility," *Vancouver Sun* reporter Bob Bouchette observed the relief committee deliberate one afternoon in 1934.² A family of four "trembled" in front of the city officials. After the father, with "small delicate hands" meekly asked for food, Mayor L.D. Taylor in his seventh term in office since 1910, rebuked him: "If you had hustled around for a job all these years . . . your wife and family wouldn't be in need of food." In a broken voice the father responded: "Hustle? Me that has walked around looking for work until I'm nearly dead? I'm a violinist but do you think I've cared for these hands? My feet are ruined from working long hours on a cement floor. And you tell me to hustle!" His wife waved her umbrella at the well-suited men: "Give him work and he won't bother you." With a "partial guarantee" of continued relief, and a pair of quarters slipped into the hands of the two children by the "charitable" alderman Harry De Graves the family left. Bouchette concluded:

Not a pleasant way of spending an afternoon, but it is chastening. If more of us who have jobs and comfortable homes and luxuries were to view the Relief Committee in action it might whittle away part of the smug self-satisfaction surrounding us.³

¹ Slogan printed on a silk banner by the west-end Vancouver neighbourhood council. *Unemployed Worker* 15 March 1933, 7.

² Richard Rajala has also unearthed the liberal voice of Bob Bouchette in the context of relief work camps. See Richard Rajala, "Forced Relief," *Legion Magazine* (September/October 2000) <<http://www.legionmagazine.com/features/canadianreflections/00-09.asp>> (26 June 2006). According to one B.C. "Who's Who" website Bouchette was "the champion of the underdog ... a shining knight out of time in the harsh world of the Depression." See *The History of Metropolitan Vancouver*, n.d. <http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/whoswho_B.htm> (26 June 2006)

³ Bob Bouchette, "Parade of Misery & Futility: Undernourished and despairing men and women present pleas before Vancouver Relief Committee," *Vancouver Sun*, 7 August 1934, 2.

For a militant minority of Vancouver's poor no whittling could carve away their penury. Compare the lonely tune of the violinist with an unemployed orchestra. In January 1933 400 Burnaby members of the Communist-led unemployed councils (UCs) stole food from three grocery stores after the relief commissioner refused their demands. The theft was led not by foreign agitators but by women urging all to "take what they wanted." The poor strolled the aisles and gathered food for their families. Five carloads of police arrived too late, arresting only three activists, one of them for taking a 15-cent tin of beans.⁴

Direct action was worth a whole lot more than a can of beans for Vancouver's Depression-era antipoverty activists. Direct action emerged as the product of the relationship between CPC activists and the unemployed.⁵ CPC activists organized unemployed councils, led demonstrations and protests against relief administration and challenged the unemployed to understand capitalism and class inequities as the source of their poverty. As ideological and organizational leaders of the unemployed, CPC activists both curtailed and inspired active resistance. Affiliation with the illegal party was pretext for police and state repression. Grassroots activists were more interested in action than ideology yet ran the risk of becoming entangled in the shifting theoretical and tactical decisions of the CPC and Comintern. CPC activists missed opportunities to mobilize women by portraying poverty as a male affliction and appealing to the hegemony of the

⁴ See "Jobless Raid Grocery Shop," *Vancouver Province*, 12 January 1933, 1; "Jobless Raid Grocery," *Vancouver Sun*, 12 January 1933, 3; *Unemployed Worker*, 21 January 1933, 7.

⁵ While the CPC organized more unemployed to engage in direct action than any other political body, not all of Canada's unemployed councils or direct action groups were organized by the CPC. Indeed, Trotskyists, social democrats, the CCF, labour councils and even pre-Keynesian liberals played organizational roles. An assessment of non-CPC organizations, strategies and ideologies falls outside of the scope of this study. For a study on the mélange of ideologies at work in a Toronto-based protest group see, Patricia V. Schulz, *East York Workers' Association: A Response to the Great Depression* (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1975).

male breadwinner. Despite these disadvantages CPC activists created UCs where new forms of direct action could flourish. They accomplished their goals by avoiding theoretical sectarianism, stressing UC autonomy and encouraging poor people to lead and develop their own struggles. Antipoverty activists resisted the Communist soapbox believing that a left critique of capitalism would emerge from the engagement of poor people in, and knowledge gleaned from, direct action itself. Thus UC activists developed the embryo of a counterhegemonic body, nurtured by and for Vancouver's indigent.

Before describing the UC's organizational structure, ideology and strategies of resistance it is essential to ascertain how the Depression and the hegemonic apparatus of the state affected Vancouver's indigent. British Columbia was among the first of the provinces to feel the impact of the stock market crash – within a year B.C.'s building, lumber and fishing industries were crippled. International tariffs and currency instability destroyed B.C.'s export economy. Despite the poor job prospects, unemployed from across the country enticed by the lower mainland's mild climate, hopped on freight trains and crossed the Rockies. For the remainder of the Depression the provincial and municipal governments attempted to restrict non-resident indigents from receiving relief and lobbied Ottawa to demand assistance - B.C.'s unemployment, they argued, had become a national problem. Vancouver's working class east end, already suffering from overcrowding and dilapidated housing, was taxed by the mass inflow of unemployed men.⁶ By 1931 over 1,000 homeless people occupied four east end "jungles," or shantytowns, while another 1,000 filled nine hostels, refuges and missions.⁷ With a

⁶ On the geographic segregation of Vancouver's working class in the east end and the contrasting opulence of West Vancouver see Jill Wade, *Houses for All: The Struggle for Social Housing In Vancouver, 1919-1950* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1994).

⁷ Wade, *Houses for All*, 44-45.

geographic concentration of frustrated unemployed citizens and transients, Vancouver's east end was ripe for radical organization.

Poor people's angst reflected not only their shared penury but also their growing dissatisfaction with state social policy. Canada's relief measures had not altered substantially from seventeenth century British Poor Laws. The archaic legislation divided the indigent based on their ability to work and placed the responsibility of relief on municipal governments and local charities. The poor laws were to provide poverty wages to ensure that the private sector could continue to draw on a cheap and hungry workforce. Although the poor laws had been severely strained by previous industrial and economic depressions, politicians and the Canadian public could no longer ignore their inadequacy during the mass national unemployment of the 1930s.⁸

However, with millionaire Conservative R. B. Bennett sworn in as prime minister in 1930, the possibilities of any substantial state commitment to provide for Canada's impoverished were dashed. Beyond the traditional conservative measure of heightened tariffs, a reluctant "Starvation" Bennett was goaded into providing inadequate loans to the bankrupt provinces and initiating federally funded relief camps: "Neither this government nor any other government that I am a member of will ever grant unemployment insurance. We will not put a premium on idleness and we will not put our people on the dole."⁹ According to James Struthers, the relief camps, run by the Department of National Defence, were built for four purposes: solidifying federal

⁸ For a description of late nineteenth century Canadian social policy and unemployment unrest see Peter Baskerville and Eric W. Sager, *Unwilling Idlers: The Urban Unemployed and their Families in Late Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998).

⁹ John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class During the Depression: The Workers Unity League 1930-1936" (Ph.d. Diss., Dalhousie University, 1985), 548. However, as other historians have pointed out, Bennett did toy with the notion of unemployment insurance as early as 1931.

responsibility over transient men; removing single men from the urban labour market; preservation of work ethic; and distancing political agitators from their captive urban audiences.¹⁰ The relief camps, many of which were scattered across B.C., proved expensive, degrading and were widely denounced. Under CPC leadership the Relief Camp Workers Union (RCWU) staged numerous walkouts culminating in the 1935 On-to-Ottawa trek. Their protests gained widespread public support and contributed to Bennett's demise and the election of Mackenzie King's Liberal majority government the following fall.¹¹

On the provincial front, Conservative S.F. Tolmie's government's (1930-1933) propensity towards corporate patronage, political infighting and insistence on a balanced budget did not sit well with B.C.'s unemployed activists.¹² In 1931, using federal funds, Tolmie embarked on his own relief camp project. The expense of the camps and accusations of patronage by public works minister by R.W. Bruhn led an irate Bennett to accuse Tolmie of misappropriating federal dollars; the camps were closed in under a year.¹³ Aside from the relief camps, Tolmie was opposed to provincial administration of relief. Instead, Finance Minister James Williams Jones funded municipalities to administer relief agencies. Under the "Jones Scale" the province provided \$9 per month for the father, \$3.50 for the mother and \$2.50 for each child under 21. An addition of 40

¹⁰ Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 98-99.

¹¹ One of King's first actions upon taking office was abolishing the relief camps. His government, however, was cautious and conservative, and after shelving Bennett's proposed "New Deal" the Liberals embarked on only a few inadequate palliative projects (for example, the National Housing Association) before finally and reluctantly initiating unemployment insurance and a national employment service in 1940.

¹² For details on Tolmie's administration see Ian D. Parker, "Simon Fraser Tolmie: The Last Conservative Premier of British Columbia, *BC Studies* 11 (Fall 1971), 21-36. Under Tolmie's direction the George Kidd Commission, composed of laissez-faire capitalists, called for halving the provincial legislature, selling off provincial railways, slashing teachers salaries, repealing the minimum wage, and reducing students eligible for high school education. Tolmie ended up condemning his own commission after public outcries.

¹³ Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own*, 56.

percent of the family total could be added for rent, fuel, and clothing - for a family of four that meant a meager \$7.00 a month.¹⁴ The “Jones scale” lasted into the administration of Tolmie’s successor, liberal Duff Pattullo, who won a landslide victory in 1933, beating out a disintegrated Conservative party.¹⁵

Pattullo won on an election platform of “Work and Wages” appealing to constituents that relief ought only be for work rendered. The B.C. Liberals opposed proposals of direct financial relief despite it being more cost-effective.¹⁶ However, Pattullo, unlike Tolmie, “believed many of the problems of the day could be solved by an active, interventionist state.”¹⁷ Pattullo complained the provincial debt and Bennett and King’s passive and fiscally conservative federal governments hampered his plan of intervention. Thus “Pattullo spent the majority of his time in office trying to squeeze money out of” Ottawa.¹⁸ Nonetheless, with little resources, Pattullo’s “Work and Wages Act” increased the maximum relief scale by twenty percent, established a forty-eight-hour week, fixed the minimum wage, and created new relief work projects.¹⁹ But while the liberal media praised Pattullo’s creation of 4,500 new jobs in April 1933, unemployed activists quipped back; with almost 100,000 unemployed in B.C. what good were 4,500 jobs?²⁰

¹⁴ “‘New Deal’ on B.C. Relief,” *Vancouver Sun*, 20 December 1932, 1. Municipalities had the discretion of supplementing the relief rates, thus there were variations in relief provisions across the province. Until 1935, homeowners, unlike tenants, did not qualify for shelter allowances. See, Wade, *Houses for All*, 55.

¹⁵ The CCF in its first B.C. provincial election gained an impressive 31.53 percent of the vote behind the Liberal’s 41.74 percent. No CPC United Front candidate received more than 700 votes .

¹⁶ Margaret Ormsby, *British Columbia: A History* (Toronto: MacMillian Company of Canada, 1958), 458.

¹⁷ Robin Fisher, *Duff Pattullo of British Columbia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 214.

¹⁸ Fisher, *Duff Pattullo*, 253.

¹⁹ Pattullo also introduced provincial health insurance in 1936.

²⁰ “Liberals ‘Work and Wages’ a Fraud: 96,000 Unemployed in B.C. Ignored,” *Unemployed Worker*, 31 January 1934, 1. In April 1933 the number of registered relief recipients in BC was 98,000. McCallum, “ ‘ Still Raining, Market Still Rotten,’ ” 134-35, 167.

Vancouver Mayor L.D. Taylor shared with Pattullo a belief in state interventionism. With populist pizzazz, Taylor held the reigns of the city for a final two terms in office between 1930 and 1934. Tired and ill, Taylor had already peaked in his political career and had lost much of his firebrand reformism.²¹ The unseemliness of the jungles, the machinations of communist radicals and the swarms of indigent that were descending on his city appalled Taylor.²² Anticipating Keynesian economics, Taylor embarked on the Burrard Street Bridge, the Lions Gate Bridge and other work projects as a means of stimulating the economy and generating employment. In addition Taylor and council frequently appealed to the provincial and federal governments for relief funds. However, although self-dubbed “a man from the masses and not a corporate man,” Taylor failed to find the indigent adequate work or provide substantial relief.²³

The federal-provincial political skirmishes over who was responsible for Canada's indigent were disconnected from poor people's day-to-day struggles. Instead it was their degrading experiences at the municipal relief offices that exposed UC activists to government irresponsibility. Under W.R. Bone's direction the Vancouver relief office was Taylorized to maximize efficiency causing long lineups and widespread unrest.²⁴ Bone reduced expenditures by “delaying grants to clients until they remained on the welfare rolls for at least a month, built up large arrears or faced eviction.”²⁵ Bone also introduced scrip in lieu of direct relief, increased the criteria of the “means test,” and enhanced investigation procedures to deter fraud. Investigators made 89,535

²¹ In the first three decades of the twentieth century Taylor was an outspoken advocate of women's suffrage and tax reform. Daniel Francis, *L.D.: Mayor Louis Taylor and the Rise of Vancouver* (Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press, 2004), 199.

²² Taylor destroyed the jungles, ordered the police to use force to protect merchants from CPC demonstrations, and fought for relief from Victoria and Ottawa. See Francis, *L.D.*, 169-173.

²³ Francis, *L.D.*, 168.

²⁴ McCallum, “‘Still Raining, Market Still Rotten,’ ” 183.

²⁵ Wade, *Houses for All*, 46.

unannounced home visits in 1933 compared to 36,152 times in 1932.²⁶ With each case assessed on an individual basis, the long lines and often-unsympathetic relief officers, made applying for relief a lonely and degrading experience.

Against this contested institutional, corporate and political hegemonic backdrop, the CPC strove to organize the unemployed as a new means of waging the class struggle. In 1928 the Comintern announced capitalism's "third period" in which unemployment was permanent; with the stock market crash in 1929 many radicals believed capitalism's end had arrived. However, the CPC was fragmented and unprepared for an impending revolution. Tim Buck, the new leader of the CPC, had caused a deep rift in the ranks; those opposed to Stalin (Trotskyists) were ousted and Ukrainian and Yugoslav groups were alienated by Buck's commitment to creating a party without ethnic factions. Between 1929 and 1931, due to CPC sectarianism, the CPC dues paying membership dropped from 2,876 members to just under 1,400.²⁷

To bolster their numbers among single Anglo-men the CPC set up the National Unemployed Workers' Association, or NUWA, early in 1930. NUWA was an affiliate to the Worker's Unity League (WUL), the new CPC union organization that reflected the third period's "labour fakir" policy of no longer affecting change within the moderate labour unions.²⁸ In Vancouver, NUWA, led by Allan Campbell and James Litterick, staged over 100 demonstrations in 1930.²⁹ NUWA was a crowning achievement for the CPC, organizing as many as 20,000 Canadians in 1931.

²⁶ *Vancouver Sun*, 3 January 1934, 15.

²⁷ Ian Angus, *Canadian Bolsheviks: The Early Years of the Communist Party of Canada* (Montreal: Vanguard Publications, 1981), 199.

²⁸ In particular the All-Canadian Congress of Labour

²⁹ Campbell was deported in 1932, and Litterick moved to Manitoba. See Todd McCallum, " 'Still Raining, Market Still Rotten': Homeless Men and the Early Years of the Great Depression in Vancouver" (Ph.D. Diss., Queen's University, 2004).

By early 1932 the CPC and Comintern wished to expand their popular base by turning away from “labour-fakir” attacks. Since 1930 communists had been highly successful in organizing poor people to demand relief in decentralized reformist unemployed councils in communities across America.³⁰ In the spring of 1932, as a result of criticism from the Red International Labour Unions (RILU) the CPC adopted the U.S. activists’ organizational structure. On 3 March 1932 the National Unemployed Worker’s Conference in Ottawa dissolved NUWA and created the National Committee of Unemployed Councils (NCUC) in its stead.

At the conference it was argued a united front could not be achieved if the unemployed were affiliated with the sectarian WUL.³¹ According to George Wilson, the NCUC secretary, the policy change was a “re-drafting of our present forces, recruiting new armies, mobilizing greater and greater forces in order to prepare a smashing counter-offensive.”³² Antipoverty activists were asked to step back from revolutionary rhetoric. Leaders must “patiently explain and convince the workers that the action proposed is necessary for the development of the struggle.”³³ Although the CPC was cash strapped, unlike NUWA, the new organization did not require a dues paying membership. Poor Canadians could participate without reaching into their lint-filled pockets or committing to Communism.³⁴ Most importantly, the CPC’s *central* ideological proviso to the UCs was “organize based on your immediate needs.” Neither the Comintern nor the CPC could represent the unemployed argued CPC leaders.

³⁰ See Franklin Folsom, *Impatient Armies of the Poor: The Story of Collective Action of the Unemployed, 1808-1942* (Colorado: University of Colorado, 1991), 264. According to Folsom unemployed councils’ genealogy can be traced back to tsarist St.Petersburg in 1906.

³¹ *Workers Unity*, August-September 1932, 5,6. Distancing the unemployed movement from the WUL was, however, largely symbolic. The WUL continued to provide, in Gramscian terms, “organic” leadership.

³² *Worker*, 28 May 1932, 4.

³³ *Workers Unity*, August-September 1932, 6.

³⁴ *Workers Unity*, June 1932, 13.

Vancouver activists were boggled by Comintern top-down insistence for organizational restructuring. George Wilson noted that “in B.C. the change was not accepted with any great enthusiasm due to the militancy of the NUWA in combating the fakirs and the extensive amount of work recently accomplished in setting up branches of the NUWA in the residential working class districts and in the camps.”³⁵ Activists were frustrated and suspicious of CPC and Comintern policy changes, especially when they appeared to negate hard fought gains.

Antipoverty activists did not benefit financially from affiliation. Regular national CPC penny drives and other fundraisers drew resources away from the UCs rather than to them. During a non-contributory insurance campaign in 1934, NCUC secretary H. Sula asked for funds to repay a loan for draft bills, postcards and other propaganda material.³⁶ UC members knocked on doors with collection lists. On at least one occasion, donors complained about where the money was spent.³⁷ The UCs estimated rent, fuel and propaganda (including the *Unemployed Worker*) amounted to just over \$15.50 per month with the majority of the funds scraped together through penny drives, tin canning and the meager contributions of the unemployed themselves.³⁸

Vancouver’s antipoverty activists were disadvantaged by more than just CPC sectarianism, theoretical teeter tottering, bureaucratic centralism and empty coffers. In 1931 the federal government amended Section 98 of the Criminal Code to include the CPC as an unlawful organization.³⁹ As Tina Loo and Carolyn Strange have argued

³⁵ *Worker*, 28 May 1932, 4.

³⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 7 February 1934, 4.

³⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 10 January 1934, 9.

³⁸ *Unemployed Worker*, 6 December 1933, 4.

³⁹ Section 98 was first enacted to quell the unrest of the 1919 Winnipeg general strike. The law declared any personal association with an organization advocating “any governmental, industrial, or economic change in Canada by use of force, violence, or physical injury to person or property” could be punishable

section 98 was a moral law that targeted beliefs not criminal activity and shifted the burden of proof to the suspect. The RCMP used Section 98 to incarcerate eight CPC leaders, including Tim Buck and Tom McEwan.⁴⁰ For the duration of the UC experiment the “Toronto Eight” were locked up in the Kingston penitentiary. With Section 98 as pretext, Vancouver Chief Constable C.E. Edgett twice ordered police in December 1932 to ransack and seize organizational materials from the UC headquarters along with other CPC offices.⁴¹ Police informants also cased UC meetings and in January 1931 Chief Constable Bingham banned all CPC-led public demonstrations after NUWA staged a particularly aggressive protest. For local activists this was a deadly blow to the movement’s ability to spread its propaganda, gather new participants, and experience the power of collective force. As late as 1933 activists were still debating the effects of the demonstration ban: “The methods adopted in regard to demonstrations on Powell St. Grounds and other parts of the city are futile and greater study and maneuvering will have to be invented to overcome the police terror.”⁴²

The UCs were further handicapped by the illegality of poverty itself. Between 1930 and 1934 25,000 men, women and children who spent less than five years under Canadian skies were deported for their involvement in street protests, Communist activities, petty theft, or by merely becoming dependent wards of the state. In Vancouver

with up to 20 years imprisonment or deportation for recent immigrants.” See Carolyn Strange & Tina Loo, *Making Good: Law & Moral Regulation in Canada, 1867-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 129.

⁴⁰ The other members of the “Toronto Eight” were Malcolm Bruce, Sam Carr, Amos Hill, Tomo Cacic, John Boychuk and Matthew Popovic. Each activist was sentenced to three to five years. After intensive protests and a legal battle orchestrated by the Canadian Labour Defence League (CLDL), a CPC affiliate, the eight were released in the spring of 1934.

⁴¹ *Unemployed Worker*, 6 December 1932, 1; *Unemployed Worker*, 17 December 1932, 1. 61 Cordova St. (UC headquarters), Maxim Gorky Club, Clinton Hall, Ukrainian Labor Temple, CLDL and Workers’ Ex-Servicemen’s buildings were all targeted

⁴² *Unemployed Worker*, 22 March 1933, 11.

307 poor people were deported in 1932 and another 179 in 1933.⁴³ The threat of deportation deterred recently immigrated poor people from engaging in public resistance. With Communists assumed to be “dangerous foreigners”, deportations were part of a policy of social cleansing. However, within NUWA and the UCs, unemployed British and native Canadians not foreigners were the central agitators. State xenophobic social policy, coupled with Tim Buck’s insistence on disbanding CPC ethnic factions, severely curtailed UC activists’ ability to mobilize Vancouver’s poor ethnic minorities.

Finally, although UCs expanded antipoverty activism to include women and children, UC activists had to overcome a male dominated CPC that persistently defined poverty as an affront to male breadwinner norms. As Joan Sangster has commented, despite the efforts of CPC female leaders like Becky Buhay and Florence Custance and CPC gendered self-criticism, the CPC “never really overcame its own indifference to” women.⁴⁴

Despite the shortcomings of CPC association the grassroots activists who headed the UCs were, almost without exception, card-carrying unemployed communists.⁴⁵ Fred Duncan, the editor of the *Unemployed Worker* was a tireless CPC activist.⁴⁶ According to Ronald Liversedge, Duncan “would sit at a table taking down notes of grievances and

⁴³ *Vancouver Sun*, 3 January 1934, 15. See also Barbara Ann Roberts, *Whence they came: Deportation from Canada, 1900-1935* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1988).

⁴⁴ Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989), 74.

⁴⁵ Some central unemployed organizers may have received a CPC stipend but it was likely a paltry sum; according to WUL leader McEwan his own CPC wage was less than his former income as blacksmith. See, Tom McEwan, *Forge Glows Red: From Blacksmith to Revolutionary* (Toronto: Progress Books, 1974), 125.

⁴⁶ The *Unemployed Worker* was published weekly beginning in 1930 as the voice of NUWA. When NUWA disbanded the *Unemployed Worker* became the official organ of the UCs. The mimeograph moved to a twelve-page format and increased its circulation to 1250 copies in February 1933 to reflect the explosion of UCs across the lower mainland.⁴⁶ By March, circulation had doubled to 2,500 copies a week. See *Unemployed Worker*, 4 February 1933, 2; *Unemployed Worker*, 1 March 1933, 1. The *Unemployed Worker* did not publish an editorial name until its last issue, with F. Duncan signing off as managing editor. See, *Unemployed Worker*, 24 October 1934, 2.

when he had a nice little crowd of women together, up he would jump and march at the head of small procession to the relief office, where he would hammer away at the relief officers, demanding clothing, kettles and pans, and medicines.”⁴⁷ Communist George Drayton was general secretary of the UCs of Greater Vancouver while Fred Grange, Bob Leales, Effie Wilson and Flora Hutton were all red leaders in the UCs.⁴⁸

How did antipoverty activists seek to overcome problems with CPC affiliation? To combat bureaucracy the UCs insisted on the autonomy of their smallest cells. Block committees comprised up to fifteen members with an elected chairperson, secretary, and grievance committee.⁴⁹ Confined to a city street they met weekly to discuss members’ conflicts with the relief system, landlords, bailiffs and police. After members shared grievances the UC protested the authority en masse. For larger struggles, block committees pooled human power and resources sending two delegates to neighbourhood councils (NC) of up to 15 blocks. Within each NC, organizational, educational, women and youth committees were formed. All positions were democratically elected with a clause allowing for the right of recall.⁵⁰ NCs were consolidated into a city organization.⁵¹ “The city council is the directing committee which carries out the collective decisions of the members in the blocks.”⁵² Finally, linking UCs across B.C. provided opposition to provincial relief legislation.

By creating autonomous local councils CPC activists hoped to win “the struggle against all remnants of bureaucratic methods [by insisting on] . . . living contact with the

⁴⁷ Liversedge, *Recollections of the On-to-Ottawa Trek*, 32-33.

⁴⁸ Many of these activists also participated in the plethora of other CPC organizations within B.C.

⁴⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 23 July 1932, 2.

⁵⁰ *Unemployed Worker* 29 October 1932, 5.

⁵¹ *Unemployed Worker* 29 October 1932, 5. City or Local Councils were dropped in September 1933 in favour of a central committee. See *Unemployed Worker*, 6 September 1933, 5.

⁵² *Unemployed Worker*, 22 March 1933, 6. Unfortunately there are no remaining documents that map the jurisdictions of each council.

masses and leadership of the struggles.”⁵³ Despite the rhetoric UCs were organizationally confusing. With each larger council composed of the smaller councils, some members attended up to five meetings a week!⁵⁴ Even the *Unemployed Worker* became awash in acronyms: “If a comrade is elected from his block to the N.C. then the L.C. to the C.C. and the P.C. he will just function on the P.C. and C.C and B.C. or, if he is just elected to the C.C. he will function on the C.C, L.C. and B.C.”⁵⁵ Although burdened by committees, stress was placed on leadership not dictatorship: “Committees are necessary but what is not necessary is that these committees should become the dictators and impose their ideas upon their members.” Further, “the membership of the block meetings is called the assembly,” espoused the *Unemployed Worker*, “and the assembly is what creates a democratic forum.”⁵⁶ While the structure of the UCs facilitated input from participants, its demanding schedule mitigated its potential for direct actions and drawing in new recruits.

The UC ideology began with reforms not radical rupture: “If we do not put ourselves in the forefront of every struggle for the SMALLEST NEEDS, the workers [and unemployed] will turn away from us and look upon us as a bunch of talkers and noise makers.”⁵⁷ In the subsidiarity logic of Bob Leales,

The worker’s immediate needs tell the worker the need of fight; the need of fight teaches him the need of organization; the use of the state power against the workers’ organizations in those struggles for bread, for wages, for decent working conditions, teaches the worker the need of political struggles; the experiences of these political struggles teach the workers that, after all, the problem is not how to

⁵³ *Worker*, 16 July 1932, 6.

⁵⁴ “Many activists were going to five meetings a week, all in connection with the Unemployed Councils, let alone other organization of which they are members.” *Worker*, 2 September 1933, 4.

⁵⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 February 1933, 3.

⁵⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 13 December 1933, 4.

⁵⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 October 1932, 2.

keep the state power out of these struggles, but who controls the state power and on which side is the power used in the class struggle.⁵⁸

Lealess, along with other Vancouver antipoverty activists, stressed action over rhetoric, reform over revolution and poor people's agency over bureaucracy.

It was UC activists' grounding in subsidiarity that led them to denounce the CCF and Trotskyist attempts to speak for the unemployed. Hostile editorials in the *Unemployed Worker* railed against J.S. Woodsworth, questioned CCF class affiliations and concluded, "When it comes to the point of exposing and taking action against the oppressors, they [the CCF] are afraid of it."⁵⁹ In answer to CCFers who argued, "Well we can get these University professors up here and then we can expose them to the workers" CPC activists responded that academics monopolize time and allow for no discussions so "the speaker always has the advantage."⁶⁰ When Trotskyists' T. Bisett, W. Scott and W. Offer broke ranks with the CPC and formed their own South Vancouver unemployed organization in the fall of 1932, the *Unemployed Worker* weighed in: "They have no faith in the workers, who in their opinion are not 'intelligent', who must be 'educated' first, then 'organized,' and then 'something can be done.'"⁶¹ Organizations and leftists who claimed they knew best for the poor without actually associating with the poor themselves frustrated UC activists. Nonetheless, UCs did temper their sectarianism. UC activists participated in forums with the CCF and by 1933 certain block committees openly identified themselves as "CCF Blocks" and "Socialist block committees."⁶²

⁵⁸ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 February 1933, 5.

⁵⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 19 November 1932, 7.

⁶⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 19 November 1932, 7.

⁶¹ *Worker*, 12 November 1932, 2.

⁶² "Proposed Arena Meeting," *Unemployed Worker*, 11 October 1933, 10; *Worker*, 2 September 1933, 4. Further study is required to unearth the strained relationship between the CCF and the CPC. While local CCF activists such as Helen Gutteridge, CCF-UC members, and later organizations such as the Mothers' Council organized and mobilized the unemployed, I would argue along with Craig Heron that while the

Although not wanting to be labeled “noise makers” or sectarian, antipoverty activists linked the UC direct actions to the proletarian battle against a passive liberal state. Activists argued the bourgeois governments and industries should alleviate unemployment during widespread economic depression: “The capitalist class and its governments, who own and control all the means of production, are responsible for the full and adequate maintenance of every man, woman and child of the working class, who are without means of life as a result of the Capitalist Crisis.”⁶³

In line with CPC proposals UC activists took up the slogan “Work or Wages” and pressured all levels of government to adopt non-contributory insurance.⁶⁴ Both measures were ostensibly reformist, although activists argued they were a temporary measure:

And until the workers overthrow capitalism and take over the factories, banks and everything else the demand will be for Work or Wages . . . our job is to help the reptile [capitalism] die and while in its death throes compel it to furnish us a job at regular rates of wages or full Maintenance.⁶⁵

Since Non-Contributory Insurance was not popular in parliament the UCs also called for immediate relief for all, irrespective of nationality, race, gender or political affiliation.

CCF challenge to the liberal hegemony cannot be overlooked, the CCF largely ignored the left notion of subsidiarity in favour of an intellectual, leftist elite. This strategic divide appears to have contributed to CPC-CCF animosity as much as the traditional revolutionary-social democrat dichotomy and other sectarian squabbles. For example, Bill Pritchard, *Commonwealth* editor, argued that the middle class not the working class was the revolutionary vanguard, while CCF intellectuals affiliated with the League for Social Reconstruction (LSR) insisted social change could only come from a “new reform elite” composed largely of well-educated middle class white men. See Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 2nd edition (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., 1996), 73. For information on Helen Gutteridge see Irene Howard, *The Struggle for Social Justice in British Columbia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1992); on the Mother’s Councils see Irene Howard, “Mothers’ Council of Vancouver: Holding the Fort for the Unemployed, 1935-1938, *BC Studies* 69-70 (Spring-Summer 1986), 249-287; On Pritchard see Howard, *Struggle for Social Justice*, 159; on the LSR see Wade, *Housing For All*, 81.

⁶³ *Unemployed Worker*, 1 November 1933, 4.

⁶⁴ Unlike the 1940 UI act, non-contributory insurance demanded all costs of unemployment be born by industry itself through taxation on profits. In the spring of 1932 a non-contributory signature campaign initiated by the CPC gathered 94,000 names. *Workers Unity*, June 1932, 11.

⁶⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 November 1930, 2-3.

“The right to relief work must be demanded by every unemployed worker on only one qualification – being out of a job – and nothing more.”⁶⁶

Antipoverty activists claimed poor people had more in common than just being out of work. They also were subject to a hegemonic individual work ethic that led to humiliating relief requirements, inadequate charitable institutions and the internalization of poverty as a personal failing. Under the capitalist individualist philosophy UC activists complained poor people were lulled into complacency and despair.

According to the *Unemployed Worker*, mainstream media were guilty of perpetuating the liberal ideology that led to poor people’s complacency. The *Vancouver Sun*, and other “British Imperial” papers wrote only from “a boss class point of view,” for the purpose of keeping the working class “ignorant of the truth.”⁶⁷ Tied to a cadre of elites, papers like the *Vancouver Sun* strove to make capital fluid and sweatshops operate efficiently.⁶⁸ Capitalist presses taught that workers’ accidents on the job were inevitable and that downsizing and wage reductions were necessary for economic growth.⁶⁹ When “yellow rags” expressed sympathy for the unemployed, they appealed to broad liberal humanitarianism drawn from religious social regeneration and charitable inclinations. The *Vancouver Sun* could call for “a governmental attitude that accords MEN the same consideration as MONEY” while offering nothing more than higher tariffs and soup kitchen donations as possible equalizers.⁷⁰

If the liberal newspapers muted and obscured worker dissatisfaction and unrest they did so, argued the CPC activists, in tandem with a host of charitable organizations.

⁶⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 22 November 1930, 3.

⁶⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 March 1933, 2; *Unemployed Worker*, 8 February 1933, 12.

⁶⁸ *Unemployed Worker*, 21 March 1931, 5.

⁶⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 March 1933, 11.

⁷⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, 29 September 1932, 6.

Charities “exploit the foolish sentimental enthusiasm of thousands of earnest but ignorant workers.”⁷¹ The YMCA, YWCA and Boy Scouts “inculcate anti-working class sentiment into the youth of the city” and the John Howard Society “turns the misguided victims of capitalism – the unfortunate youths who land in jail for criminal offenses – into good slaves, law-abiding Christians, and hundred per-cent patriots.” The Salvation Army, or “Starvation Army” were “religious peddlers” who “by holding a crust of bread in front of the starving workers” use “capitalism in the name of religion to exploit the workers.”⁷² In 1931 the Vancouver Welfare Federation formed to raise money for socially acceptable charities by encouraging employers to garnish employee paychecks, often without permission.⁷³ When Vancouver schoolteachers agreed to donate an entire month’s wages to the federation, Bob Leales appealed to the teachers. While he admired their sacrifice it set a precedent – that teachers, like other workers must make the financial sacrifice, leaving Vancouver’s prosperous wallets unscathed.⁷⁴ According to the *Unemployed Worker*, “Social regeneration is a refined way of telling the unemployed that charity organizations are institutions that are scientifically formed for preventing the hatred of the working class for charity from being directed into a proper channel [Communism].”⁷⁵ Charity’s insistence on empathy over equality reinforced the power of an economic elite over the toiling masses, argued antipoverty activists.

CPC antipoverty activists roughly sketched the terrain of the liberal order within the pages of the *Unemployed Worker*, but it was through the UCs that counterhegemonic

⁷¹ *Unemployed Worker*, 22 November 1930, 1.

⁷² *Unemployed Worker*, 15 November, 1930, 1.

⁷³ *Unemployed Worker*, 7 November 1931, 2. The *Unemployed Worker* also accused the Vancouver Welfare Federation of overcharging for administrative fees. The United Way of the Lower Mainland subsumed the Vancouver Welfare Federation after world war two.

⁷⁴ *Unemployed Worker*, 20 December 1933, 9.

⁷⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 November 1933, 11.

rhetoric was translated into action. Intellectual understanding without practice is of no use, activists contended. Besides, poor people do not have to be fully conscious of class struggle to be engaged in class conflict. What poor people were fully conscious of, the UC activists argued, were the everyday problems of poverty. As UC members shared their individual grievances, collective issues arose. In 1933 UC members formulated winter demands for fuel, utility provisions, winter clothing, medical attention and increased relief rates. According to the *Unemployed Worker*,

The demands . . . indicate that they have been formulated by those who know what it means to be without sufficient food for days, waiting for a fresh supply of scrip. They know what it means to have to pinch and scrape in order to make a half cord of wood last two weeks during this wintry weather, poor, threadbare clothing, living by candle light, no medical attention.⁷⁶

These were real not theoretical concerns and were based on the lived experiences and perceptions of poor people. For example, although the Depression was a period of economic deflation, UC members contended scrip grafting by relief officers and shopkeepers and price jacking by profit-hungry producers had driven up food prices.⁷⁷ To verify their suspicions the UCs "Worker's Budget" assessed the "qualities and quantities of various necessities of life and in corresponding amounts of funds."⁷⁸ The door-to-door survey found food costs (including butter, bacon, beef, baking power, cheese, coffee, flour etc.) increased by 24 percent from November 1932 to January 1934. A family of three received \$4.07 in food relief, and, due to price increases, this amount

⁷⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 18 October 1933, 3.

⁷⁷ Vancouver's first Depression-era relief officer, George Ireland, was fired after pilfering meal tickets and taking kickbacks from local restaurants. Milk producers were also accused by city officials and the unemployed of raising prices to skim the relief system. See McCallum, "Still Raining, Market Still Rotten," 134.

⁷⁸ *Unemployed Worker*, 17 January 1934, 7.

purchased only three-quarters of what it could in 1932.⁷⁹ By discussing perceived inflation the UCs helped poor people evaluate their required sustenance and press for collective demands.

Honouring unemployed demands won many of Vancouver's poor people to the UCs. By October 1932 the first UCs took their grievances to the authorities. Two months later a citywide UC conference reported 1,000 members in attendance.⁸⁰ By February of 1933 the UCs reached the apex of their membership with 114 block committees with a membership of 2,300 in Greater Vancouver.⁸¹ On any given week, block committee meetings drew as many as 250 unemployed.⁸² Very few names have been recorded for posterity; these are the anonymous activists who survived by using bodies, words and solidarity to acquire the necessities of life. Many of the unnamed were tireless supporters; others were one-timers, participating in a single event out of curiosity or self-interest.⁸³

For UC members the relief line was not an anonymous column of downtrodden faces - rather each relief recipient was a potential political ally. Editorials urged UC activists to use the relief line as a recruitment zone.⁸⁴ Every person "waiting for a food voucher that does not keep body and soul together can become an active force" if activists speak out about the power of direct action.⁸⁵ The *Unemployed Worker* complained, however, that "spontaneous struggles have broken out on the relief lines

⁷⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 17 January 1934, 8. Unfortunately the *Unemployed Worker* did not publish how many people filled in the "Worker's Budget" so one should be wary drawing conclusions based on an unknown representative sample.

⁸⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 25 April 1934, 6.

⁸¹ In the fall of 1932 Vancouver had approximately 8500 people on relief, the vast majority, 7,300 in all were families. While not taking into account relief recipients in Burnaby, New Westminister and the Greater Vancouver area, UC attendance numbers suggest that as much as 10 percent of relief recipients were participants in the UCs.

⁸² *Unemployed Worker*, 27 December 1933, 6.

⁸³ Increasing attendance and encouraging one-timers to return were frequent topics of discussion within the UCs See, *Unemployed Worker*, 20 September 1933, 8.

⁸⁴ *Unemployed Worker*, 20 December 1933, 6.

⁸⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 3 January 1934, 4.

without unemployed council supporters knowing about them.” Spontaneity, the paper argued, is no match to a strong organization.

UC activists demonstrated in and outside relief offices. According to Fred Grange, “We know that it has been due to the consistent and persistent pressure exercised by delegations from N.C.’s and other small bodies that have been a thorn in the side of the Relief Committee and the city council and is responsible for the slight improvements that have been made.”⁸⁶ In December 1933 UCs fought for an official relief cheque day and lobbied for a 100 percent increase in fuel allowance. The demand for fuel came with the aim of decentralizing relief so recipients did not have to haul coal across town. Fuel increases were granted but the centralization of relief remained.⁸⁷

Relief issued in scrip restricted what the unemployed could purchase from select retailers. On 12 January 1933 Burnaby U.C. members raided three grocery stores after being refused entrance to speak to relief commissioner Bennett in demand of open scrip (food and household vouchers without conditions). One hundred workers in East Burnaby entered the Model Grocery store and took food from the shelves. Simultaneously, over 300 workers in North Burnaby made away with food from the Piggly Wiggly and Lee Kees.⁸⁸

In early 1934, striking for more relief, 250 Burnaby UC activists broke into the relief office and refused to leave until open scrip was provided. Six Burnaby police officers bolstered by 45 Vancouver constables evicted the men, women and children and removed all the files, fixtures and desks to Edmunds, seven miles away. In protest, the Burnaby UC gathered in front of several downtown grocery stores, pressuring the

⁸⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 November 1933, 1.

⁸⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 20 December 1933, 9.

⁸⁸ *Unemployed Worker*, 21 January 1933, 2.

proprietors to take up their cause at the relief office. Protests continued the next day and the relief office was moved back to its central location with the promise open scrip would be granted on 15 March 1934.

Because relief was individualized, the UCs responded by fighting personal grievances. UCs reported weekly to the *Unemployed Worker* of success in individual relief cases. For example, in November 1932 130 Burnaby UC members, surrounded by a "swarm of police," occupied the relief office for two hours, winning relief for a single worker.⁸⁹ In North Vancouver in March 1933 250 UC members, some walking over seven miles, attended a demonstration in front of city hall to win extra relief for an elderly couple. At first the relief officer sent the protestors to seek aid at the Red Cross but after meeting with delegates he approved the demanded extra \$5.00 allowance. The *Unemployed Worker* called the action a success not only for the elderly couple but for all participants: "They were well rewarded and all went away with a feeling that each and every one was responsible for winning this demand and partially alleviating the suffering of members of their own class."⁹⁰

When not dealing with state relief provisions the UCs protected home and family from landlords, repo-men and petty capitalists. The *Unemployed Worker* reported at least twenty home/utility pickets between the fall of 1932 and late 1934. By as early as October of 1932 UC activists praised the results of collective action in forcing utility companies to reestablish services.⁹¹ In the False Creek UC the "vile" Grimmett and Brett were stopped from taking a family's doors and windows while the Kingsway UC returned a water pipe stolen from underneath a renter's home and stopped the seizure of a

⁸⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 12 November 1932, 5.

⁹⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 March 1933, 7.

⁹¹ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 October 1932, 2.

mother's washing machine.⁹² After families were cut off from B.C. Electric, activists, including an unemployed linesman, clandestinely rewired homes.⁹³ In October 1933 UC members left a meeting when informed of a bailiff seizing a family's furniture a few blocks away. Activists gathered troops as they paraded down the street. One militant shoved the furniture off the bailiff truck to be passed down the line of protestors safely into the home. The police were present but did not interfere.⁹⁴

The UCs also responded to evictions and home repossessions. Despite the B.C. Liberal government's 1933 election promise that no one would be evicted from their home for failure to meet payments, evictions were commonplace. A renter's position was even more precarious. Picketing homes scheduled for eviction often remained for weeks, requiring organized mass meals and shift work. At 6 p.m. the legal time limit for evictions passed and the unemployed returned to their own homes, or, if without home, hunkered down on a stretch of open floor.⁹⁵

Eviction stories seldom ended happily. Following a prolonged strike 15 policemen evicted a family in the South Fraser UC. "The house was completely stripped of everything movable . . . leaving this family of six on the sidewalk with nothing else but the clothes they were wearing."⁹⁶ Acting on behalf of the landlords, Relief Officer Bone complained that UC tactics had forced "the landlord to take out eviction papers, thereby causing the real estate agents a good deal of money." Some landlords doubled as city councilors. Alderman Shinnick offered one of his pieces of real estate lacking plumbing

⁹² *Unemployed Worker*, 5 April 1933, 5; *Unemployed Worker*, 10 May 1933, 3.

⁹³ Ronald Liversedge, *Recollections of the On To Ottawa Trek* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1973), 33.

⁹⁴ *Unemployed Worker*, 25 October 1933, 3.

⁹⁵ Ben Swankey & Jean Evans Sheils, "Work and Wages:" A Semi-Documentary Account of the Life and times of Arthur H. (Slim) Evans, 1890-1944 (Vancouver: Trade Union Research Bureau, 1977), 72; *Unemployed Worker*, 10 January 1934, 3.

⁹⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 31 January 1934, 4.

and windows to an evicted family. "Big hearted Shinnick," mocked the *Unemployed Worker*. Aldermen W.J. Twiss and McDonald were also identified as unscrupulous landlords. Alderman McDonald's house was picketed after the UC rallied around a family of nine facing eviction from a dilapidated home with "an old water boiler made into a heater."⁹⁷

The pickets in front of Arthur "Slim" Evans' home, leading labor activist, received the most media attention. In March 1934 with "Slim" in Oakalla for advocating the overthrow of government, his activist wife, Jane Evans, and their daughter faced foreclosure on the family built home. Alderman W.J. Twiss held the \$1800 mortgage. Local UCs, bolstered by other CPC activists, picketed for four weeks. A Young Pioneer committee of 16 children distributed leaflets attacking Twiss.⁹⁸ Twiss and the relief department refused to settle Evan's utilities account and threatened to take her off relief, but were dissuaded by a grievance committee.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, after weeks of preparation, 150 police evicted Jane Evans and her daughter.

In the autumn of 1933 the UCs opposed a city auction of 2,000 homes repossessed due to non-payment of taxes. In Burnaby a similar action paralyzed bidding when UC activists filled the auction hall.¹⁰⁰ The UCs demanded a moratorium on taxes and interest on workers homes. Similarly, members called on the city to expand relief to homeowners instead of forcing them into foreclosure. That the city would auction their homes signaled to UC activists that they had no legal recourse: "Constitutionally the workers are to lose their homes and to prevent this we must therefore adopt

⁹⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 29 March 1933, 9.

⁹⁸ Swankey, "Work and Wages," 70.

⁹⁹ Swankey, "Work and Wages," 71.

¹⁰⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 27 September 1933, 1.

unconstitutional methods; that is methods that are opposed to the present methods of the authorities.”¹⁰¹ A planned protest did not materialize; on 20 November 1933 627 homes were auctioned with 600 defaulting to the city and another 2500 slated for sale. Six police officers ensured the UCs would not derail the auction.¹⁰²

Occasionally directions from CPC headquarters hijacked the energies of UC activists. In April 1933, for example, the NCUC called for UCs to march to provincial legislatures. The B.C. Hunger March drew activists away from daily protests at relief offices to prepare for the demonstration. The size of the march also concerned politicians and police who curtailed the possibilities of an effective demonstration. The march may have fostered solidarity, but it did nothing to improve the economic lives of poor people.

The demands of the Hunger March were a 25 percent increase in all relief and the right to eat and sleep where one chooses.¹⁰³ Other concerns of UC activists were added:

Begging and pleading is of no further use . . . we are threatened with evictions from our homes. We are threatened with darkness by the B.C. Electric. We are bulldozed and insulted by the Relief Investigators and clubbed by the Police when we protest . . . The B.C. Hunger March must halt this offensive and hurl it back against the vile callous Jones Scale and its promoters.¹⁰⁴

Five thousand buttons were printed at CPC headquarters to be sold as a fundraiser, with the slogan “I support the Hunger March.”¹⁰⁵ Finance, feeding, housing, transportation, reception and publicity committees were formed and organizers sent across the province.¹⁰⁶ For those unable to travel to parliament, simultaneous marches were planned in cities across B.C.

¹⁰¹ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 November 1933, 2.

¹⁰² *Vancouver Province*, 21 November 1933, 3.

¹⁰³ *Unemployed Worker*, 5 April 1933, 1.

¹⁰⁴ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 March 1933, 12.

¹⁰⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 22 March 1933, 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 4 February 1933, 3.

Premier Simon Fraser Tolmie requested a delegation of six be sent in lieu of a mass demonstration: "These parades are entirely unnecessary as this Government is always glad to listen to representation presented by delegates authorized to act on behalf of any body of citizens."¹⁰⁷ The Tolmie government also took coercive measures to ensure the protest was small and low-key. The Fordham Commission threatened relief camp workers would not be allowed to return to the camps, and police patrolled railway stations, arresting activists riding freights. Four organizers were arrested on boxcars on their way to prepare outlying communities.¹⁰⁸ In the Oakalla prison 37 activists were detained for over a week after the demonstration.¹⁰⁹ For the unemployed, backing down from a mass demonstration was untenable: "Nothing but the rude jolt of massed workers marching determinedly to their objective, will galvanize them into action and force them to come thru with our demands."¹¹⁰

On 4 April 1933 1,500 unemployed waved banners and chanted at the provincial legislature while the police escorted Japanese navy officials around the parliament buildings.¹¹¹ Disobeying Tolmie's request for six delegates, the unemployed sent a contingent of 57. The Tolmie government received nine activists. Arthur Evans trapped government spokesmen Wolf Bruhn and McKenzie into stating they were "representatives of the capitalist class."¹¹² Paltry concessions included the promise relief workers could return to the camps and that those arrested would be released. As the

¹⁰⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 29 March 1933, 4.

¹⁰⁸ *Worker*, 25 February 1933, 1.

¹⁰⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 12 April 1933, 1.

¹¹⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 29 March 1933, 1.

¹¹¹ The presence of the Japanese navy was a point of protest amongst the activists. Since the Japanese army had invaded China in 1931 with the support of the U.S. government, the *Unemployed Worker* asked its readers to see the war as an economic not racial decision bent on weakening communism and expanding capital. Most importantly, claimed the *Unemployed Worker*, "the interests of the Chinese and Japanese workers are the same." See *Unemployed Worker*, 31 October 1931, 1.

¹¹² *Unemployed Worker*, 12 April 1933, 2.

march dispersed many of the unemployed were “fully convinced that we have nothing to hope for from these racketeers and politicians of the capitalist class.”¹¹³

In Vancouver organizers changed tactics after there were police promises of a show of force.¹¹⁴ Instead of a march Greater Vancouver held eight mass meetings in working class halls. Detectives cased their meetings and 100 police were “swinging their sticks” at the empty Cambie Street grounds: “The sight of hundreds of police staging a parade of their own . . . was a big laugh,” reported the *Unemployed Worker*.¹¹⁵ Activists tried to pacify “old time warriors” upset with the change in tactics, arguing that if the unemployed avoided confrontation, the public would sympathize with their peaceful demands for relief: “Everyone knew that requests had been repeatedly made for the right to peacefully parade and yet all the available forces of the state, armed to the teeth, rode around town as if the Japanese Navy were attacking the city.”¹¹⁶

Despite the failure of the mass demonstration, antipoverty activists continued to uphold mass marches as an essential direct action tactic. The *Unemployed Worker* emphasized how demonstrations produce “a positive reaction in the minds of the bourgeois who have to be forced to grant demands and concessions.” As such protests “demonstrate numerically that we mean to enforce our demands,” and showed other poor people the divide between capitalist and proletariat. At every demonstration unemployed “‘wall flowers’” stood on the sidewalk, to “‘see the cops beat up on the reds.’” Instead of asking “why demonstrations” the *Unemployed Worker* suggested a qualitative

¹¹³ *Unemployed Worker*, 12 April 1933, 2.

¹¹⁴ *Unemployed Worker*, 5 April 1933, supplement.

¹¹⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 5 April 1933, supplement.

¹¹⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 5 April 1933, supplement.

assessment: “why poor demonstrations?”¹¹⁷ How could unemployed demonstrations end with a bouquet of wallflowers turned red?

UC activists sought to turn more wallflowers into class combatants by including women, children and ethnic minorities. The UCs, perhaps more than any CPC organization, encouraged the equal involvement of men and women. Unfortunately, women were often invited only as proof to “the authorities that there are thousands of women and children starving in this great city of ours.”¹¹⁸ However, female UC members played an integral role in resisting the state. The assumption of the “weaker sex” was challenged: “Women are the most militant section of the workers, yet we pay least attention to them and their needs – a further exposure of our sectarianism.”¹¹⁹

Women were the forgotten poor of the Depression era. CPC activists rarely acknowledged the effect wage decreases and exclusion from unemployed relief had on Canadian women.¹²⁰ Women, regardless of qualifications, were left with poorly paid positions as domestic servants or waiting tables – reinforcing what Nancy Christie has described as a reinvigorated misogynist division of labour during the Depression.¹²¹ In 1933 the West End UC warned other councils the provincial government employment office sent women to work as domestic servants, paid only in the usual allotment of scrip.¹²² A major point of grievance for women was the unequal issue of relief - \$3.50 for a woman as opposed to \$9.00 for their male counterparts. Relief investigators also raised the ire of female activists when they played the licentious card. In November 1933 a

¹¹⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 12 April 1933, 11.

¹¹⁸ “What about the Women?” *Unemployed Worker*, 28 March 1931, 5.

¹¹⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 4 February 1933, 2.

¹²⁰ *Workers Unity*, June 1932, 14.

¹²¹ See Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

¹²² *Unemployed Worker*, 4 October 1933, 5.

relief investigation of a widow's "mothers pension" conducted by a woman and "a thing in pants" insinuated that the widow was promiscuous. The mother of two went into "hysterics." Even after a medical examination proving her chastity the pension board continued to side with investigators, leading the UCs to ask: "We wonder what kind of cesspools they have for minds."¹²³

Leading female UC activists linked economic and gender inequalities to the class struggle. One UC woman summed up the use value of women in a liberal capitalist Canada: "Your only purpose in life is to produce children as commodities for capital to exploit, or as cannon fodder for bosses' wars."¹²⁴ Flora Hutton was vehement in her attack on liberal-initiated working class women clubs who "say they are going to train them [poor young women], give them a vocation and fit them to take their positions as the future 'Mothers of Canada.' To that we working class women answer 'it's the old, old story. We are wise to it.'"¹²⁵ Not all were wise; as female UC activists encouraged neighbours to understand poverty as a systemic not personal problem they were exasperated by those whose strong religious commitments, beliefs in female inferiority and magazine racks filled with the liberal *Maclean's*, blinded them to gender and economic inequalities.¹²⁶

What demands encouraged women to join the UCs? Frequently women organized around traditional roles in the home economy.¹²⁷ One mother of four raised hell in the

¹²³ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 November 1933, 7.

¹²⁴ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 February 1933, 6.

¹²⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 25 October 1933, 3.

¹²⁶ *Worker*, 6 June 1931, 3.

¹²⁷ The *Unemployed Worker* officially encouraged women press for domestic demands. As relief officers complained of an unemployed housewives' lack of thrift and introduced scrip, the *Unemployed Worker* stressed how their "womenfolk" knew their "likes and dislikes" and could always stretch "meager wages" before unemployment – why would "the capitalist class" and relief officers question the thriftiness of their wives and mothers now? *Unemployed Worker*, 14 March 1934, 8.

relief office demanding “nutritious food for my children.” The relief officer accused her of poor fiscal planning at home. She responded: “I asked him to divide \$4.77 by 6 then take the 79 cents and try to keep his well fed carcass for 2 weeks in groceries. I refused to be put off by the usual soft soap . . . He then informed me that my scrip would be raised.”¹²⁸

UCs offered the option of collective struggle. UC women took up the case of an “invalid mother” and her two daughters after the eldest hurled a typewriter at the relief officer Bone. “Still this did not move stone hearted Bone.” The women found the family at home, met with city council and after a three hour wait won a measly \$1.00 in relief. In council chambers the female posse gave the police a “razzberry.”¹²⁹ In January 1933 65 women in the Burnaby UC requested open scrip for local department stores. When the commissioner refused, the delegation advocated for three young mothers in need of milk for their babies; milk was delivered with the assurance, “where there were babies, they would not go without milk.”¹³⁰

Women played a dominant role in medical grievances. Aside from trumpeting CPC calls for universal medical care, UC activists fought the closures of baby clinics and other health services throughout the Depression.¹³¹ After an emergency ward was closed the UCs successfully lobbied to have it re-opened. Medical professionals often avoided unemployed patients who could not pay for treatment: one woman, suffering from appendicitis had to call two doctors before one came to her aid.¹³² Half a year later, after

¹²⁸ *Unemployed Worker*, 5 April 1933, 5.

¹²⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 4 October 1933, 5; *Unemployed Worker*, 13 December 1933, 5.

¹³⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 4 February 1933, 7.

¹³¹ *Unemployed Worker*, 22 March 1933, 7.

¹³² *Unemployed Worker*, 22 March 1933, 7. For a detailed history of women and Vancouver’s medical institutions and early health insurance see Veronica Strong-Boag and Kathryn McPherson, “The Confinement of women: Childbirth and Hospitalization in Vancouver, 1919-1939,” *BC Studies* 69-70

several UC protests, the provincial government promised all citizens access to a family doctor. During relief investigations, women reported being forced to “strip naked for medical inspection in a barbarous and cruel, humiliating manner.” Collective UC actions demanded a trained female nurse to attend all subsequent searches and won.¹³³

In October 1933 the North Fraser Branch of the CPC Women’s Labor League reported that medical authorities were advising expectant mothers on relief to conduct their own home births. “We are all aware that in most homes of the relief recipients there are no accommodations to receive the stork,” reported the *Unemployed Worker*. One mother gave birth in an unsanitary home without clothes to wrap the baby. Another woman discovered vacant beds in the hospital maternity ward leading her to state: “Why should not the workers wives benefit by modern medical equipment? Are we going to be forced backward whilst the capitalist blood suckers enjoy every luxury we made possible?”¹³⁴ A month later the city relief department cited miscommunication with medical officials; all relief recipients could choose to call either a family doctor or attend the maternity ward to deliver their children.¹³⁵

From the cradle to primary school to an unstable job market, Depression-era working class youth had few opportunities. The UCs were determined to involve youth by raising their concerns to the state and educational authorities. The *Unemployed Worker* argued that single youth cannot “live like mosquitoes,” feeding off the charities of a capitalist host and drifting without attachments. Instead their demands ought to be

(Spring-Summer 1986), 142-174; and Margaret W. Andrews, “The Course of Medical Opinion on State Health Insurance in British Columbia, 1919-1939,” *Histoire Sociale* 16:31 (1983), 131-143.

¹³³ *Unemployed Worker*, 27 December 1933, 4.

¹³⁴ *Unemployed Worker*, 18 October 1933, 6.

¹³⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 November 1933, 8.

popularized under the umbrella of the unemployed movement.¹³⁶ Linking the UCs to the Young Communist League, Children's Clubs and Women's groups led to a broadening of the CPC beyond its male dominated leadership and its union focus on male concentrated industry.

Burnaby UCs called for a 100 percent increase in children's relief with the slogans, "How would you like to live on a three cent meal?" and, "Which shall it be? Children's needs or bondholders' greed."¹³⁷ A year later Burnaby UCs initiated an affiliated group, the Child Welfare League to lobby to raise children's relief by a dollar. Marching on city council in March 1934 the group was quickly shut down. None of the aldermen spoke: "'it was not on the agenda' was the infamous excuse."¹³⁸

The UCs also organized children around school demands. In 1932 the Renfrew UC and children marched to city hall to demand clothes and shoes; promised 50 pairs of shoes when 400 were necessary, the delegation was thrown out by Mayor Taylor. Activists threatened a school strike. According to the *Worker*, "committees of youth and children are being set up in the schools and formulating methods of gaining their demands."¹³⁹ In 1933 the Windermere Children's Committee protested school principals who were billing children for school supplies, and purportedly using corporal punishment to those who failed to pay.¹⁴⁰ In North Vancouver transportation to and from Keith Lynn School was an issue in the fall of 1933. According to the provincial school act, 50 percent of transportation costs of students living three miles from school were the burden of the province. A delegation won transportation costs for all children under eight: "The others

¹³⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 4 February 1933, 2.

¹³⁷ *Worker*, 2 September 1933, 5.

¹³⁸ *Unemployed Worker*, 28 March 1934, 1.

¹³⁹ *Worker*, 22 October 1932, 6.

¹⁴⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 14 June 1933, 6.

still have to walk but the fight is still on.”¹⁴¹ A UC-CPC affiliate, the Pioneers of Vancouver, collected 600 names for a petition demanding school supplies. After threatening the principal of Laura Secord and Begbie schools with a school strike, the school supplies were granted to the students.¹⁴²

To entice youth away from liberal social clubs to the UCs and other CPC affiliations, communist activists organized socials, dances and sports teams.¹⁴³ In 1933 and 1934 the UCs organized a summer camp for children. Canvassing supporters, organizers raised \$620.82 in the first year. More than 150 children, 30 adults and youth attended camp for three weeks.¹⁴⁴ The camp mixed Communist education with outdoor activities and games. Unemployed summer camps, and youth clubs were designed to encourage an early sense of class struggle in lieu of the ideological messages received in Boy Scouts, Girl Guides and other pro-capitalist youth groups.

Like women, youth and children were called to attend demonstrations to increase numbers, discourage police attacks and garner public sympathy.¹⁴⁵ At the Hunger March in 1933 it was estimated that 40 percent of the protestors were youth.¹⁴⁶ However, CPC activists lamented ephemeral youth involvement: “An attempt is being made to draw in new forces into the youth committees . . . which have showed tendencies to fall away.”¹⁴⁷

It was just as difficult for the UCs to encourage ethnic involvement in their collective protests. However, as Gillian Creese has documented, the CPC broke down traditional racial barriers and exploitation between B.C.’s Asian workers and white rank

¹⁴¹ *Unemployed Worker*, 22 November 1933, 12.

¹⁴² *Unemployed Worker*, 14 March 1934, 5.

¹⁴³ *Unemployed Worker*, 28 March 1931, 5.

¹⁴⁴ A picnic with ice cream, prizes and sports was held in Vancouver for 175 children unable to attend. See *Unemployed Worker*, 27 September 1933, 12.

¹⁴⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 19 December 1931, 1.

¹⁴⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 12 April 1933, 7.

¹⁴⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 22 March 1933, 11.

and file: "Asians were not only accepted as members, they were actively recruited as equals, and issues specific to Asian workers were placed on the labour agenda during conflicts."¹⁴⁸ In the unemployed movement, the Chinese initiated the Chinese Unemployed Workers' Protective Association (CUWPA) which regularly joined forces with the UCs and CPC affiliated protests.¹⁴⁹ The *Unemployed Worker* remained true to the CPC's insistence that the class struggle outweighed ethnic differences:

Only by mass organization of all workers willing to fight for the right to live, regardless of their political opinion, religion, race, creed, or colour, can we overcome the misery, starvation, inhuman conditions and outrageous terror with which we are confronted to-day. We all have a common issue to fight for, the right to live!¹⁵⁰

In the spring of 1933 a False Creek UC was organized composed of Japanese sawmill workers and their families.¹⁵¹ Bob Lealess "behooved every worker to support" the Japanese, and not conflate Japan's imperial policies with the struggles of poor Japanese to find employment in Canada.¹⁵² In November 1933 the waterfront south UC took the case of a Chinese woman with five children to the relief office to demand fuel.¹⁵³ That same month 60 unemployed Chinese people organized by Bob Lealess marched from Chinatown to the city relief office to demand nondiscriminatory relief.¹⁵⁴ Relief officer Bone directed them to the charitable Good Shepherd Mission run by Miss Hallaby, an English missionary. Arriving at the mission, Hallaby, a "heartless creature," called all

¹⁴⁸ Gillian Creese, "Exclusion or Solidarity? Vancouver Workers Confront the 'Oriental Problem,'" *BC Studies* 80 (Winter 1988/89), 44. Creese argues that prior to the 1930s and the adoption of more pan-socialist politics, white workers, labour unions and councils, drawing on arguments of labour competition and racist "othering" failed to view Asians as anything but "foreigners" who were undeserving of the same rights and privileges as white British Columbians.

¹⁴⁹ Creese, "Exclusion or Solidarity?" 44-45.

¹⁵⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 31 September 1931, 3.

¹⁵¹ *Unemployed Worker*, 12 April 1933, 7.

¹⁵² *Unemployed Worker*, 12 April 1933, 7.

¹⁵³ *Unemployed Worker*, 8 November 1933, 10.

¹⁵⁴ At the time the Chinese frequently received vouchers worth only third of their white unemployed counterparts. See Wade, *Houses for All*, 48.

Chinese gambling addicts, and was accused of xenophobia by the protestors. Mobilizing more Chinese unemployed, Lealess led marchers to city hall where Taylor refused to hear them speak. "It is not a question of talking; it is a question of feeding hungry people," replied Lealess. The mayor promised Chinese workers the same relief as the rest of Vancouver's citizens. The police evicted the delegation. The next day the Chinese workers returned to the relief office to force Bone to follow the promise of city council. As they passed the Good Shepherd Mission, protestors noticed that Hallaby had hired "two white thugs, their hands covered with handkerchiefs [sic] to hide their knuckle-dusters"¹⁵⁵ to protect herself from the Chinese unemployed horde. Economic oppression may have been universal but ethnic divisions were not overcome in the UCs. CPC activists were only marginally successful in including Vancouver's Asian population in the fight for the "right to live."

By April 1934 the UCs were losing steam. Block committees fell from their height of 120 to 20; membership fell from 2,300 to 300.¹⁵⁶ Local activists complained of "cumbersome" bureaucracy and excessive meetings.¹⁵⁷ Others argued that too few educational events, lack of leadership and "not enough agitation" were the leading causes of UC decline.¹⁵⁸ Citing frustrations with CPC united front electoral policies, former Burnaby UC members disbanded and created the Burnaby Worker's Association. The new group grew from 100 to 500 members in three weeks.¹⁵⁹ The CPC, with its leadership released in the spring of 1934, trumpeted a renewed commitment to centralized bureaucracy and expanding their resistance in Bennett's relief camps.

¹⁵⁵ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 November 1933, 3.

¹⁵⁶ *Unemployed Worker*, 25 April 1934, 6.

¹⁵⁷ *Unemployed Worker*, 25 April 1934, 6.

¹⁵⁸ *Unemployed Worker*, 25 April 1934, 6.

¹⁵⁹ *Unemployed Worker*, 15 June 1934, 3.

Besides, the autonomy of the UCs was not, according to the CPC, successful in creating a mass movement: "In the past several [UCs] have attempted to solve their own problems in their own way. The methods of work were not co-ordinated along any particular line, the resulting division of forces only tending to weaken the power of the unemployed as a whole."¹⁶⁰ CPC headquarters decided provincial organizations were more tactically sound than community activism, especially in the fight for social insurance.¹⁶¹ On 19 August 1934 a conference held in Burnaby replaced the UCs with B.C. Workers' Councils. With the new CPC organization direct actions against municipal relief authorities plummeted, and CPC leadership, not the unemployed, determined the immediate needs of impoverished Canadians.

In his exhaustive study of the WUL, John Manley suggests that dissatisfied single unemployed men joined CPC organizations "not in most cases because they themselves were communists in an ideological sense, but because it appeared to be the most effective leadership available."¹⁶² Not just single unemployed men but poor, frustrated families joined CPC-affiliated unemployed councils between 1932 and 1934. Their experiences imply communist leadership was not always beneficial. UC activists were disadvantaged by excessive theoretical debates, changing tactical positions and were suspicious of Soviet protocols. Caught within the confines of an illegal party, unemployed councils faced powerful coercive measures of the state including deportations, arrests, raids and demonstration bans. As a largely Euro-Canadian male-dominated organization, the CPC hindered the involvement of women, children and ethnic minorities. So why did

¹⁶⁰ *Unemployed Worker*, 19 September 1934, 1.

¹⁶¹ *Unemployed Worker*, 5 September 1934, 4.

¹⁶² Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class During the Depression: The Workers Unity League 1930-1936," 525.

antipoverty activists and a minority of poor people consider the CPC the “most effective leadership available?”

Unemployed Council CPC activists were effective because they explicitly accredited the knowledge, strength and agency of poor people as the nascent foundation for counterhegemonic resistance. CPC activists forged a community in direct action by melting down CPC theoretical sectarianism and molding autonomous local councils in the coals of poor people’s experiences. By accepting direction from the poor based on their smallest needs, antipoverty activists brought ideologically diverse poor people together to create new forms of direct action in demonstrations against local relief administrations, political leaders, landlords and petty capitalists. UC activists’ commitments to involving women and children, and to a limited extent, ethnic minorities, conferred greater participation by the socially marginalized than many other CPC affiliate organizations. Avoiding dogma, antipoverty activists believed poor people would adopt and refine a leftist critique of the state and capital via their engagement in direct actions. Nonetheless, although activists, not theoreticians, UC leaders expounded a critique of state relief, mainstream media, business and charitable institutions to encourage poor people to identify apparatuses of liberal capitalism as the source of their poverty. Thus, by their deeds Vancouver’s antipoverty activists did not simply win socio-economic gains, they were also actively and creatively engaged in a project of “living otherwise.”

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Chapter Two: Antipoverty Activism in an Age of Affluence:
Vancouver, 1949-1962.

In *The Affluent Society* (1958) the Canadian-born economist John Kenneth Galbraith proclaimed that increased production and Keynesian social policy had reduced poverty in postwar society from the problem of a majority to that of a minority.¹ According to Galbraith, rational “production has become the solvent of the tensions once associated with inequality, and it has become the indispensable remedy for the discomforts, anxieties, and privations associated with economic insecurity.”² By entrusting an enlightened liberal political leadership to direct production towards the mitigation of inequality Galbraith hoped to overcome the distribution problems of private enterprise. “We have yet to see that not the total of resources but their studied and rational use is the key to achievement.”³ As Galbraith and a recovered liberal order tell it, the dark days of the Depression had come and gone, liberal capitalism had corrected its most egregious flaws and citizens of the Western World could now get jobs, load up their shopping carts and marvel at the beauty and complexity of the age of affluence.

Canadian academics have thus far overlooked the post-war era as a site of poor people’s resistance. Yet poor people did take direct action measures and in doing so, exposed some of the elitist and inequitable results of liberal capitalism’s age of affluence. While a majority of Canadians frolicked in the fields of postwar consumption and economic prosperity, poverty continued and antipoverty activists struggled to amplify the voices of the poor. Vancouver’s civil disobedient were still influenced by memories of Depression-era organizing within labour councils, trade unions and the CPC. The 1930s

¹ John Kenneth Galbraith, *Affluent Society* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1958), 323.

² Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, 119.

³ Galbraith, *Affluent Society*, 352.

antipoverty activist's demand for a responsible government capable of solving economic disparity was carried over to critique the post-war welfare state. By continuing within this paradigm, mid-century antipoverty activists risked having their arguments co-opted by a strengthened liberal capitalist hegemony. Activists were further curtailed by their inability to move beyond issues of male unemployment to a more gendered and cultural analysis of poverty.

During the first post-war financial crisis in 1949-1950, activists shared with the unemployed councils of the 1930s a connection with the CPC. By the second recession in 1957-1962, McCarthy-tainted labour and political leaders attempted to direct antipöverty activism towards a more liberal and social democratic agenda. The bickering over ideology and tactics by antipoverty activists' putative allies in organized labour, the CPC and left-wing parties resulted in a fragmented and weakened poor people's movement. However, despite the incapacitating effect of token support from organized labour and its state-oriented agenda, unemployed activists did engage in some direct action – exposing the divide between subsidiarity-inspired forms of direct action and the elitist parliamentary-democratic principles of the left's dominant social democratic bureaucrats.

How had the hegemonic battleground of Vancouver's antipoverty activists changed since the early years of the Depression? During the 1950s "international free trade was the new capitalist orthodoxy."⁴ In B.C. the resource industry was booming and the service and tourist sector announced unprecedented growth. In the age of affluence labour unions and councils and social democrats "envisioned social change coming gradually, through breakthroughs in collective bargaining and through progressive

⁴ Craig Heron, *The Canadian Labour Movement: A Short History*, 2nd edition (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company Ltd., 1996), 85.

legislation passed by social democratic governments.”⁵ In the immediate post-war years the Canadian government enacted social and labour legislation to pacify and co-opt the demands of poor people, leftist activists and unions. According to Craig Heron, the liberal compromise neutralized the possibilities of resistance as the working class’ “traditional tools of direct action and solidarity were severely restricted or taken away.”⁶ In addition, Cold War actions equated militant dissent with Communism and led to the ousting of reds from labour unions and councils and curtailed the potential of extra-parliamentary resistance.

In the 1940s Mackenzie King’s Liberals attempted to stem the growing support of the CCF by introducing federal unemployment insurance, family allowances and post-war reconstruction planning.⁷ King’s government’s reactionary Keynesianism was a form of social control that minimized market-place interference and upheld the liberal individualist work ethic. As Jill Wade has recorded, CCF and communist direct actions bolstered the CCF’s parliamentary pressure and contributed to the Liberal’s partial capitulation. Resistance to evictions in 1945 led to the occupation of the old Hotel Vancouver by CCFers, Communists and war veterans and forced the federal government to turn the hotel into social housing and build new low-income housing units.⁸

Louis St. Laurent was elected Liberal prime minister in late 1948. St. Laurent, like King, was a fiscal conservative who insisted that national security costs during the

⁵ Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 90.

⁶ Heron insists the 1950s leftist strategy was not a wholesale “sell-out” as “the labour movement probably lacked the power to present a more potent challenge to the deeply entrenched capitalist resistance, and its leaders grasped at the restricted recognition offered by the state.” But if direct action is seen not so much as a tool to wrest popular support but as a tactic to fight and politicize the day-to-day struggles of the indigent, labour leaders did indeed fail to exercise the power that the state could not wholly destroy: civil disobedience. See, Heron, *Canadian Labour Movement*, 82.

⁷ Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2006), 125.

⁸ Wade, *Housing For All*, 140.

cold war trumped social reform spending.⁹ During his almost ten year tenure Laurent refused to raise pension rates and waited until his final year in office to confront provincial demands for support of their medical assistance programs.¹⁰ The election of Conservative John Diefenbaker in 1957 did not alter the government's reluctance to improve its social policies. Instead, Diefenbaker issued the Gill Report that criticized the "liberal" welfare system on an actuarial basis, insisting that assistance had strayed from its minimal insurance principles.¹¹

W.A.C. Bennett, a Tory renegade, brought the Social Credit party to power in B.C. in 1952. Bennett was a capitalist populist who distrusted big business and sided with the petit bourgeois: " 'It is the free enterpriser's right to make money, and it's his right to go broke.'"¹² Upon taking office, the Social Credit attacked B.C. hospital insurance and replaced it with a voluntary system financed on a "pay-as-you-go basis."¹³ A free-enterpriser, Bennett denounced socialism and communism and frequently butted heads with the CCF as official opposition. For the duration of the 1950s Social Credit sought to stimulate the economy by assisting the small free enterpriser at the expense of B.C.'s poor people.

In 1949 the LPP/CPC still believed revolution immanent but challenged the Liberal Louis St. Laurent government under the reformist aims of "a good home, a steady

⁹ Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada*, 141.

¹⁰ Federal Medicare would not, however, be initiated until 1968. Under the plan, the federal government agreed to bear 50 percent of the costs of each provinces' medical insurance plan.

¹¹ Georges Campeau, *From UI to EI: Waging War on the Welfare State*, translated by Richard Howard (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2005), 78.

¹² David J. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett and the Rise of British Columbia* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 1983), 287. For information on Social Credit's ideology of freedom, individual responsibility and distrust of big business and big labour see, Leonard Kuffert, "Reckoning with the Machine: The British Columbia Social Credit Movement as Social Criticism, 1932-1952," *BC Studies* 124 (Winter 1999/2000), 9-39. For information on Bennett's particular petit bourgeois populism see Gordon Hak, "Populism and the 1952 Social Credit Breakthrough in British Columbia," *Canadian Historical Review* 85:2 (2004), 277-296.

¹³ Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett*, 159.

job and trade with all the world.”¹⁴ A cold and blustery winter, combined with a recession in 1949-50, provoked unemployed Communist activists to organize their brethren. When the federal finance minister, Douglas Abbott, lifted rental controls permitting rents to increase by 20-25 percent, Communists brought delegations of unemployed to Ottawa, provincial legislatures and city councils across Canada to protest the “St. Low Rent” government.¹⁵ In Vancouver’s poor east-end neighbourhoods Fred Collins started the East End Tenants Defence Committee to “fight to hold the line on rents.”¹⁶

Collins and William Gee also created the Unemployed Action Committee (UAC) in November 1949.¹⁷ The UAC, as their name suggests, was anxious to move away from tedious reports on unemployment and instead build a community based on direct action. Within a month the UAC collected 1,500 signatures of support and were swamped by activists at their Pender auditorium headquarters. In keeping with the Communist penchant for political cells, various committees were formed. By January the dues paying membership was 200 strong.¹⁸

¹⁴ “LPP seeks action on jobs, home, trade” *Pacific Tribune*, 16 September 1949, 1. Following World War Two, the CPC reorganized under the new guise, the Labour-Progressive Party (LPP)

¹⁵ “Rent boost arouses nation-wide protest,” *Pacific Tribune*, 11 November 1949, 1. For example, a “Rent Train” organized by the Quebec federation of tenants, brought 225 delegates to Ottawa. Jean Parent, a young Scottish war bride, slapped six war service medals in front of Finance Minister Abbott and cried, “I can’t afford my present rent and if they try to put up the rent, I’ll not pay it, and I’ll not move, do you hear me, Mr. Abbott, I’ll not move!” See *Pacific Tribune*, 23 December 1949, 6.

¹⁶ *Pacific Tribune*, 2 December 1949, 1. Collins was a highly regarded Communist-organizer in Toronto during the Depression and a former member of the Canadian Seamen’s Union and the Fur Traders Union.

¹⁷ William Gee gained further notoriety in 1954 after his union, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, local 213, ousted Gee for his sympathies towards the LPP. Gee later sued the union.

¹⁸ “Jobless plan mass lobby to legislature,” *Pacific Tribune*, 27 January 1950, 1. Membership required an initiation fee of 25 cents and 10-cent dues fees per month. See, “1500 city jobless pledge support to organization,” *Pacific Tribune*, 30 December 1949, 1.

On 19 January 1950 200 unemployed marched to city hall, bellowing “We want jobs, not breadlines,” “No more Dole,” and “Down with Soup Kitchens.”¹⁹ The protestors demanded Mayor Charles Thompson provide funds for the destitute and plead for relief from Ottawa. Afterwards the UAC distributed a petition collecting 50,000 signatures in support of a public works program and cash assistance through unemployment insurance.²⁰ In addition they attacked the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Commission for failing to have enough staff to process claims in the promised “nine day gap.”²¹ “This demonstration has done more to focus public attention on the unemployment situation here than any previous action,” said William Gee, to a cheering crowd.²² A few weeks later Gee found work and left Collins to lead the UAC.

On 20 February 1950 Collins and 80 unemployed men, women and children marched to city hall and threatened a “sit-down strike.” The UAC agreed to back down on the condition that city council phone Ottawa to seek a special grant for direct monetary relief and provide aid for the city’s indigent. According to the *Vancouver Sun*, “the threat of disorder was more apparent than” during the group’s previous visit. The city social services administrator, J.I. Chambers, defended the city’s efforts, noting the social services department doled out \$7,000 more to Vancouver’s poor than in 1949.²³ Not enough, said the activists. For those not covered by national UI, the city ought to fork over \$20 per week for married (\$15 for single) jobless and an additional \$2.50 for each

¹⁹ “Unemployed march in Vancouver” *Victoria Times*, 20 January 1950, 3; “Relief Request in Ottawa,” *News-Herald* 20 January 1950, 1. The march fell on the heels of an earlier city hall demonstration in December 1949. See “Best Christmas box - jobs at good wages,” *Pacific Tribune*, 23 December 1949, 1, 7.

²⁰ *Vancouver Province*, 27 January 1950, 8.

²¹ “Families go hungry in red tape tangle,” *Pacific Tribune*, 3 February 1950 1, 6.

²² “Jobless plan mass lobby to legislature,” *Pacific Tribune*, 27 January 1950, 1.

²³ *Vancouver Sun*, 20 February 1950, 6.

child. Alderman Alex Fisher “threw up his hands in horror . . . and squeaked that the city ‘hasn’t got the money.’”²⁴

City council contacted Ottawa and expressed their anxiety: “We can see no reason to believe that the unemployed themselves, thus ignored, and in many cases destitute, will not hesitate to take drastic action to bring attention to their problem.” The city was told unemployment in Vancouver had already peaked and a “special grant” would not be provided.²⁵ Two days later the unemployed returned to hear St. Laurent’s dismissal and that the city found their municipal relief rate “preposterous:” “It would cost the city millions . . . we have not the power to spend that kind of money, even if we had it,” said Mayor Thompson. “You won’t do anything because you do not want to do anything,” replied Collins.²⁶ After “catcalls and derisive attacks on council” two “destitute cases” were referred to the social services department.²⁷

Dubbed “Operation Porkchops,” the UAC also lit coals under Liberal Byron “Boss” Johnson’s provincial government. Funded by the LPP, 200 activists (including at least 20 women) ranging in age from their early 20s to mid 50s converged on Victoria on 8 May 1950.²⁸ Twenty delegates met with Premier Bryon Johnson and cabinet. Their demands included the implementation of the 1945 “postwar rehabilitation plan” and the creation of civic public works projects.²⁹ Jackie Robson asked about jobs for women and was pointed to the “domestic service” while another minister proposed the unemployed

²⁴ “Unemployed demand cash relief for destitute,” *Pacific Tribune*, 24 February 1950, 1.

²⁵ Vancouver City Archives (hereafter VCA), Mayor’s Office, Series 483 , 34-f-3, file 4, Correspondence with Ottawa regarding the demands of the Unemployed Action Committee, December 1949-February 1952.

²⁶ “Unemployed demand cash relief for destitute,” *Pacific Tribune*, 24 February 1950, 1.

²⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, 22 February 1950, 2.

²⁸ *Daily Times*, 8 March 1950, 7; *News Herald*, 28 April 1950, 8.

²⁹ “Jobless trek to Victoria ‘operation porkchops’ support sendoff rally,” *Pacific Tribune*, 3 March 1950, 1.

should leave the cities and “go north or into the Interior.”³⁰ “Boss” Johnson deferred responsibility and advised the UAC to lobby the federal government instead. Collins followed Premier Johnson’s suggestion and was ousted from the House of Commons in Ottawa two months later for “causing a disturbance” after attending the first National Convention of Unemployed Organizations. The convention did not have an anniversary, signaling the end of official LPP/CPC unemployed organizations.

Fear of “Stalinist” agitators like Collins and Gee led the president of the Canadian Congress of Labour (CCL), A. R. Mosher, to propose a national union for the jobless. The dues paying membership, Mosher stated, would mobilize unemployed union men but would eventually be the largest union in Canada, including every unemployed citizen with one club house exception: No Communists Allowed.³¹ The CCL unemployed union aimed to find work for members and “failing that, a living allowance greater than the present ‘inadequate’ unemployment insurance.”³² Mosher intended to install a leadership representing the poor without resorting to direct action: “Our purpose is to prevent the recurrence of the hungry 30s when thousands of unemployed converged on Ottawa and created riots and breadlines across the country. We are interested in preventing the jobless being used as a political football.”³³ In actuality, Mosher’s proposal removed the unemployed from the political playing field, demoting them from quarterbacks to towel boys.

Not all antipoverty activists were enamoured with Mosher’s anti-CPC and anti-direct action game plans. Activist quarterbacks tussled in the fledgling Victoria

³⁰ “Jobless see cabinet, say organization will compel gov’t action.,” *Pacific Tribune*, 10 March 1950, 1,6.

³¹ “C.C.L. Sets up Jobless Union” *Daily Colonist*, 8 February 1950, 5.

³² *Daily Colonist*, 1 February 1950, 2.

³³ *News Herald*, 20 January 1950, 1.

Unemployed Association (VUA) over the politics of poor people's protests. M.H. Schop, an unemployed butcher, Leslie Holmes and S.C. Pace were alarmed at an inaugural VUA meeting by the number of "reds" in the crowd of 40. Nevertheless Schop was elected head of the association.³⁴ Three days later, citing an ideological rift, Schop and companions abandoned the VUA to create a new unemployment union under the auspices of the CCL. Schop told the press, "We regard Communists as traitors engaged in a conspiracy to undermine the rightful organization of the unemployed. Their chief object seems to be to subordinate the national interest to the interest of the Soviet party line."³⁵ Meanwhile Communist activists felt that "there is no room in any unemployed group for discrimination on grounds of political, religious, racial or trade union affiliations."³⁶ Anti-communist organizers also disagreed tactically with their red counterparts. Schop denounced the marches and city hall occupations by the Vancouver UAC: "These forms of mob hysteria don't do you any good," said Schop.³⁷

As Schop rejected direct action, in Vancouver the VDTLC and the CCL endorsed by 78-7 a national unemployed union. Members would pay 25-cent monthly dues with half saved for local administration. The national committee comprised of five appointees by the CCL, two appointees from the VDTLC and three elected union members. Sam Jenkins, a member of the communist-led MBU expressed dissatisfaction with the membership fee and the denial of input from the rank and file: "This is a step too far – saying members haven't enough brains to administer their own funds." Other reds resented that the CCL "set themselves up as appointees over the heads of the

³⁴ *Victoria Times*, 28 January 1950, 15.

³⁵ *Daily Colonist*, 1 February 1950, 2.

³⁶ *Daily Colonist*, 1 February 1950, 2.

³⁷ *Daily Colonist*, 1 February 1950, 2.

unemployed” and predicted that the CCL would be unable to “control political ideologies.” “I’m one Communist who’ll be fighting for the unemployed,” declared Ed Leary.³⁸

Interest in an unemployed organization waned as the economy recovered in 1951. Although the B.C. Federation of Labour (BCFL) discussed an unemployed workers union in 1954 it was not until the “low economic growth” of 1957-61 that poor people once again took to the streets.³⁹ The monthly unemployment rate peaked in B.C. in February 1961 when it reached 17 percent and 78,000 citizens were unemployed.⁴⁰ B.C.’s unemployment rate exceeded the national average, especially in 1958, 1960 and 1961. While the female unemployment rate rose alongside their male counterparts, the masculine-dominated seasonal workforce was among the hardest hit. Similarly, teenagers were twice as likely to be unemployed as middle age workers.⁴¹

On 29 November 1957, the CCL and the VDLC held the largest rally for the unemployed since the dirty thirties.⁴² One thousand of the 25,000 unemployed in Vancouver heard representatives from the political parties and an address by Joe Morris, the vice-president of the CCL. The right-leaning parties were mocked. Conservative MP John Taylor was shouted off the platform after insisting that there were “more men at

³⁸ Jack McCaugherty, “Union for jobless to be formed here,” *Vancouver Province*, 15 February 1950, 6. Ed Leary was a member of the Fur and Leatherworkers union.

³⁹ *Daily Colonist*, 2 February 1954, 10.

⁴⁰ Waldo M. Skillings, *A general review of unemployment in British Columbia during the post-war period* (Government of B.C.: Department of Industrial Development, Trade and Commerce Bureau of Economics and Statistics, October 1971), 19.

⁴¹ Skillings, *general review of unemployment*, 21.

⁴² A similar VDLC rally was held for 1,000 on the 20 March 1958. All four federal election candidates were heckled, including CCF Harold Winch, who was congratulated on his ‘excellent speech as a free-enterpriser.’” Questions dealt with unemployment, automation, pensions and a national health plan. See *Vancouver Sun*, 21 March 1958, 10.

work in Canada than at this time last year.”⁴³ Taylor was shaken: “I’ve never come across anything like that before. Our people in Ottawa are working hard to do something.”⁴⁴

The crowd was more receptive of CCF’s M. Alex Macdonald of Vancouver-Kingsway who advocated immediate construction of the Columbia River project. As Woody Guthrie rambled, “Roll on, Columbia, your power is turning our darkness into dawn,” leftist Canadian nationalists favored the McNaughton Plan for the Columbia river which insisted energy harnessed be for Canadian consumption. According to unemployed organizer Eric Waugh, “we wanted that power here to develop our industry.”⁴⁵ Instead, the Columbia River Treaty would grant the United States the bulk of the energy.⁴⁶ In addition to their nationalist argument, the unemployed pressured the B.C. government to stop stalling on the Columbia contract thereby delaying a flood of employment for the poor.⁴⁷ Waugh’s comments and the crowd’s support for MacDonald harkened back to the 1930s unemployed demands for public works projects. Activists desired government “mega-projects” and job-creation programs; if the capitalist marketplace could not provide jobs, antipoverty activists demanded the government create work.

The rally’s keynote speaker, Joe Morris (CCL) insisted unions fight the “deliberate” use of unemployment to restrain inflation exemplified by Graham Towers, former Governor of the Bank of Canada, who had remarked, “It is a bold government which will say that if the so-called full employment inevitably spells inflation, then

⁴³“Unemployed labor rally shouts down Tory MP,” *Vancouver Sun*, 30 November 1957, 1.

⁴⁴“Crowd boos MP, ‘we want jobs,’” *Province*, 30 November 1957, 25.

⁴⁵ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

⁴⁶ The Columbia treaty was not signed until January 1961. The Social Credit’s position on the Columbia River Treaty was that of compromise. Bennett believed that by exacting revenue from a Columbia power plant by selling power to the U.S., B.C. would be able to afford to construct the Peace River dam to meet the province’s energy consumption. Bennett was so determined in his pursuit of the “Two River Policy” he actually sidestepped his free enterprise principles to purchase B.C. Electric, believing power development would not be achieved if left to private enterprise. Mitchell, *W.A.C. Bennett*, 290, 305.

⁴⁷“Columbia ‘top job aid,’” *Province*, 6 March 1961, 1.

employment will have to be something less than full in the interests of the nation as a whole.”⁴⁸ Morris’s solution to inflationary rhetoric was to lobby all three levels of government to “increase development” and “set in motion those projects that would serve the function of pump-priming business activities and restore pay cheques to our people.” Morris, predictably, did not call for direct action or poor people’s participation, insisting poor people’s voices would be stronger if they let union leadership speak for them.⁴⁹

Not all the unemployed bought into the CCL strategy. In remembrance of the 1938 Vancouver post office occupation, unemployed Communist marine workers, seafarers, ironworkers, electricians and cement masons picketed at the ceremonial opening of the city’s \$13,000,000 newly-constructed post office in March 1958.⁵⁰ The rank and file likely initiated the action as no union leader claimed responsibility.⁵¹ Throughout the year Communist-led union locals sporadically staged unemployed rallies and parades but many wanted to expand their efforts outside of their union enclaves.⁵² As a result the Communist union rank and file also asserted themselves within the VDLC in an effort to create an active, more inclusive unemployed body.

Amazingly, in February 1958, the anti-Communist BCFL secretary George Home assisted in sending 300 unemployed activists to Victoria and “swamped the corridors,” demanding elected officials support a public works program, a moratorium on debt, and

⁴⁸ UBC Special Collections (hereafter UBCSC), Vancouver and District Trades and Labor Council, Series C, 15.34, Address by Joe Morris, vice-president, Canadian Labour Congress and I.W.A. District President at Unemployment Rally, Vancouver, 29 November 1957, 5. Morris, as CCL leader, was instrumental in the ousting of Communists from the CCL.

⁴⁹ UBCSC, Address by Joe Morris, 8.

⁵⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, 15 March 1958, 25.

⁵¹ Jack McCaugherty, “Jobless parade at P.O.” *Province*, 15 March 1958, 1.

⁵² See “City Unemployed rally demands benefits as long as jobless,” *Pacific Tribune*, 11 July 1958, 2; “Jobless Unionists stage parade,” *Pacific Tribune*, 28 November 1958, 1.

increased UI and social assistance.⁵³ Communists who joined the protest demanded W.A.C. Bennett use the 1957 \$41,000,000 budget surplus to support the public works program.⁵⁴ Fragmented along ideological and tactical lines activists came under increasing pressure to unify their efforts.

Three conferences on unemployment gathered together unemployed unionists, government representatives, municipal leaders, church groups and Legions and led the VDLC to create the Lower Mainland Unemployment Committee (LMUC). On 23 January 1959, the LMUC declared: "It is the obligation of all three levels of government to relieve unemployment and unemployment distress. These governments represent all the people, including the unemployed."⁵⁵ The Communist rank and file within the VDLC, especially those belonging to the MBU, were insistent the LMUC be a direct action organization. Sam Jenkins felt the LMUC must

take some direct action . . . we should seriously consider taking our wives and children down to the UIC office and camping there until John Diefenbaker gets moving on this problem . . . the temper of the workers is wearing thin, and they expect some action from the leadership of the labor movement.⁵⁶

CCF, civic and labour council representatives were less enamored with direct action. Harold Thayer, editor of the *CCF News* stated, "labor has never achieved anything by going to the barricades. We must use our heads... we must mobilize support for our proposals in the proper and democratic way."⁵⁷ Sectarian debates initiated not by the

⁵³ "Start works plan labor tells government," *Pacific Tribune*, 21 February 1958, 1,12.

⁵⁴ "Rally demands Bennett start 'crash' public works program," *Pacific Tribune*, 7 February 1958, 11.

⁵⁵ UBCSC, Vancouver and District Trades and Labor Council, (1889-1983) Series C, 15.35, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 13.

⁵⁶ "Labor to press gov't on jobless benefits," *Pacific Tribune*, 8 May 1959, 1,8.

⁵⁷ "Labor to press gov't on jobless benefits," *Pacific Tribune*, 8 May 1959, 1,8. The Vancouver Labor Council in 1959 was split in half by communist and social democratic forces. President Lloyd Whalen, had raised the ire of Communists after he gave himself a \$600 a month paycheck as a "special advisor" and spent more energy raising money for the Red Feather campaign (Vancouver Community Chest) than council business. Whalen was replaced by social democrat Ed Sims of the brewery workers in January

unemployed themselves but by LMUC allies within labour unions and left-wing parties significantly neutralized the possibilities for spontaneous direct actions by poor people.

Nevertheless, for one year LMUC activists tried to move beyond the sectarian debates within the labour movement by leading a February delegation to Victoria and holding numerous protests in front of city hall.⁵⁸ Most of the LMUC's actions were symbolic, although an action committee was sporadically mobilized, setting up pickets in front of homes slated for eviction and collections of chattel debts.⁵⁹ With each direct action came a series of proposals composed by the LMUC's bureaucratic union and local political leadership – proposals that significantly redirected unemployed angst towards local capital stimulus and harkened back to Depression-era demands for more responsible provincial and federal governments.

For Ottawa the LMUC suggested extensions on “exhausted” UI benefits: “The benefit period is being proved inadequate, to the distress of thousands.”⁶⁰ In addition, the LMUC sought federal aid to municipalities; eradication of bond re-financing which increased interest rates and municipal borrowing costs; tax incentives to investors buying municipal bonds at lower interest rates; and an increase to the basic income tax exemption. The LMUC also cautiously commended Ottawa's 1958 Winter Works Program, a five-year plan, which promised municipalities 50 percent of the labour costs for works projects.⁶¹ However the LMUC argued Vancouver was unable to pay for

1960. See, Bert Whyte, “VLC Supports Jenkins: Right-wingers routed,” *Pacific Tribune*, 20 November 1959, 1; ‘Sims new head of VLC: Teamsters hire Whalen,” *Pacific Tribune*, 22 January 1960, 1.

⁵⁸ On city protests see, “1,500 jobless marchers demand work, wages,” *Pacific Tribune*, 24 June 1960, 2.

On provincial protests see, “Labour sets goal on 100,000 names,” *Pacific Tribune*, 6 February 1959, 1.

⁵⁹ “Jobless pickets halt seizure of furniture,” *Pacific Tribune*, 19 February 1960, 8.

⁶⁰ UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 3.

⁶¹ The provincial government chipped in another 25 percent. For seven-months a year, 300 to 400 full-time employees built Vancouver roads and housing, and installed street lights and traffic signals. See,

public works “on a scale large enough to remedy the problem of large-scale unemployment” and the expenses of operation outweighed wage benefits. Municipal project salaries averaged a mere 12 to 25 percent of the cost of the program. Of the 22 public works projects in 1959, only 376 temporary jobs were created despite over 54,000 unplaced applicants.⁶² Thus the LMUC contended a more extensive federal public works program could create “all types of social capital in our country.” However, unless the federal government committed itself to public works “at a level sufficient to create and stimulate employment,” a basic income tax exemption would do more to stimulate the economy by providing greater consumptive power to the low-waged.⁶³

Finally, the LMUC called for Ottawa to address the inability of many poor families to purchase their own homes. The government subsidiary, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation’s (CMHC) palliative loans were beyond the reach of most of Vancouver’s poor. In 1958 the average income of borrowers on small homes was \$5,280 yet more than 80 percent of income tax returns in 1955 were less than \$4,000.⁶⁴

As the LMUC engaged in a dialogue demanding government create capitalist economic incentives, job creation programs, and affordable housing the state found ways to deflect and neutralize their demands. By creating policies such as the CMHC loans, or the Winter Works Program, the government gave the appearance of action while not significantly alleviating poverty. With their demands co-opted, the LMUC was caught up in the quagmire of internal debates, quarrelling over the government’s piecemeal

Vancouver City Archives (hereafter VCA), Wilson Family Fonds, Add mss. 362, 551-E-3, file 3, Letter from Board of admin office to Mayor and Council regarding Winter Works, 1961-62, 15 September 1961.

⁶² UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 7.

⁶³ UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 8.

⁶⁴ UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 10. In the first quarter of 1958 CMHC approved loans for 11,000 small housing units; but in the second quarter the number was reduced to 5,150. For information on Vancouver’s shortage of low cost housing and the palliative measures of the CMHC and its federal predecessors see Wade, *Houses for All*.

offerings. The LMUC's leadership, composed of local politicians and union bureaucrats, took the opportunity to espouse their desires for localized Keynesian initiatives and social democracy. Communist-inspired antipoverty activists could barely be heard over the din and the unemployed were relegated to pawns. A fractured LMUC, with its strength as a direct action organization seriously deflected, only played into the hands of liberal hegemonic power.

The LMUC also had proposals for the provincial government. Between May and October of 1958, unemployed people thrown off UI due to insufficient contributions increased by 276 percent leaving the provincial government responsible, via social assistance, for "unemployed employables."⁶⁵ The LMUC, drawing on a report by the Community Chest, called for social assistance rates to be raised by 21 to 55 percent and the process made "more expeditious."⁶⁶ The LMUC also made a Keynesian critique of the Socreds for privileging debt relief over social spending:

Deficit financing in periods of economic depression is accepted without question by economists and Government financial experts... the Government sector of the economy must increase its share of spending to compensate for the decreases in the private consumption and private investment sectors.⁶⁷

Why then, the LMUC asked, has British Columbia allocated seven percent of its budget to debt reduction when the national average is only three percent?⁶⁸

⁶⁵ UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 17.

⁶⁶ UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 11. In October 1959, 433 people were collecting provincial unemployment assistance with a total dependency of 1,511. Provincial unemployment assistance was funded as follows: 50 percent by the federal government, 40 percent by the province and the remainder by the municipality. Rates by family size (1-8) per month: \$55.50, 86.50, \$104.50, \$122.50, \$140.50; \$158.50; \$176.50; \$194.50. To qualify for assistance the unemployed worker had to prove he/she was not collecting UI, and had less in cash, bonds, or liquid assets, than the amount of assistance drawn. If a family was collecting UI and the amount was less than what would be received under provincial unemployment assistance they could request a top-up.

⁶⁷ UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 12.

⁶⁸ UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 11.

At the municipal level, the LMUC encouraged the adoption of the Winter Works program despite its failings. Municipalities should look for revenue earning projects such as “bus and truck terminals, shopping centers, land development, private airports, parking facilities, etc.” Accordingly, if the municipalities “publicize [their] actions to gain the whole-hearted support of [their] constituents” they might be successful in winning some of the demands tabled by the LMUC.⁶⁹ Calls for municipal capitalist investment and greater municipal funding are reflective of the LMUC’s hierarchical structuring – commerce-savvy local politicians and union leaders made self-interested demands that were abstract and disconnected from poor people’s daily needs and struggles.⁷⁰

In October 1960 the LMUC’s name changed to the B.C. Federation of Unemployed (BCFU) although it remained an affiliate to the VDTLC and BCFL.⁷¹ The BCFU was initiated with a 19-member executive council, consisting of 14 labour officials and five unemployed unionists. This time, in addition to the executive, an elected Vancouver and District Unemployed Council (VDUC) composed of rank and file unemployed was established.⁷² Once again it was the Communist influence that insisted on escalating direct action. In the *Pacific Tribune*, an editorialist said the unemployed had heard enough of the causes and statistics of poverty, thus “something more than polite talk by ‘hat-in-hand’ delegations is required to compel Ottawa and Victoria to act . . . a million jobless should mean ‘take off the gloves.’”⁷³

⁶⁹ UBCSC, Discussion on Unemployment in the Lower Mainland, 23 January 1959, 15.

⁷⁰ A second conference of the LMUC on 3 April 1959, with 83 delegates in attendance, continued with another mishmash espousal of Keynesian liberalism, and appeals to social democracy. See, UBCSC, Vancouver and District Trades and Labour Council, Series C, 6.5, Summary and Explanation of Resolutions Unanimously Carried by the Lower Mainland Unemployment Committee, 3 April 1959.

⁷¹ UBCSC, Vancouver and District Trades and Labor Council, Series A, 1962 Minute book, Letter from Eric Waugh to the VDTLC, 6 March 1962, 7.

⁷² “Labor moves to organize unemployed,” *Pacific Tribune*, 7 October 1960, 12.

⁷³ “Action to win jobs,” *Pacific Tribune*, 21 October 1960, 4.

Eric Waugh, unemployed and a member of the Marine and Boilermakers Union, was elected to lead the VDUC. Waugh's memories of Vancouver during the Depression, his commitment to pacifism, and his belief in involving poor people through measures of direct action reinvigorated unemployed involvement in the labour council organization. Born in Port Kells, Eric Waugh's working class mettle was forged in his early teenage years, in Depression era Vancouver. As Arthur "Slim" Evans led the men on the On-to-Ottawa trek, Waugh, 13, was hired as a caddy for Freddy Wood, Vancouver's most distinguished golf champion, at a swish golf course in Coquitlam. Waugh and a handful of other caddies were paid 10 cents per 45-minute lesson. Upset with their wages, the caddies delegated Waugh to pressure Wood to share more of the one dollar rate per customer. Wood barely lifted his eyes above his newspaper, called Waugh "a son of a bitch" and sent him away. Waugh convinced his comrades to strike. The next time there were three or four lessons in a row, the caddies jumped on their bicycles and went down to the river for a swim. Wood responded and billed his customers an extra quarter and raised the caddies' wages to the same. For Waugh it was his "first victory for the working class."⁷⁴

Waugh's father, a compulsive gambler who voted CCF, was not the inspiration of Waugh's first labour agitation: "I used to tell him to his face you are a bloody capitalist without the capital," remembers Waugh. As his father slipped in and out of employment, and was even cut off relief due to his penchant for gambling, the Waugh family of four "went hungry quite a few times but it seemed to be just a way of life to go without eating."⁷⁵ To understand his poverty, Waugh frequently ran across from his home on

⁷⁴ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

⁷⁵ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

Leonard Street, where a future brother-in-law held communist meetings late into the night. In grade seven, “Red Eric” as his working friends later called him, walked out from school to join an unemployed march in downtown Vancouver.

As Hitler moved into Poland, Waugh was part of a gang called the “Bosley Hoodlums.” “Our whole attitude was that it was a capitalist war and we wouldn’t have anything to do with it.”⁷⁶ When revelations of Hiroshima mushroomed, Waugh participated in the Communist “ban the bomb” movement. “If you could do away with greed you can do away with war,” said Waugh.⁷⁷ Waugh worked as a construction worker until 1953 when he left to work as a ship’s rigger and joined the MBU. In 1959, at 38 years old, Waugh was laid-off. His wife’s meager earnings as an office worker were the sole income for a family of six. “I’m sort of a semihousewife because she works,” Waugh told the press at the time.⁷⁸

As chairman of the VDUC, Waugh led delegations, often several hundred strong, to city hall. The city police threatened the activists with tear gas while Mayor Thompson tacitly acknowledged the power of unemployed mass action: “The unemployed organized and with the support of the labor movement were a force strong enough to compel... governments to pass legislation and take action to improve their lot.”⁷⁹ The VDUC staged sit-downs in the Unemployment Insurance Commission offices to protest cuts to UI.⁸⁰ The corporate headquarters of B.C. Electric and B.C. Telephone were also targeted after utilities were cut in unemployed homes. George McMahon, an oil tycoon who

⁷⁶ Later, however, Waugh, fearing a fascist victory, signed up; but by the time he received his medical examination the war was over.

⁷⁷ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

⁷⁸ Bob Porter and Bryce Williams, “NDP supporters admit plot to disrupt Diefenbaker rally,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1962, 2.

⁷⁹ “500 Jobless marchers ask action by city,” *Pacific Tribune*, 10 February 1961, 3.

⁸⁰ “Sitdown at Robson Street unemployment insurance office,” *Pacific Tribune*, 28 April 1961, 1.

promised 10,000 jobs if Bennett was re-elected, found his home besieged with pickets after he failed to deliver work. Demonstrations also accompanied several Liberal, Conservative and corporate conventions.⁸¹ On occasion the VDUC also successfully fought individual cases of eviction.⁸²

Beyond their day-to-day efforts, repeating the provincial marches on legislature that were so common during the 1930s entranced Waugh and the VDUC. By March 1961 Waugh and the BCFU raised enough money to send over 800 unemployed to Victoria to insist Social Credit Premier W.A.C. Bennett take responsibility for unemployment. “Our existence and our continued state of unemployment is testimony to the ignorance, or reluctance, of our government leaders and to the fallibility of the laissez-faire economic jungle you endorse.”⁸³ On the ferry, men reminisced about the 1935 Regina police riot. A few women were present including a woman with a three-month-old child who made the journey while her husband sought work in Vancouver.⁸⁴

Over a thousand unemployed islanders greeted Lower Mainland activists. Together they marched to the legislature. Police cleared the traffic ahead. Placards read “Vessels not Missiles,” and “You told Us it [Depression] wouldn’t/couldn’t happen again, It has.”⁸⁵ Mimeographed labour songs were distributed and guitars and voices broke into “We Will not be Moved,” and a revision of “Roll the Union On” with the new lyrics, “if Mr. Bennett gets in the way, we’ll roll right over him.” CCF auxiliary and

⁸¹ “Unemployed to stage City Hall march on Tuesday,” *Pacific Tribune*, 3 February 1961, 1. On conventions see, “Unemployed hit ‘money for arms not jobless’ policy,” *Pacific Tribune*, 6 October 1961, 3.

⁸² “Jobless win fight for city family,” *Pacific Tribune*, 23 February 1962, 1.

⁸³ *Vancouver Sun*, 6 March 1961, 1.

⁸⁴ *Victoria Daily Times*, 6 March 1961, 2.

⁸⁵ *Victoria Daily Times*, 6 March 1961, 2.

wives of local trade unions laid out refreshments on Douglas Street. Arriving on the legislature lawns the crowd chanted “we want jobs.”

An advanced party comprised of Waugh, Patrick O’Neal (BCFL), and Paddy Neale (VTLC) and 17 other delegates met with political officials and presented a brief. Meanwhile, protestors handed leaflets to officials outside the building and a few hundred took the parade right down the legislature’s halls.

The brief called for deficit financing to pay for a massive program of public works, with an appeal to the state: “We do not appear cap-in-hand, or in any sense humble. We are here to demand the fulfillment of our natural right. We are here to demand that you, in whom has been placed the public trust, do that which is your responsibility and your duty.”⁸⁶ The province shirked its duty, argued the BCFU, when it cut medical assistance to unemployed employables on 18 January 1961.⁸⁷

In the afternoon CCF opposition leader Strachan introduced a motion for a special debate on unemployment. The 75 protestors admitted cheered from the galleys. The motion was defeated 27 to 17. Speaker Lorne Shantz argued unemployment had already been discussed in the current session.⁸⁸ Outside, O’Neal told the crowd they had received a “sympathetic hearing.” Activists had shown their solidarity, but had failed to exact a single concession from the province. Waugh, frustrated by the results, vowed the BCFU would return, and the next time “we will go again and stay there until something is done” even if it takes weeks.⁸⁹ Despite its ineffectiveness, Tom McEwen, editor of the *Pacific*

⁸⁶ *Victoria Daily Times*, 6 March 1961, 1.

⁸⁷ UBCSC, Letter from Eric Waugh to the VDTLC, 7. Canadian power for Canadian use of the Columbia River; a shorter workweek; full unemployment insurance; and the suspension of debts on chattels for the jobless were also promoted in the activist brief.

⁸⁸ “Jobless marchers see debate motion lost” *Victoria Daily Times*, 7 March 1961, 3.

⁸⁹ *Province*, 9 March 1961, 16.

Tribune, was impressed by the diversity of interests involved in the march: many of the trade unions were present while municipal leaders like Nanaimo Mayor Maffia and business interests provided verbal and financial support. However, if the voices of the poor were not chanting alone were they not in jeopardy of being drowned out?⁹⁰

To win the support of Vancouver city council, Waugh took the issue of the reinstatement of medical aid of “unemployed employables” to city hall. The delegation’s brief called for funds to make drugs available without charge to those on social assistance. The brief called the provincial cut a “heartless example of economizing at the expense of the least fortunate members of the community” and presented several cases of medical neglect.⁹¹ As a result of the delegation city hall ordered a report on the medical aid cuts. On 25 July 1961 the city balked at demanding the province reinstate medical coverage, resolving instead to request the province set up a “temporary drug authority” to dispense medication to poverty-stricken families.⁹² The VDUC could count the city as an ally but not if it threatened the health of city hall bank statements.

Polite talk continued between the Vancouver municipality and the VDUC after activists presented another brief with 11 recommendations to reduce unemployment. The *Vancouver Sun*, former CCFer and Mayor A. Thomas Alsbury and Council were all impressed with the decorum of Waugh and his delegation. The *Vancouver Sun* wrote,

Twenty-five years have made a dramatic difference in the tactics and approach of worried unemployed seeking government action . . . Instead of the old-time open-

⁹⁰ Tom McEwan, “2,000 jobless at Victoria demand, ‘We Want Work,’” *Pacific Tribune*, 10 March 1961, 1.

⁹¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 31 May 1961, 25; For the full brief see VCA, Social Service Department, Series 450, 1-6-C-6 file 5, In the Matter of Cutting off Medical Assistance to Unemployed Employables by the B.C. Provincial Government, 30 May 1961.

⁹² VCA, Social Service Department, Series 450, 1-6-C-6 file 5, Letter from city clerk to T.T. Hill, Social Service Administrator, 12 July 1961.

air rallies and marches, militantly denouncing capital and profits, they presented a well researched brief.⁹³

According to Waugh, Mayor Alsbury was not concerned about the quality of their demands but that it was presented by a delegation. After one protest, Alsbury told Waugh “just phone me and I’ll arrange for an appointment.” “He didn’t want me to come with a goddamn crew. But I’d bring a crew every time,” says Waugh.⁹⁴

The same 11-point brief followed Waugh and the BCFU as they converged on Victoria on 21 February 1962. The demands included a 20 percent increase in social assistance; restoration of medical cards; extension of UI benefits and winter works programs; a moratorium on mortgage foreclosures; 35 hour work week; creation of Canadian merchant marine; open trade with all countries; capital investment in natural resources; and full development of the Columbia river for Canadians. Three hundred and twenty unemployed left in eight chartered buses from Vancouver to join 200 islanders.⁹⁵ At least 50 women were present waving placards, “we demand a merchant marine,” “work, not war,” “we want beef not bull.” A vocal quartet sang, “Bennett is a phony, he should be removed.”⁹⁶

The *Pacific Tribune* voiced its disgust when “in a callous action unprecedented for many years, Premier Bennett and the Socred cabinet Wednesday refused point-blank to meet with a delegation of jobless.”⁹⁷ Although Waugh and BCFU received \$4,000 in financial support from the BCFL and the VDTLC, no union leaders attended the second

⁹³ “The reasoned approach,” *Vancouver Sun*, 8 December 1961, 4.

⁹⁴ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

⁹⁵ “Unemployed parade in Victoria,” *Vancouver Sun*, 21 February 1962, 2.

⁹⁶ *Victoria Daily Times*, 21 February 1962, 1.

⁹⁷ “Socred Cabinet Refuses to meet jobless lobby,” *Pacific Tribune*, 23 Feb 1962, 1.

provincial protest. Perhaps the lack of labour bureaucracy gave the Social Credit cabinet rationale to refuse a delegation, sending provincial secretary Wesley Black instead.

In “one of the worst outbursts ever heard from the public galleries,” 50 BCFU activists stormed the legislature while others hollered, “we want jobs” in solidarity at the main rotunda outside the legislative chambers.⁹⁸ Waugh began the mantra “we want jobs” to disrupt Works Minister W.N. Chant who gave a speech congratulating Social Credit’s efforts to stimulate the economy. One protestor responded: “people are hungry, and he’s talking about something that doesn’t matter.”⁹⁹ Frustrated by the outbursts, Chant switched topics to denounce the “evils and slavery inherent in socialism.”¹⁰⁰ According to Paddy Sherman of the *Province*, Chant’s “free enterprise” speech left agitators looking “as if they’d been sprayed with sleeping-gas ” while his scourge of socialism tirade, “seemed almost calculated to incite a riot in the circumstances.”¹⁰¹

Attorney General Robert Bonner and Speaker Lorne Shantz threatened to introduce a motion of “strangers are present” an archaic parliamentary ruling that granted the seven RCMP and plainclothes policemen the authority to remove the agitators.¹⁰² However, as the local media recognized, the government did not want to “be accused of throwing out the jobless when they came for help.”¹⁰³ Premier Bennett, whom the BCFU had been told was away from the house, sat silently through the protest, reading a copy of the *B.C. Government News*.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 February 1962, 13.

⁹⁹ *Victoria Daily Times*, 22 February 1962, 13.

¹⁰⁰ “500 jobless, invading house on \$4,000 tour, halt session,” *Province*, 22 February 1962, 17.

¹⁰¹ Paddy Sherman, “Parades only anger house,” *Province*, 23 February 1962, 5.

¹⁰² Several “experienced officials” said the “strangers” option had never been threatened in the history of the B.C. legislature. See, Jack Cahill, “Threatened with ouster; 200 shouting ‘strangers’ disrupt B.C. legislature” *Vancouver Sun*, 22 February 1962, 31.

¹⁰³ *Province*, 23 February 1962, 5.

¹⁰⁴ “‘You son of a gun’ Bennett taunted,” *Victoria Colonist*, 22 February 1962, 1.

“The holler was necessary because the government wouldn’t see us,” Waugh told the press. Editorialists disagreed. According to the *Province*, angry unemployed should be treated with sympathy, as their goals are of “tragic futility.” “The demonstration is out-of-date as an effective economic and political tool in this age of enlightened welfare governments and economic planning. It is a time for patience and cooperation rather than sackcloth and ashes.”¹⁰⁵

Patience and cooperation did not characterize a Vancouver rally for John Diefenbaker, Conservative prime minister, three months later. In fact Bob Porter and Bryce Williams of the *Vancouver Sun* called the rally on 29 May 1962, “the rowdiest and most violent political meeting ever held in British Columbia.” Two hundred members of the BCFU along with 3,000 trade union members crashed the rally. According to Waugh and activists, the melee started when someone grabbed a council banner and ripped it up. “We only wanted to be heard. It was not our intention to break up or stop the meeting. But when you’re hit on the head we believe it’s your right to defend yourself – we’re not martyrs,” said Waugh. When asked by reporters “Do you believe this rally disintegrated to something reminiscent of the Brown shirt tactics in pre-war Germany?” Waugh responded, “I agree, but this time the shoe was on the other foot and the tactics were not by opposition supporters.” Martin Amiabel, 37 and his son Ronald, 17, jumped into the fray after they observed several men gang up on a single unemployed man. Jack Wood, 49, a member of the “ban-the-bomb” movement put aside his pacifism and joined the fight after seeing “two men kicking a youth.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ “The futilities of public emotions,” *Province*, 23 February 1962, 4.

¹⁰⁶ Bob Porter and Bryce Williams, “NDP supporters admit plot to disrupt Diefenbaker rally,” *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1962, 2.

Diefenbaker “raised his voice to plow through the din rather than trying to reply.”¹⁰⁷ Chants of “Where’s the jobs?” “Give us a health plan,” and “Reduce income tax” filled the hall. When Diefenbaker launched into a defence of equality a crowd member blurted: “What about the equality of Indians, Metis and the unemployed?”¹⁰⁸ The police brought a canine unit, but did not need to release the hounds.¹⁰⁹ Patrol Superintendent B.W. Jelly said overcrowding was the culprit and added there is no law against “heckling” at political gatherings.¹¹⁰

Political leaders weighed in on the skirmish. Diefenbaker conceded that the hecklers had “earned their pay,” insinuating activist mercenaries instigated the riot. Other Conservatives claimed “‘meeting-wreckers’ were hired to break up the rally.”¹¹¹ George Moy, office manager of the Vancouver Conservative headquarters, said the “young Conservatives were fully justified in their actions against the demonstrators.”¹¹² The media suggested the NDP were responsible since the BCFU had indicated they would support NDP candidates in the upcoming federal election. Provincial NDP president, Tom Berger, protested: “The NDP deplores the riot that ensued and had absolutely nothing to do with it.” As Waugh and the VDUC engaged in a tradition of direct action they exposed the gulf between the parliamentary-democratic priorities of the NDP and the bureaucratic structure of the labour unions and councils and a form of direct action that sought to empower and mobilize disenfranchised British Columbians.

¹⁰⁷ Ab Kent, “PM peppered by hecklers,” *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 May 1962, 12.

¹⁰⁸ *Victoria Daily Times*, 30 May 1962, 12.

¹⁰⁹ “‘Where are the jobs?’ Demand jobless pickets,” *Pacific Tribune*, 1 June 1962, 1.

¹¹⁰ “Tories Blamed for Starting Big Rally Row,” *Victoria Colonist*, 1 June 1962, 5.

¹¹¹ *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1962, 2.

¹¹² *Victoria Colonist*, 1 June 1962, 5. Liberal leader Lester Pearson weighed in saying the Diefenbaker reception was “a bad deal – not representative of Vancouver” and blamed the rowdiness on “organized obstruction.” See, “Near-Riot Bad Deal – Pearson,” *Victoria Colonist*, 1 June 1962, 5.

The press targeted Waugh as a possible communist after Robert Strachan, CCF provincial leader, announced Waugh was a Red.¹¹³ Waugh responded: "I don't believe any man should say 'yes' or 'no' to that question... [I have] no politics other than the working man's politics. Mine are trade union politics."¹¹⁴ Waugh could not admit to being a card carrying Communist for fear of Cold War vetting. Patrick O'Neal, secretary of the BCFL, remembers Waugh, was an RCMP spy who began his career as an informer in England.¹¹⁵ Waugh "knew this and I knew if I said I'm a Communist he would have expelled me and the furor it would cause."¹¹⁶

Waugh left his position as head of the VDUC later that year, securing a position as a ship's rigger. In December 1962, David Drurie, the new president of the VDUC, was disappointed when only 47 people attended a meeting to discuss a spring return to parliament. Cedric Cox, Burnaby NDP MLA told the meeting that "Premier Bennett isn't going to be moved" by a tiny show of numbers: "If only a few go on a trek you're only spending money that would put plenty of loaves of bread on your tables. Why give \$4 each to the government ferries?" An unemployed member left despondent. "The size of this meeting shows we are apathetic... we need political education. The capitalists know their interests – we should know ours."¹¹⁷

At 83 years old, Waugh resides in a bachelor suite in a senior's residence in North Vancouver. Standing at 6'2 and only 140 pounds, Waugh chain-smokes and rarely eats. His walls are decorated with romantic images of American Indians riding the plains and profiles of Paul Robeson and Fidel Castro. Although Waugh has remained a permanent

¹¹³ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

¹¹⁴ *Vancouver Sun*, 1 June 1962, 2.

¹¹⁵ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

¹¹⁶ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

¹¹⁷ "Victoria protest trek called off by jobless," *Province*, 21 December 1962, 17.

member of the MBU, his travels to Cuba since 1962 inspired him in ways his Canadian activism could not. Organizing unemployed in an age of affluence carried few rewards: “No it was pretty tough in a lot of ways with such a rich country and yet it couldn’t feed the people, didn’t want to feed them, didn’t need to feed them,” says Waugh.¹¹⁸ All the unemployed believed they had in their arsenal was their voices and they strained them with all their might to the cold ears of politicians. For Waugh, the collective voice was effectual: “The government and city forces were scared of us,” recalls Waugh: “we captured the media’s attention not through violence but just the cry, “We want jobs.”¹¹⁹

Waugh remains steadfast in his commitment to Communism. “For all its shortcomings it [the Communist Party] was the spark of the unemployed struggle” in the post-war period, he recalls. Waugh takes Marx’s historical teleology to heart, believing capitalism had to show “its terrible claws” in order to “develop the world to what we have now.” While Waugh found Marx socially significant, his ideology never strayed to the authoritarian. “People came to their own bloody conclusions as to why they haven’t got jobs. We didn’t tackle it like we were the Communist party that would put down this is this and that is that. We were political too but we weren’t advocating one way or another.”¹²⁰

Working within labour councils was a pragmatic not ideological decision – the VDTLC and the BCFL had access to scarce resources and were recognized as legitimate organizations by the political authorities, lending “credibility” to the VDUC. As a result of their pragmatism, Waugh and his fellow activists were unable to resolve the contradictions inherent in trying to unite with social democratic left organizations and

¹¹⁸ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

¹¹⁹ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

¹²⁰ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

remain “politically correct” while still mounting a coherent counterhegemonic critique of unemployment through their professed adherence to communism.

Although a communist ideology was never enforced, Waugh nonetheless worries that he had “too big a say in” the unemployed movement and “must have been domineering.” It was difficult to work democratically with the labour councils, Waugh claims, in part because the political structure privileged leadership, with “little involvement of the membership.” As a result many unemployed segments of society failed to be included in the protests. Waugh remembers, “it didn’t enter my mind about women in the unemployed. I didn’t think about it.” However, there was often a contingent of women present. Although Waugh believes the Chinese and Japanese people “got the worst” of economic and racial exploitation, they too were not actively drawn into the fold.¹²¹ Unfortunately neither communist nor liberal ideologies in the post-war period were sensitive to poverty as an epidemic afflicting more than unemployed, white men.

In post-war Vancouver unemployment activism underwent several transformations. In 1949-1950 the Communist UAC was the first to organize the unemployed. Under the climate of McCarthyism, social democrat labour unions and councils mobilized to oust reds from their ranks, and vied for the hearts and minds of “impressionable” poor people. Drawing on rational state planning and optimism towards production, the leadership of the CCL, VDTLC and BCFL proposed an alternative ideology for unemployed activism. The labour bureaucracy insistence on “legitimate” democratic debate circumscribed the ability for poor activists to press for their demands. However, Communist activists such as Sam Jenkins and Eric Waugh infiltrated the labour councils, adamant that the LCUC and the BCFU use direct action as a major tactic

¹²¹ Eric Waugh, personal interview, 3 September 2005.

in battles against all three levels of government. Demands and actions of antipoverty activists during the second post-war recession, 1958-1962, were dished from an eclectic stew of Galbraithian liberalism, leftist nationalism, communism and unemployed angst. The only common belief held by the disparate activists was an emphasis on state-based change, either through a variety of pressures on government, or perhaps for a few communist diehards, a full-fledged revolution. Despite their various shortcomings the UAC, LCUC and BCFU, were a means for a minority of Vancouver's poor to engage with governments in an age of affluence.

Chapter Three: "Fight to Win:"
The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty, 1989 -

In April 1989, after 16 days of beating the pavement, nursing blisters and attending rallies, 30 antipoverty activists from Windsor, Ottawa and Sudbury walked the finale of 400 kilometres to arrive at Queen's Park to insist Liberal Premier David Peterson increase welfare rates.¹ John Clarke, organizer for the London Union of Unemployed Workers, cited growing reliance on food banks and shelters and called for the immediate implementation of the Thomson report.² Three thousand to 4,000 supporters met the marchers - the largest antipoverty demonstration in Canada since the 1960s. After the trek a province-wide steering committee met to discuss a broader organization and in February 1990 the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) was born. However, the ranks were split; John Clarke promoted a grassroots direct action operation while his adversary advocated for a conventional lobbying group. Clarke won the leadership but a third of the founding convention walked out.³ With a smaller support base, OCAP morphed into a misnomer; rather than a provincial coalition, OCAP's foundation represented the poverty-ridden East End of Toronto.⁴

¹ Mike Funston, "Antipoverty marchers have message for Ontario: Act fast," *Toronto Star*, 8 April 1989, A9.

² The march fell on the heels of an earlier trek to the Ontario legislature that demanded, "Just to eat and pay the rent we need 25 percent." After the first march, the Liberals commissioned the George Thomson report that called for a \$42.3 billion overhaul of the welfare system. See Shelley Page, "3,000 Rally to demand Queen's Park fight poverty," *Toronto Star*, 9 April 1989, A1. After the second protest, Peterson introduced a \$415 million welfare reform package that increased welfare by 9 percent, extended child benefits and shelter allowances, and implemented an employment support program. See, Susan Reid, "Welfare: Quiet Issue but Big Problem," *Toronto Star*, 1 September 1990, D4. Clarke immigrated from Britain to join his father after his mother died in 1976. In the early recession years of the 1980s Clarke lost his job at a London Ontario factory and formed an unemployed organization. See, *Toronto Star*, 15 April 2003, B1.

³ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁴ However, OCAP has expanded its city base into West End Parkdale and the Northwest Toronto Somalian community and provincially through autonomous community coalitions and Ontario-wide protests.

OCAP first campaigned against the reelection of Peterson. With the slogan, "Down with the Poverty Premier," OCAP activists disrupted 27 Liberal press conferences, banquets and even a boating regatta.⁵ In April 1990 200 poor Ontarians dumped hundreds of old shoes on Queen's Park demanding Peterson walk a mile in their shoes.⁶ Although tacitly supporting Bob Rae's electoral campaign, OCAP was snubbed by the social democrats when the NDP won a majority government in September 1990. According to Clarke, "once the NDP was elected its enthusiasm for poor people's organizations took a nose dive and correspondingly the labour bureaucracy became much more conservative."⁷ For the next five years OCAP struggled to form a resistance against the NDP.⁸ As Clarke admits, "if you are challenging a left government you are challenging the whole system, because there is no electoral alternative to point to."⁹ Nonetheless, an angry crowd of 150 OCAP protestors stormed Queen's Park in April 1991 to inform Rae that he must uphold his promises to the poor. Similar OCAP actions hounded NDP ministers.¹⁰ When not badgering Rae activists besieged the Conservative Brian Mulroney government. Between 5 August and 11 August 1991, 24 antipoverty activists set up a tent city, dubbed "Mulroneville" outside of the Tory party's national convention. Modeled on 1930s Depression squats the camp featured a post office for

⁵ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁶ Susan Reid, "Put yourself in our shoes, Peterson told," *Toronto Star*, 12 April 1990, A14.

⁷ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁸ The NDP reneged on promises to decrease reliance on food banks, alleviate poverty, increase the minimum wage, speed up the welfare system, introduce tax breaks for the poor and raise taxes on big business. See *Toronto Star*, 1 September 1990, D4. During their time in office, the NDP raised welfare rates by only one percent while concomitantly increasing spending by \$109 million to crack down on welfare fraud. See, Martin Mittelstaedt, "Ontario Welfare Payments to rise by 1 percent," *Globe and Mail*, 28 January 1993, A5; Lee-Anne Goodman, "Ontario Targeting Welfare Cheats," *Canadian Press*, 29 March 1994.

⁹ Podur, "When the Class Line is Drawn".

¹⁰ Maureen Murray, "Poverty marchers target Rae," *Toronto Star*, 10 April 1991, A1. For another protest see, Derek Ferguson, "Demonstrators criticize Boyd for 'betrayal' of Ontario poor," *Toronto Star*, 6 December 1991 A5.

protest letters, an effigy of Mulroney, street signs such as “Layoff Lane,” “Freetrade Blvd.” and a Mulroneville cemetery.¹¹

Ousted from power in 1995, the apathetic and impotent NDP made way for the neoliberal “Common Sense Revolution” of the Progressive Conservative Party. In what ways has OCAP resisted the neoliberal restructuring of the state? With what means and under what conditions have OCAP activists organized poor people to challenge and identify neoliberal capitalism as the source of their penury?

OCAP has survived and achieved some of its goals by maintaining close, direct association with specific groups of poor people whom it represents and serves. In contrast to its antipoverty predecessors, OCAP reflects several post-New Left concerns. OCAP insists that poverty operates along multiple sites of domination, is skeptical about state-based change and eschews revolutionary meta-narratives or grand theories of social transformation. Believing theory can divide and weaken, OCAP tiptoes around the abstract and instead marches to an ideology of action, insisting that practical direct action be directed to remedy distinct resolvable problems of poor people. Nonetheless, OCAP considers itself anti-capitalist and encourages poor people to think and act otherwise by juxtaposing mutual aid and equitable actions against capitalist profits and an ideology of liberal individualism. Similarly, by connecting itself to other left-orientated organizations from unions to indigenous struggles, OCAP positions itself as part of a larger counterhegemonic battle. Whether confronting neoliberal cutbacks to social policies, defending the livelihood of squeegee artists, squatting in abandoned buildings, assisting poor refugees, or engaging in large-scale anti-capitalist and anti-neoliberal protests,

¹¹ Peter Small, “‘Get out of Town,’ tent city folk tell PM,” *Toronto Star*, 6 August 1991, A6.

OCAP activists have strived to create a community that empowers poor people to fight against their own social marginalization.

OCAP activists' beliefs are independent and diverse; some are socialists, anarchists, social democrats, Christians and a handful refuse to ascribe to any ideology at all; what they hold consensually, however, is the belief that capitalism creates poverty. For Mike Coward, OCAP represents "different people [from different ideological backgrounds] who just don't like the system and want to see a change."¹² OCAP's philosophy is articulated in deeds not words. In remembrance of the late Norman Feltes, a former York University professor and OCAP activist, Clarke wrote, "because of his academic background, Norm agonized far too much about the legitimacy of his contribution. This uncertainty was utterly groundless because we all appreciated him as a comrade and respected greatly his courage and determination."¹³ OCAPer Gaetan Heroux has no such uncertainty, insisting anti-capitalism "is a recognition that capitalism is what's causing this but you don't start from theory to the concrete, for me you work from the concrete and the theory will come."¹⁴ Heroux illuminates OCAP's theoretical contradiction – OCAP indeed starts with a theory but it is a theory grounded in action – it is a theory of action.

For OCAP, domination has many forms beyond the economic. Exploitation based on age, gender, ethnicity, mental health and privileged knowledge is the lived experience of many poor and the impetus for direct action. Winning battles for sex trade workers and newly arrived Somali immigrants, OCAP is keenly aware that there are many faces to

¹² Mike Coward, personal interview, 5 July 2005.

¹³ John Clarke, "Norman Feltes: An OCAP appreciation," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001): 20. See also, Norman Feltes, "The New Prince in a New Principality: OCAP and the Toronto Poor," *Labour/Le Travail* 48 (Fall 2001), 125-157.

¹⁴ Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

poverty. As OCAPer Kolin Davidson has said, “poverty affects so many different communities it doesn’t only affect one group of people . . . we don’t want to push aside and say we don’t specialize in” issues affecting poor people.¹⁵

The respect for ideological differences, skepticism towards meta-theories and the inclusion of other non-economic forms of domination reflects a particular postmodern environment. Yet, OCAP activists have criticized postmodern theorists for being obtuse and stultifying, preferring to base their ideology of action on their own personal struggles and the historical and contemporary experiences of marginalized people worldwide.¹⁶ Activists frame their own battle in context with Depression-era unemployed activism, postcolonial conflicts for indigenous sovereignty, the women’s liberation movement, punk culture and contemporary anti-globalization protests.¹⁷ If OCAP activists cite a theorist it is more frequently Mikhail Bakunin than Michel Foucault. Thus not just postmodern theorists but contemporary activists have reconceptualized nineteenth century anarchist critiques of power and the state, equality and mutual aid, in light of postmodern concern for multiple forms of domination, the unequal and shifting dispersal of power and the means for resistance.¹⁸ Similarly, if postmodern in orientation, OCAP

¹⁵ Kolin Davidson, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

¹⁶ Jeff Shantz, personal interview, 2 July 2005; PJ Lilley, personal interview, 2 July 2005.

¹⁷ Clarke has published an article specifically about Depression era organizing. See, “Unemployed Movements of the 1930s: Lessons for Today,” *Labour’s Militant Voice*, <<http://labormilitantvoice.com/arcPamphUnemployed.htm>> 12 December 1998. Clarke has also encouraged other activists to read the work of Canadian historian Bryan Palmer and the autobiographical work of Wal Hannington. See, Wal Hannington, *Unemployed Struggles, 1919-1936: My Life and Struggles amongst the Unemployed* (Yorkshire: EP Publishing Limited, 1973); Wal Hannington, *Ten Lean Years: An examination of the record of the national government in the field of unemployment* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1940). Other activists in personal interviews suggested a wide array of twentieth-century and contemporary social struggles as the source of their antipoverty, direct action philosophy.

¹⁸ See, Todd May, *The Political Philosophy of Poststructuralist Anarchism* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994) and Saul Newman, *From Bakunin to Lacan: Anti-authoritarianism and the Dislocation of Power* (Maryland: Lexington Books, 2001).

activists have not rejected Marxist preoccupations in toto – rather their actions can also be contextualized as an expression of the New Left.

The OCAP anti-capitalist asserts that under the current social system “what is produced and who can consume it has nothing to do with the real needs of people but only the enrichment of the few.”¹⁹ OCAP understands liberal capitalism as the interplay between structures and agents. According to John Clarke, “when we go up against a landlord or welfare office, when we challenge unjust governments, we keep it firmly in mind that these individuals and institutions didn’t come from nowhere” rather “it is this system of social relations, capitalism, which must be overcome not merely the variable policies or figureheads which sustain it.”²⁰

Inspired by Marxist Bryan Palmer, Clarke provides a historical interpretation of Canadian hegemony: During the Depression poor activists led by the Communist Party demanded concessions from a state that continued to use inadequate seventeenth century British Poor Law to administer relief. Unemployed agitation at relief lines and the infamous “On-to-Ottawa Trek” forced a government response, out of which the state, via a liberal-humanitarian passive revolution, introduced Keynesian welfare initiatives. For several decades the compromise between the left, unions, poor people and the state and big business operated in relative good faith. However, by the 1980s, the state rescinded concessions in the name of government downsizing and an unfettered free market. By 1995, Conservatives toting a neoliberal arsenal were dismantling post-war compromises forcing OCAP and antipoverty activists into a “defensive trench war.”

¹⁹ John Clarke, “Anti-capital/antipoverty,” *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 4 (June 2001), 12.

²⁰ Clarke, “Anti-capital/antipoverty,” 13; Jeff Shantz, “Fighting to Win!: Anarchists and the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty,” *Northeastern Anarchist* 4 (Spring 2002), 6.

The practical life of the anti-capitalist requires the paradoxical employment of both reform and revolutionary tactics. There is no doubt that some OCAP activists dream of long term systemic change. As Clarke has said, true democracy

must mean the mass of people actually running things and, especially, taking control of the production of society's wealth. OCAP never begs for crumbs. While we may have to defend our crust of bread today, we're working for the moment when we take over the bakery.²¹

However, OCAP activists tend to be realists – it only takes a few encounters with its hegemonic adversaries to be keenly aware that OCAP lacks the resources and numbers to bring about revolution.

Individual casework or protests to demand welfare increases are the crusts before the bread; bringing in new recruits and honing skills to make real and immediate gains is the way of building a counterhegemonic community. Like Rosa Luxemburg's transformative reforms, OCAP views reforms as “a means to a larger end of social and economical transformation (and transforming ourselves in the process) rather than orienting toward reforms as an end in themselves.”²² Quoting anarchist Lorenzo Kamboa Ervin, OCAP activist Jeff Shantz describes reforms as ““survival pending revolution,’ practices which win real gains for people in the here and now.”²³ For PJ Lilley “winning is what makes people want to win more” while Mike Coward emotes, “living in poverty is terrible but once you start fighting you start feeling this shit life is not so bad.”²⁴

Flushing out the plumbing analogy, Clarke suggests

if you call a plumber and the plumber leaves and your toilet is still blocked you conclude that the plumber was no good. Similarly, if politically organizing

²¹ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

²² Clarice Kuhling and Alex Levant, “OCAP trials and the Politics of Resistance,” *New Socialist* 42 (July-August 2003) <<http://newsocialist.org/magazine/42.html>> (26 June 2006).

²³ Shantz, “Fighting to Win,” 5.

²⁴ PJ Lilley, personal interview, 2 July 2005; Mike Coward, personal interview, 5 July 2005.

doesn't change the conditions of your life or at least raise real possibilities that they get a change then why would people do it?"²⁵

While OCAP understands its leadership role, activists are reluctant to individualize leaders; Clarke refuses biographical interviews, while Jeff Shantz says that "whenever we get asked who is your leader we say we are all leaders here."²⁶ As MacDonald Scott observed, OCAP activities are not "one guy from Greenpeace hanging off a building," rather they are actions deeply rooted in the needs of a community.²⁷

Although OCAP's support base among the poor is statistically minuscule the relationship is real and productive.²⁸ While OCAP's leadership formulates creative means of mobilizing the poor, organizers and organized must feel as though they share the same aims. In the words of OCAPer Kolin Davidson, "we don't go out and do something for a community, we do it with a community because it is our community as well."²⁹ Tim Groves suggests OCAP's leadership is largely auxiliary, with OCAP "supporting a community that is trying to empower itself."³⁰

OCAP's longevity and strength relies on "how strong we are in the streets... how well we are able to react when shit happens" to poor people.³¹ Despite concerted actions by government, media and police to shut OCAP down the organization persists because "the base was too strong, the roots are too deep."³² The most provocative evidence of a dynamic relationship between OCAP and the poor community occurs when the helped

²⁵ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

²⁶ Jeff Shantz, personal interview, 2 July 2005.

²⁷ Brian Dominick, "Reinventing Antipoverty: The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty employs fresh, winning tactics," *ZMag* <<http://www.zmag.org/ZMag/articles/jan99dominick.htm>> (January 1999).

²⁸ John Clarke recalls Wal Hannington who expressed exasperation that fewer than 10 percent of the British unemployed were ever mobilized during the Depression era. John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

²⁹ Kolin Davidson, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

³⁰ Tim Groves, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

³¹ Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

³² Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

and the helpers are reversed. When police handed Heroux a warrant on the street for his antipoverty agitation, homeless people surrounded him to prevent his arrest. Heroux recalled, "I understood then that the so called traditional role of the activist going and saving people was upside down... now they were protecting me."³³ By making a difference in poor people's lives, either via individual casework or through involving them in social protest, OCAP has allowed leadership and power to be flexible and transferable – as OCAP activists have commented - they are *led* to inspiration by the very community to which they belong. OCAP owes its street credibility amongst poor people to its particular organizational dynamic.

How does OCAP's formal structure reinforce their fluid relationship with the poor community? OCAP consists of a general membership a few hundred strong, an eight to ten member elected executive and two full-time and one part-time elected paid organizers.³⁴ The full-time salaries are less than \$20,000 a year. With little cash of their own, paid organizers are intimately aware of low-income concerns. John Clarke is the only activist who has been with OCAP since its inception; in fact, most current OCAPers joined after the election of Mike Harris.³⁵ The bulk of OCAP's membership consists of poor, unemployed people.³⁶ Many OCAP "leaders" such as Gaetan Heroux, Mike Coward and Kolin Davidson have personally experienced homelessness and/or the welfare system. At protests it is not unusual to observe children, activist high school students and squeegee street kids, mingling with seventy-something retired University

³³ Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

³⁴ Clarke has been elected yearly as an organizer for OCAP. The other full-time position is currently held by Sarah Vance who replaced Sue Collis in 1999.

³⁵ John Clarke recalls asking a gathering of demonstrators in 1995 how many had never been previously involved in a political action; over three quarters of the crowd put up their hands. John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

³⁶ Sarah Vance, personal interview, 2 July 2005.

professors and homeless old-timers. Since the 2000 Queens Park protest, OCAP has drawn the support of often middle class, anti-globalization youth causing some OCAP activists to voice concern that their base community of poor people not be neglected.³⁷ If OCAP includes all ages it also invites all ethnicities. In the OCAP office conversations in different languages often vie for air space. OCAP has translated agitational material in over eight languages. OCAP's demographics have included First Nations, Chinese, Somalian and Muslim activists.

Many OCAP activists are front line social workers.³⁸ Involvement in OCAP has threatened their careers – Davidson, for example, left Saint Christopher's House after the Ministry of Health threatened to withdraw the non-profit's funding if Davidson continued to organize in OCAP on his off hours.³⁹ Before his current employment at Street Health, Heroux was fired from two previous social work jobs due to his involvement with OCAP.⁴⁰ Despite the precariousness of their employment, by working daily amongst the homeless, OCAP activists have built friendships and trust amongst Toronto's poor.

OCAP holds biweekly executive and general membership meetings. General membership meetings range in attendance from 20 to 250. OCAP strives for consensus, where possible and by ballot where necessary. If an executive proposal is divisive it is revised or abandoned. While OCAP is committed to a democratic structure, organizers acknowledge that democracy is a process not an event and that each individual's

³⁷ On the other hand, Clarke complains of a vacuum left behind by lapsed middle-aged activists, isolating young anticapitalists from recent historical experience. John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

³⁸ Stefan Pilipa, Sarah Vance, Rachel and Gaetan Heroux have all worked at Street Health which offers harm reduction to the homeless and underhoused in Toronto's East Downtown. Gaetan Heroux has been working with poor people at Dundas and Sherborne for the last 18 years. Kolin Davidson and Omid Zareian are employed at the Parkdale Community Centre.

³⁹ Kolin Davidson, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

⁴⁰ Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

commitment to the organization usually translates into greater input into the decision-making process.

During the Mike Harris era OCAP operated on \$50,000 a year.⁴¹ This budget covered the two full-time and two part-time wages, legal fees, rent and clerical expenses. Unions, individual rank and filers and concerned citizens have all provided financial support. OCAP has avoided funds from government citing suspicion of its co-optive power. Between 1995 and 2001, Buzz Hargrove and the CAW contributed \$10,000 annually. However, in 2001 after the mock eviction of Jim Flaherty from his constituency office, Hargrove cancelled their donation. "The CAW will not condone violence or destruction of property as a tactic."⁴² According to OCAP activists, the eviction of Flaherty's office was merely an excuse for Buzz Hargrove to tear up his cheque. What really raised Buzz's ire was OCAP's call one month earlier to escalate "economic disruption" by blockading the NAFTA superhighway at Windsor, crippling, among other industries, Buzz's own automobile plants.⁴³ Aside from the CAW, CUPE has donated between \$4,000 and \$6,000 annually. Syd Ryan of CUPE, unlike Hargrove, continued to support OCAP after the Flaherty eviction. A year earlier however, Ryan had suggested that CUPE might pull its funding after the June 2000 Queen's Park riot. Ryan later changed his tune, donating \$6,000 and promising to help cover riot-related legal expenses.⁴⁴

⁴¹ In 2004 the budget was raised to \$80,000.

⁴² Geoff Bickerton, "Labour, OCAP and Protest," *Canadian Dimension* 33:5 (September/October 2001), 1.

⁴³ Mary Agnes Welch, "'Disruptions' aim to topple Tories," *Windsor Star*, 9 May 2001, A4.

⁴⁴ Christopher Guly, "Union backs poverty activist charged in Queen's park riot," *Ottawa Citizen* 26 July 2000, A11.

While CAW's withdrawal of funding could have crippled OCAP, individuals, including CAW and CUPE rank and file kept OCAP from teetering.⁴⁵ CUPE local 3903 (York University's contract faculty, teaching and graduate assistants) has covered OCAP's \$800 rent since late 2001⁴⁶ donating more than any other social organization annually.⁴⁷ During financial crises, OCAP has received funds from a Sault Ste. Marie old age home and supporters from as far away as South Korea and Australia.⁴⁸ A Torontonian busboy donated life savings of \$3,000.⁴⁹ OCAP has even had homeless people try to donate their panhandled earnings, evidence of its reputation amongst Toronto's poor.⁵⁰

As can be seen by union funding, the tactics of OCAP are not always well received by union bureaucracy. Yet for many OCAP activists unions remain a powerful resource in waging an attack on capitalist hegemony. But, if unions are to be part of a counter-hegemonic bloc, Shantz says they will have to return to "the old labor standard, 'An Injury to One is an Injury to All'" instead of remaining content to protect and assist only their dues paying membership.⁵¹

To move in this direction OCAP has advocated for greater decentralization in union ranks. During the 1996 "Days of Action" OCAP picketed with Toronto postal

⁴⁵ Paul Moloney, "CUPE leader serves libel notice on mayor," *Toronto Star*, 30 October 2001, B3.

⁴⁶ Following the October 2001 "Shut Down Bay Street" demonstration Toronto Mayor Mel Lastman discovered that OCAP's office space at 249 Sherbourne was subsidized by the city owned Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) (OCAP paid only \$75 a month in rent). Lastman was furious and wanted them evicted. The TCHC already had plans to use the OCAP space – as a result OCAP moved to its current location at 10 Britain St. See Bruce DeMara, "Controversial poverty group pays low rent in city space," *Toronto Star*, 26 October 2001, B4.

⁴⁷ Nicole Cohen, "OCAP struggles for survival," *Eye Weekly* <http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_09.16.04/city/ocap.html> (16 September 2004).

⁴⁸ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005; Cohen, "OCAP struggles for survival".

⁴⁹ Podur, "When the Class Line is Drawn".

⁵⁰ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁵¹ Shantz, "Class Struggle," 4.

workers, shutting down operations at Yonge and Lakeshore.⁵² Two years later on 21 October 1998 OCAP set up a picket line to assist two “victimized postal workers” fired from the Station E post office for union activism. Dubbed the “Boss Free Workplace” the strike barred the post office to all managers.⁵³ In 2003 after the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees (HERE) union Local 75 refused to defend immigrant employees from religious and ethnic related firing, OCAP organized the Metropolitan Hotel Workers.⁵⁴ Many staunch union advocates acted as though “someone farted in church,” recalls Clarke, after OCAP challenged the HERE bureaucracy.⁵⁵ With the aid of OCAP the Metropolitan employees have begun fighting their employer in court.⁵⁶

OCAP has also been involved with union flying squads. During the “Days of Action” CAW locals resurrected the early twentieth century IWW tactic of “flying squads” where decentralized crews of union members disrupt the operations of their workplaces and the broader community. Flying squads have played a role in every large OCAP demonstration since 1995.⁵⁷ According to Alex Levant, flying squad member for CUPE 3903, union executives have treated the squads with “caution and ambivalence”

⁵² The “Days of Action” were a series of eleven one-day city-wide strikes across the province between 1995-1998. The “Days of Action” reached their zenith with a protest in Toronto on 25 October 1996 with 250,000 in attendance, the largest demonstration in Canadian history. The protestors were an eclectic mix of socialists, environmentalists, feminists, union members, welfare recipients, native rights activists and poor people.

⁵³ Dominick, “Reinventing Antipoverty”.

⁵⁴ Podur, “When the Class Line is Drawn”.

⁵⁵ Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005. Paul Clifford and Bill Fitzpatrick were the HERE local 75 officials.

⁵⁶ <http://www.metropolitanhotelsworkers.org/campaign.htm>

⁵⁷ CAW locals across Ontario have implemented flying squads; York University CUPE local 3903 has the largest flying squad with 80 members on call; and the Toronto Teachers Flying Squad (a group derived from three separate teacher’s unions) was created in 2001 to support OCAP’s Pope Squat. See, Alex Levant, “Flying Squads and the Crisis of Workers’ Self-Organization,” *New Socialist* 40 <<http://newsocialist.org/magazine/40.html>> (February-April 2003).

while many rank and file have appreciated a venue to critique the “business unionism” of their leadership.⁵⁸

While Canada’s heavyweight unions have participated in OCAP demonstrations and events, OCAP activists argue unions failed during the “Days of Action” and the 2001 Ontario Common Front to use their most powerful job: shutting down the workplace.⁵⁹ Union leadership wanted the Conservatives out of power but saw mass strikes as counterproductive and unlikely to win popular support.⁶⁰

According to Clarke, “the problem is that the union bureaucracy is congenitally incapable of resistance.”⁶¹ For Clarke the labour leadership “is sort of like a parasite that kills the host body... sucking the life out of the ability of the working class to fight.”⁶² As Stefan Pilipa remarked, “it is hard to imagine many contemporary labour leaders taking any sort of dramatic or disobedient political action that could subject them to prosecution in the criminal courts.”⁶³ Historian Bryan Palmer is clear in his denunciation of union leadership and the need for grassroots organization:

The current trade-union officialdom, with some possible exceptions, has been forged in this atmosphere of bureaucratic individualism, and is thus not a leadership that can be relied on to do much. There are, however, militants at the base of the labour movement. They need regroupment and they need a programmatic orientation that will link them to themselves and to others, such as OCAP.⁶⁴

⁵⁸ Levant, “Flying Squads”.

⁵⁹ Bryan Palmer’s assessment of the 1983 B.C. solidarity strike reaches similar conclusions. See, Bryan Palmer, *Solidarity: The Rise and Fall of an Opposition in British Columbia* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1987).

⁶⁰ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁶¹ Podur, “When the Class Line is Drawn” 4.

⁶² John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁶³ Bryan Palmer, “Repression and Dissent: The OCAP Trials” *Canadian Dimension* 37:3 (May/June 2003), 3.

⁶⁴ Bryan Palmer, “Riot Act: Reviving Protest in Ontario,” *Canadian Dimension* 34:5 (September/October 2000), 30.

Through the affinities created between flying squads, Metropolitan employees and OCAP a minority of rank and file workers are actively seeking to radicalize their unions.

Aside from unions, OCAP has worked with a variety of social organizations and individuals. Such affiliations are essential for a collective attack on capital. As John Clarke says, “we’ve always walked a line between trying to give a lead and take the struggle forward and not isolate ourselves.”⁶⁵ Antipoverty, anarchist, socialist, immigrant and other organizations across Canada have turned to OCAP for development, advice and support.⁶⁶ Shawn Brant and Sue Collis, former executives on OCAP and committed Mohawk activists, have forged a link between the Tyendinega First Nation and OCAP. In respect for their struggle and sovereignty OCAP has incorporated the sun of Louis Hall’s Mohawk Nation Akwesasne flag symbolizing unity, honour and resistance into the OCAP logo.⁶⁷ Globally, OCAP activists have communicated with the landless peasant movement in Brazil, the Zapatistas in Mexico and have attended anti-globalization summits. For Clarke “the fact that across this world, certainly in this country, the level of mobilization is so bleak people look to this downtown antipoverty organization as some kind of example is pretty sad” but it also serves to legitimate OCAP’s deeds.⁶⁸ For Gaetan Heroux the global experiences of the poor, in turn, inspire him. “I couldn’t have lived off of OCAP’s actions alone,” he says.⁶⁹

It is not surprising that Clarke calls antipoverty mobilization in Canada “bleak” considering OCAP has been on the defensive since 1995 against neoliberal restructuring

⁶⁵ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁶⁶ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005. Coalitions have been established, sporadically in communities across Ontario including Peterborough, Kingston, Sudbury and Ottawa.

⁶⁷ *Call it Struggle for a Reason 4* (June 2001), 2.

⁶⁸ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁶⁹ Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 3 July 2005.

and a dominant ideology of economic individualism. On 26 June 1995 Mike Harris drove his “common sense revolution” into a Conservative majority government. Inspired by right-wing Friedrich A. Von Hayek’s *Road to Serfdom* (1944), Harris planned to introduce tax cuts, balance the budget and reduce government.⁷⁰ In 1995 welfare rates were slashed by 21.6 percent. Individual economic responsibility must replace government handouts, the revolution argued.⁷¹ Between June 1995 and December 1995 54,887 recipients, representing 103,228 people, stopped receiving welfare cheques.⁷² Rooting out welfare fraud, implementation of workfare and further cuts to provincial social assistance continued over the following eight years of Conservative rule.⁷³ -

In addition to welfare cuts, Harris cancelled 17,000 social housing units in 1995. In 1998 Harris abolished rent controls. With rental rates climbing 10 percent annually since 1998, a flood of evictions followed. In 2000, 60,000 Ontario families were ousted from their domiciles⁷⁴ In Toronto in 2001 it was estimated that there were 2,000 evictions a month.⁷⁵ Lack of housing for the homeless led to tragic results: The Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC) counted between 1985 and 2002 over 300 homeless deaths,

⁷⁰ Harris also attacked workers by slashing the Ministry of Labour by 40 percent, introducing a 60-hour workweek and requiring union workplaces to post information on decertification. The Conservatives also slashed medical care and education. See John Clarke, “The Meek shall inherit diddley-squat” *Briarpatch* 30:3 (2001), 12.

⁷¹ The cuts followed incremental rate increases - Peterson’s Liberals raised welfare rates by nine percent, and Rae’s NDP by one percent. See the *Globe and Mail*, 28 January 1993 A5.

⁷² “100,000 no longer on welfare, stats show,” *Globe and Mail* 6 December 1995, A5.

⁷³ In 1996 Harris cut social assistance from 17,000 post-secondary students; in 1997 the province appropriated a federal government Child Benefit gratuity of \$50 for all 500,000 Ontario children on welfare. See “10,000 Jobs cut, fees boosted,” *Times Colonist*, 12 April 1996, 3; Jane Gadd, “Many families in dire straits without support payments,” *Globe and Mail*, 14 December 1996, A1.

⁷⁴ Thomas Walkom, “Labour gearing up for battle,” *Toronto Star*, 17 June 2001, A1.

⁷⁵ Clarke, “Meek shall inherit diddley-squat,” 12. In fact a United Way city-commissioned report in 1999 called Toronto’s 26,000 homeless a “national crisis.” See *Lethbridge Herald*, 10 August 1999, 5. Another report, one year later, claimed Toronto’s homeless population to be 15.9 percent higher than New York City’s. See Judy Rebick, “Pitch battle is at door of the legislature,” *ZNet* (20 June 2000) <http://www.zmag.org/Sustainers/Content/2000-06/20rebick.htm>

with more than 200 fatalities since 1996.⁷⁶ In 2001 alone there were 40 reported deaths of Toronto's homeless while in 2002 there was an average of two homeless deaths per week.⁷⁷

In what ways has OCAP organized poor people to defend against neoliberal restructuring? Most of OCAP's large-scale protests including the "Days of Action" and the Queen's Park protest held the repeal of Harris' welfare and housing cuts as key demands. In addition, OCAP picketed outside the homes of welfare office managers and social services' politicians.⁷⁸ On other occasions, OCAP assailed the Harris government's implementation of workfare by disrupting press conferences and picketing at workfare job sites, such as the YMCA.⁷⁹

In addition to protests, OCAP has challenged social policy by taking up individual grievances in direct action casework. While rarely discussed in the mainstream media, at any one time OCAP handles a dozen welfare-related grievances. The organization boasts a 95 percent success rate by using a combination of escalating tactics from letters and phone calls to mass occupations and pickets.⁸⁰ Often the "threat of an in-house demonstration is enough to get bureaucratic balls rolling miraculously smoothly, making stuck accounts suddenly unstuck."⁸¹

⁷⁶ http://www.standrewstoronto.org/OOTC_news.htm. The TDRC holds monthly vigils for homeless-related deaths.

⁷⁷ "In Memoriam" *The Street Post* 5:2 (September 2002), 2.

⁷⁸ In July 1997 OCAP picketed the home of Peter Jagt, a welfare-office manager in Toronto. See, Margaret Philp, "Poverty crusade gets personal," *Globe and Mail*, 20 September 1997, A1. When Dalton McGuinty's Liberals came to power in 2004 and failed to raise welfare rates, OCAP conducted a similar action in front of the luxury condominium of Sandra Pupatello, minister of community and social services.

⁷⁹ On workfare press conference disruptions see Martin Mittelstaedt, "Ontario Launches workfare amid jeers," *Globe and Mail*, 13 June 1996, A10. On the YMCA workfare strike see, Dominick, "Reinventing Antipoverty".

⁸⁰ Podur, "When the Class Line is Drawn".

⁸¹ Dominick, "Reinventing Antipoverty".

By fighting individual grievances OCAP gains new recruits. After picketing and winning Bryan a new dental plate from Ontario Disability and Social Services' insurance provider, the terminally-ill cancer patient was "anxious to be involved in case work actions on a regular basis."⁸²

Isolated, poor single mothers are too often spit out of the Ontario welfare machine without receiving adequate relief. In the summer of 2002 OCAP confronted a welfare office that denied a 19 year-old, 9-month pregnant woman an allowance to cover bottles, bibs, a comforter and a crib. The office told the rotund woman that she needed a signature from a doctor proving her pregnancy – but the doctor requested cash payment to write the letter. OCAP responded: "I presume that this whole matter is a joke and that someone in your office is offering a satire on inflexible bureaucracy at its most ludicrous and damaging..."⁸³ Two hours later the woman's demands were met.

The slashing of welfare rates placed an enormous strain on food banks and charities; but soup alone could not fill the bellies of the poor. Thus in 1995, Conservative Social Services minister David Tsubouchi suggested welfare recipients bargain at grocery stores; dented cans of tuna, he proposed, might qualify for a discount: "People should take whatever means they can to try to be as economical and wise when they do shop."⁸⁴ In response 70 OCAP activists filled grocery carts in an upscale Loblaws and proceeded to the checkout with their own 21.6 percent discount cards. Business was halted. Five people were arrested.⁸⁵ John Clarke described the act as "an example of how to ridicule a

⁸² OCAP picketed at the Great West life insurance office in Toronto while supporters in Winnipeg protested outside the company's central office. See, "Two Victories: OCAP's daily victories, for, and by, the poor" *ZNet* (23 May 2002) <<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=2013>>

⁸³ "Direct Action Casework Victories," *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 5 (Summer 2002), 8.

⁸⁴ "Tsubouchi flayed over tuna remarks," *Globe and Mail* 4 October 1995, A10.

⁸⁵ All those arrested were acquitted, while Tsubouchi was removed from cabinet. See, "Crown Squashes Tsubouchi's court appearance," *Globe and Mail*, 30 March 1996, A7.

government, cause a corporate financial backer pain and develop the militancy of those resisting them.”⁸⁶ In another food action in December 1996 OCAP invited homeless people to the Queens Park dining room to enjoy the roasts and desserts. Afterwards, OCAP panhandled the MPPs for the \$500 tab. The costs were covered but not a dime came from the pocket of a Tory MPP.⁸⁷

Food is not only an issue of protest but a community builder. According to Gaetan Heroux it was not until 1995 that OCAP began to have meals at events. Local drop-in centers lent their kitchens to OCAP chefs. Food “grounds us in those communities,” says Heroux, “and allows us to bring those agencies on board” that have, at certain times, overcome their fear of government funding cuts and condemned government policies that target poor people.⁸⁸ In September 1997 OCAP held a barbecue outside a motel serving as a shelter for refugee gypsies.⁸⁹ The Mohawk Tyendinaga has provided OCAP events with poached deer and fish. In 1999 two OCAP trips to Ottawa paused to enjoy a feast at a Tyendinaga reserve. Sean Brant, a Tyendinaga and OCAP activist presented venison at an OCAP Parkdale meal. “We went into the bush and harvested that deer. We didn’t have Mike Harris’s permission to take it out of season. You might call us poachers but we didn’t go to a supermarket and beg,” Brant proudly announced.⁹⁰ To protest “the war on the poor and the free ride of the rich,” a feast for 500 poor people in 2003 sent the odour of venison adrift in the wealthy Yorkville neighbourhood.”⁹¹

⁸⁶ Clarke, “Meek Shall inherit Diddley-squat,” 14.

⁸⁷ “Antipoverty Direct Action in Ontario since 1990: 15th Anniversary Calendar”, (2005).

⁸⁸ Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

⁸⁹ The Gypsies had recently been targeted by a group of neo-Nazi’s chanting slogans, “Honk if you Hate Gypsies.” OCAP along with ARA carried signs at their feast that read: “Honk if you Hate Racists!”

⁹⁰ Joe Fiorito, “Gritty meeting, no matter how you slice it,” *National Post*, 14 December 2000, A25.

⁹¹ “Antipoverty Direct Action in Ontario since 1990: 15th Anniversary Calendar”, (2005).

A more brazen “Robin Hood” food action occurred in September 2004 when OCAP entered a Loblaws and stole \$3,525 worth of groceries to serve at a feast at Allan Gardens. An OCAP statement read that the theft “serves notice to the McGuinty Government that, if they won’t reverse the Tory giveaway to the rich, the process of redistribution will happen anyway.”⁹² Joe Fiorito attended the feast and shared with Clarke that Loblaws donates 50,000 pounds of meat to Second Harvest, a charity that distributes food to the poor. Clarke responded, “It’s fairly standard in the corporate world to engage in some sort of philanthropy and write off the cost.” Charities, OCAP contends, are too often a source of marginalization and no solution to poverty.

In the spring of 2005 Jonah Schein, a York University student discovered a cost the government would have difficulty writing off. In the Ontario Welfare Act, Schein found a provision for recipients to receive a \$250 a month doctor-ordered supplement to meet their dietary needs. Following Schein’s information, OCAP set up clinics across the city (and coordinated clinics across Ontario) staffed by medical professionals willing to sign the paperwork. Over a million dollars worth of funding and 4,000 people were signed up in the first six months in Toronto.⁹³ While Mayor David Miller and city council slowed down the process for applicants it was the new Liberal Queen’s Park that slashed the supplement provisions on 4 November 2005.⁹⁴ OCAP activists have continued to fight for the reinstatement of the supplement and, more importantly, a 40 percent increase in the welfare rate.

⁹² “Antipoverty Direct Action in Ontario since 1990: 15th Anniversary Calendar”, (2005).

⁹³ http://ocap.ca/rtr/diet/press_release August 15 2005

⁹⁴ The new supplement is available only for those with extreme health problems; with a liver disease one might expect an extra \$10 a month, while those with AIDS might warrant up to \$240 extra a month.

Without a fixed address many homeless people are unable to collect welfare, let alone a special diet supplement. Instead they often find a piece of pavement where they can beg and panhandle. Since the early 1990s street youth have squeegeed vehicles on Toronto street corners. In January 1997 OCAP mass panhandled through the Eaton's center after Police Chief Boothby called for a crackdown on panhandlers.⁹⁵ The following summer Mayor Mel Lastman dumped \$1.9 million on a Community Action Policing program with 175 policeman working overtime dishing out fines and harassing squeegeers.⁹⁶ To protest 20 OCAP activists conducted a mass squeegee alongside 100 squeegee artists. Street kids shimmied up telephone polls and tied banners. On the ground, an army of sponges thudded against windshields.⁹⁷ In January 1999 Mike Harris enacted the Safe Streets Act.⁹⁸ A dozen OCAP activists were there to panhandle the government. Clarke commented, "The people you've denied a basic living income to are going to continue to do what's necessary to live... that means squeegeeing. And that means coming here and getting in your face."⁹⁹ By April 30-odd squeegeers were fined \$200 each.¹⁰⁰ OCAP has defended Safe Streets Act tickets in court, winning over 1,000 cases in 2000.¹⁰¹ Lawyer Edward Sapiano enlisted 30 lawyers to represent people

⁹⁵ "Antipoverty Direct Action in Ontario since 1990: 15th Anniversary Calendar", (2005).

⁹⁶ The following year the City of Toronto invested \$2.1 million in its CAP program. In eleven weeks, 62,862 people were investigated with two out of three reported being assaulted or threatened with arrest. In August 2000 police complaints by citizens were up by 30 percent. See, "Above the Law," *Street Post* 5:1 (Spring 2003), 4.

⁹⁷ The rally occurred on 11 July 1998. A repeat demonstration was held on 22 August 1998 with the slogan "Hands off Street Youth." 1000 OCAP activists, poor people, anarchists and the Anti-Racist Action (ARA) organization marched to Toronto's 52 Division to denounce the police crackdown on panhandling.

⁹⁸ The "Safe Streets Act" restricted "aggressive panhandling," and slapped up to \$500 fine for first offences and up to \$1000 for repeat offenders. Explicitly, the Safe Streets Act made it illegal to solicit near any vehicle, bank, roadway or bus stop.

⁹⁹ Richard Mackie, "Critics attack Ontario bill for punishing poor people," *Globe and Mail*, 30 November 1999, A25.

¹⁰⁰ Colin Freeze, "Squeegee kids reeling from police campaign," *Globe and Mail*, 21 April 2000, A14.

¹⁰¹ Clarke, "Meek shall inherit diddley-squat," 14. The majority of the cases are dismissed after the arresting officer fails to show up in court.

charged under the new law.¹⁰² Aside from legal support OCAP has also produced a pamphlet advising panhandlers on how to handle police confrontations.¹⁰³

When squeegeers have wanted off the street OCAP's Mike Coward has been an essential resource. For over ten years Coward has collected lists of available affordable housing and is a pro at speeding up housing applications. Coward assists individual complaints against landlords. He sits as an advocate on housing and rental tribunals. The following is one of many atypical cases Coward defends. After their apartment flooded, a family of four had their hotel paid for by their landlord. After one week the landlord stopped payment and made no effort to repair the apartment. OCAP contacted the housing tribunal and the landlord; as a result, the family won all costs, transportation, compensation for damaged belongings, and three months rent.¹⁰⁴ On occasion, Coward's letters fail to make an impression. In early 2004 a woman at the Regent Park public housing project came to OCAP after living for four months with sewage from an upstairs apartment leaking from a hole above her toilet. The owner, the municipally funded Toronto Community Housing Corporation (TCHC) sent in a repairman who fled after assessing the extent of the damage. Their letters unheeded, OCAP members collected six litres of sewage and delivered it to the TCHC district manager - repairs were made that afternoon. Helping people on individual housing casework has brought new members into the fold. After halting a drug-addict's eviction, Coward recalls the man's excitement

¹⁰² Susan Bourette, "Critics, panhandlers plan next moves as province's squeegee law takes effect," *Globe and Mail*, 1 February 2000, A19. Meanwhile Peter Rosenthal is currently preparing a constitutional challenge to the safe streets act, claiming the Charter was contradicted, "by preventing people in need from asking others for help." See, *Globe and Mail*, 21 April 2000, A19.

¹⁰³ "Squeegee Workers and Panhandlers: Know your Rights," n.d. (2000).

¹⁰⁴ "Bureaucrats, tremble in your boots," *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 6 (2003), 5.

upon realizing his Spanish translation skills could help OCAP reach local immigrant populations.¹⁰⁵

The homeless have also benefited from individual casework. OCAP has accompanied homeless people to various shelters across the city to ensure their entry.¹⁰⁶ Just as common have been collective struggles against shelter owners and operators. OCAP joined with residents of the Christie/Ossington men's shelter after they complained of being forced into freezing weather at 7:30 a.m. Led by Bernie, an ex-OCAP squatter, the men staged a sit-in, demanding the shelter stay open until noon, provide bus tickets on cold weather days, and there be no repercussions for demonstrating. OCAP assured the manager they would back up the men's demands. "Not for another day throughout the rest of the winter did residents get the boot when it was freezing outside."¹⁰⁷ Similarly, when the Maxwell-Meighen shelter, run by the Salvation Army, increased its nightly bed rental from \$7 to \$10 in April 2003, 30 OCAP members protested inside the building. The Salvation Army called off the rent increase.¹⁰⁸

Challenging the front line service providers for homeless people might grant concessions but it fails to create or maintain existing shelters. Thus OCAP has been diligent in pressuring all three levels of government to address the issue of homelessness. After successfully lobbying Toronto to add new hostel beds over the winter of 1998-99, 80 OCAP activists stormed a spring city meeting that deliberated on closing 600 shelter beds and passing a bylaw that would limit low-income housing to buildings not

¹⁰⁵ Mike Coward, personal interview, 5 July 2005.

¹⁰⁶ Dominick, "Reinventing Antipoverty".

¹⁰⁷ "Bureaucrats, tremble in your boots," *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 6 (2003), 5.

¹⁰⁸ "Bureaucrats, tremble in your boots," *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 6 (2003), 5.

exceeding three units.¹⁰⁹ OCAP refused to leave city hall until police clad in bulletproof vests dispersed them. The bylaw was defeated but the shelters soon threw patrons outdoors. Four years later, city council contemplated a shelter bylaw that would place a moratorium on shelter beds; the bylaw also suggested 'trainee' cops as shelter security. On 4 February 2003 10 OCAP members interrupted city council: "We do not take the death of people living on the street lightly and will not accept a by-law that contributes to such a senseless loss of life."¹¹⁰

Also at the municipal level, OCAP has butted heads with business leaders and citizens who sought to sanitize their neighbourhoods. On 18 July 1998 OCAP picketed Toronto's oldest restaurant, the Senator, after the owner successfully lobbied to shut down a homeless hostel next door. Pickets continued until the owner wrote to the city requesting the reopening of the shelter.¹¹¹ Similarly, on 19 June 1999 OCAP protestors picketed a gas station after the manager prevented the opening of a shelter near his pumps.¹¹² Affluent "not-in-my-backyard" (nimby) citizens have also been targeted. In July 1995 800 OCAP supporters marched from the Regent Park housing project to the ritzy Rosedale neighbourhood to impress upon residents that "Tory tax breaks to the rich and cuts to the poor mean \$1 million a month is leaving Regent Park bound for Rosedale."¹¹³ On 5 August 1997 OCAP clashed heads with the Toronto Downtown East Residents Association (TDERA), a nimby stronghold. With the slogan, "Yuppie Residents Back Off," OCAP picketed two homes of TDERA leaders, declaring, "If they

¹⁰⁹ The Doctor's Hospital (100 beds) Salvation Army Lighthouse shelter and a women's 30-bed facility were all slated for closure.

¹¹⁰ "OCAP blitzes city council over anti-homeless bylaw," *A-Info News Service* (4 February 2003) <<http://www.ainfos.ca/03/feb/ainfos00076.html>>

¹¹¹ "Antipoverty Direct Action in Ontario since 1990: 15th Anniversary Calendar", (2005).

¹¹² PJ Lilley, personal interview, 2 July 2005.

¹¹³ "Antipoverty Direct Action in Ontario since 1990: 15th Anniversary Calendar", (2005).

find the face of poverty so unpleasant that they want to drive it from the neighbourhood, we will take it right to their doorsteps.”¹¹⁴ By holding business and citizen social cleansers accountable for poverty, OCAP extends its critique beyond political institutions. The entire social organization of capital and property must bear the responsibility of Canada’s indigent.

In an attempt to hold the Conservative provincial government accountable for homelessness and poverty, OCAP sought media attention through symbolic protest. On 12 June 2004 OCAP activists “evicted” Finance Minister Jim Flaherty from his Whitby constituency office. John Clarke said the raid was to make Flaherty feel “the extreme disruption, intense suffering and extreme humiliation” that tenants facing evictions feel.¹¹⁵ OCAP activists overturned file cabinets, moved furniture into the street and scrawled, “Fuck your corporate pride” on closet doors and “Fuck Gender” on the wall of the women’s washroom.¹¹⁶ Absent from the office, Flaherty was furious at OCAP for “terrorizing” his four staff. Nineteen people were arrested.¹¹⁷

OCAP also engaged in “street theatre” to expose the federal government’s inadequate provisions to the homeless. In 1999 OCAP protestors traveled twice to Ottawa. On 9 February 1999 2000 homeless activists from Ontario and Quebec collided with Ottawa police and the RCMP on the parliament grounds.¹¹⁸ A few days later the

¹¹⁴ Margaret Philp, “Poverty crusade gets personal,” *Globe and Mail*, 20 September 1997, A1.

¹¹⁵ *Toronto Star*, 17 June 2001, A1.

¹¹⁶ Mark Gollom and Robert Benzie, “Poverty activists vow to increase civil disobedience,” *National Post*, 13 June 2001, A16.

¹¹⁷ The longest held were Clarke (25 days), released on \$40,000 bail and Sean Lee-Popham released on house arrest after 37 days in prison. See, Tracy Huffman, “Poverty activist released from jail,” *Toronto Star*, 10 July 2001, B4; Catherine Dunphy, “Activist under house arrest,” *Toronto Star*, 20 August 2001, B5.

¹¹⁸ Activists were refused a political audience, save for a ruffled Joe Clark who ambled into the crowd of angry protestors. See, Erin Anderssen, “Clark invited mishap, antipoverty group says,” *Globe and Mail*, 13 February 1999, A10.

federal government announced its National Homelessness Initiative, a three year \$753 million investment to assist local governments in establishing shelters, food banks and other required services and facilities for the poor.¹¹⁹ John Clarke believed the demonstration “helped convince the Chretien government” to provide homeless funding. Another Ottawa protest the following November was far less peaceful.¹²⁰ A line of pepper spraying riot cops drove protestors off parliament hill after they attempted to remove metal barricades. Protestors hurled hockey sticks, cans and bottles at the police.¹²¹

When not removing obstacles, OCAP constructs homes. Since 1997 OCAP activists have embarked on seven different squatting actions. Taking over a vacant building or a public space has several repercussions: it draws public and government attention to safe, livable places for the homeless; it empowers poor people to participate in a collective creation of home; and is an immediate way for OCAP to move people off the streets. However, rapid and frequently violent police evictions often occur before protestors have time to roll out their sleeping bags.

In the spring of 1997 OCAP squatted twice at 88-90 Carlton. Both times riot police with pepper spray arrested protestors within hours. Jim Cywink, a homeless man, explained his involvement: “I’ve seen murders, abuse at hostels. People can’t even sleep without having one eye open . . . That’s why people are sleeping on the streets. That’s

¹¹⁹ At the end of the three years 1,700 projects were funded \$426 million. In 2002 the National Homelessness Initiative was renewed for another 3 years. See, Sue Bailey, “Federal Government Homeless Initiative,” 3 May 2003.
<http://action.web.ca/home/housing/alerts.shtml?x=34236&AA_EX_Session=1abdaab945d16aaed14a94352cef10b7> (26 June 2006)

¹²⁰ Once again Chretien refused to speak the protestors. Labour Minister Claudette Bradshaw told reporters she tried to arrange an interview but was rebuffed.

¹²¹ Shawn McCarthy, “RCMP officers pepper-spray demonstrators,” *Globe and Mail*, 18 November 1999, A4.

why people are dying on the streets.”¹²² At the court hearing, Judge Cole dismissed the charges, calling the squat “altruistically motivated.”¹²³ After the Carlton squats, the federal government rehabilitated the building and turned it into social housing. In November of 1997, citing a need for 700 shelter beds, OCAP took over a vacant Doctor’s Hospital. Unsatisfied with the assurance that a shelter for 100 beds would be open by December, activists held out for hours before the Toronto police emergency task force broke in and arrested all 13 on charges of mischief and unlawful assembly. Within a month the Fort York Armories opened as a shelter and the Doctor’s Hospital was employed as a temporary winter solution to homelessness.¹²⁴

Based on the failure to provide a long-term squat, OCAP changed tactics to occupy a park in lieu of a building.¹²⁵ On 7 August 1999 OCAP’s “Safe Park” at Allan Gardens was filled with 800 protestors carrying heaping plates of Tyendinaga fish and venison. The Safe Park issued a proclamation, “let the city be on notice that it is our right to secure a safe place to sleep, eat and live that won’t be interfered with.” One OCAP activist commented, “the park was a beacon of mutual aid in practice” with people eating, caring and living together.¹²⁶ The homeless argued that the park was preferable to overcrowded and violent hostels.¹²⁷ Three days later 90 police gave 60-odd campers 15

¹²² *Times Colonist*, 6 March 1997, A9.

¹²³ Thomas Claridge, “Housing activists spared jail for break-in,” *Globe and Mail* 16 December 1998, A14.

¹²⁴ Dominick, “Reinventing Antipoverty”.

¹²⁵ Ostensibly the “Safe Park” was also in protest of Lastman’s Community Action Policing program. OCAP pitched the “Safe Park” idea to City Council, requesting tents, portable toilets and video cameras to protect residents. Council denied the request.

¹²⁶ Shantz, “Fighting to Win!” 3.

¹²⁷ Lila Sarick, “Poverty group leader vexes politicians with confrontational tactics,” *Globe and Mail*, 10 August 1999, A9. Meanwhile Mel Lastman and Mike Harris raged against the occupation: Lastman called OCAPers “professional bums” and John Clarke a “thug.” See, “Toronto mayor at war with city’s homeless,” *Lethbridge Herald*, 10 August 1999, 5.

minutes to pack their bags. Twenty-seven people were arrested.¹²⁸ No new hostel spaces were won and the homeless dispersed. According to Clarke, the safe park was an act of resistance against hegemonic property rights:

No concept of 'squatters' right' has ever become part of the legal and social fabric in Canada precisely because no generalized resistance to the 'property rights' of the greedy and socially destructive has emerged . . . a mass squatters' movement would be a crash course in practical anti-capitalist resistance. Their sacred 'property rights' and 'rule of law' would have to give way to the much more meaningful right of communities to act in their own defence and to win the basic human right to shelter.¹²⁹

Three years later OCAP squatted again to challenge capital. The "Mission Squat" coincided with the provincial Conservative convention to elect new leader, Ernie Eves, in March 2002. At 8 p.m. OCAP squatters, approximately 60 strong, moved in. Wishing to occupy the building over night, Gaetan Heroux believed they were going to be safe.¹³⁰ Not so. Two hours later, a police force lobbed tear gas into the building. At least one person was tasered. Dozens of OCAP squatters were arrested, strip-searched and interrogated at 52 Division station. By the next morning Don Weitz claims he had not yet been able to contact a lawyer.¹³¹ The vigor shown by the police was effective; OCAP's Mission squat failed to flag the attention of mainstream media outlets or provoke the city to open new shelter spaces. Spirits were damaged; Heroux recalled everyone was anxious after getting the "shit kicked out of them . . . how do you tell people that this is worth doing?"¹³² Someone, however, suggested a squat to coincide with Pope John Paul II's Toronto visit for World Youth Day the following summer. With the police stretched to

¹²⁸ Shantz, "Fighting to Win!" 3.

¹²⁹ John Clarke, "The fight for housing moves for forward," *New Socialist* 38 (October-November 2002), 1.

¹³⁰ Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

¹³¹ Don Weitz, "The squat, jail and police brutality; a preliminary eyewitness report," *Street Post* 5:2 (September 2002), 11-15.

¹³² Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

their limit with event security and with international media attention on the city, OCAP hoped to draw eyes not truncheons to the plight of homelessness.

Tim Groves spent days leading up to the Pope Squat to find a suitable location.¹³³ The result: 1510 King St West in the east end neighbourhood of Parkdale, a former abandoned rooming house owned by a numbered Mississauga company. The owner's corporate status had been revoked in 1994 and ever since the city of Toronto had accumulated a hefty bill.¹³⁴ As it turned out the nebulous ownership prevented a police eviction; Sergeant Robb Knapper admitted they could not forcibly enter the building without permission of the owner.¹³⁵

On 25 July 2002 1,000 homeless people, OCAP activists and supporters marched from Masaryk-Cowan Park with banners festooned with "What would Jesus Say? BUILD HOUSING NOW."¹³⁶ OCAP drafted a list of squat demands which included converting the building into housing; inspection and repairs of all unsafe substandard housing; the end to economic evictions; raising the minimum wage from \$6.85 to \$10.00; reinstating rent control; and building 2000 units of social housing every year.¹³⁷ In the absence of an immanent police eviction, residents and OCAP supporters swung hammers and brooms, inspired by the belief that "through collective initiative, hard work and imagination, we

¹³³ Groves first wetted his direct action appetite as a youth organizer in an OCAP-supported high school flying squad that protested cuts to public education and the introduction of standardized testing. Tim Groves, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

¹³⁴ In 1995, with residents still occupying the building, the city paid \$5,200 for hydro and \$2,073 for plumbing. By 2002 city liens against the property were at least \$15,808 and back taxes amounted to \$38,000. See, Paul Martin, "We need leaders who give a squat about cities and housing," *Toronto Star*, 27 July 2002, A18; Kerry Gillespie, "We'll talk to province if squatters leave, city says," *Toronto Star*, 2 August 2002, B5.

¹³⁵ Not that they did not try - within twenty-four hours the cops descended on the squat with guns and flashlights but left when they realized they could not do anything. *National Post*, 10 August 2002, 1.

¹³⁶ Stefan Pilipa, "Pope Squat," *New Socialist* 37 <<http://newsocialist.org/magazine/37.html>> (August-September 2002).

¹³⁷ "Pope Squat: Demonstration & Action for Housing & Income," pamphlet, (25 July 2002).

can restore a building that would otherwise be left to rot or be demolished. We invest long hours and our own money, not asking for any handouts from the government.”¹³⁸

The building was dilapidated. It took over a month for running water and electricity to be restored. Mouldy carpets and drywall were torn up, handrails fixed, holes in the roof reshingled and two dumpsters of rotten materials, garbage and furniture removed. The front garden soon sprouted swiss chard, tomatoes, lettuce and marigolds.¹³⁹ Samuel Tassej described how his cleaning efforts contradicted the stereotype of “lazy” poor people: “If you were here you’d see me working. I’ve cleaned up my room, I helped build inside. Just come and watch me.”¹⁴⁰ As the *New Socialist* reported: “OCAP is not known for its softer, friendlier side, but it must be stated . . . [the Pope Squat] became beautiful in the way that everyone involved became deeply invested in the fate of the building and property, imagining its eventual transformation into decent, affordable housing.”¹⁴¹ After a month the squat provided housing to 15 previously homeless people.

The outpouring of support from left-leaning organizations heartened OCAP. On 31 July Buzz Hargrove and the CAW offered \$50,000 towards converting the Pope Squat.¹⁴² On 2 August 2000 union supporters marched in solidarity with the Pope Squat. Five days later 100 squat supporters rallied in front of city hall. Dozens of people donated their time, tools, food and entertainment: Ron Hawkins Jr. of Lowest of the Low held a concert while Avi Lewis and Naomi Klein filled the backyard with 300 people for a film screening.

¹³⁸ “Why Squat?” *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 5 (Summer 2002), 2.

¹³⁹ Michele Landsberg, “Squatters have right idea about derelict housing,” *Toronto Star*, 28 September 2002, K1.

¹⁴⁰ *National Post*, 10 August 2002, 1.

¹⁴¹ Stefan, “Pope Squat”.

¹⁴² Abigail Pugh, “Rapping With OCAP: This poor org’s about more than arrests and protests,” *Eye Weekly* <http://www.eye.net/eye/issue/issue_08.07.03/city/ocap.html> (7 August 2003).

City officials and the Ontario Attorney General turned to the fire marshal for authority to end the Pope squat.¹⁴³ Tearing down the doors on 25 October 2002 the squat was raided by a dozen fire marshals and 100 police officers. Fire Prevention Division Chief Jack Collins ruled the place unsafe for human habitation, citing a broken fire alarm, poor electrical wiring, cracks in the walls and fire doors. The water and electricity were shut off. On 1 November the remaining residents at 1510 King St. W. were evicted. One couple left without a fuss: "Well, maybe it is worth it [to try and stay] but I'd rather be walking on the street than in jail." Fifty OCAP activists flocked to the site after the eviction and "complained about the absurdity of moving people from an unsafe building only to push them to equally unsafe conditions in homeless shelters and on the streets."¹⁴⁴ Three members were arrested. By mid-November the city had already spent \$12,000 to guard the building around the clock from the poor.¹⁴⁵

Just as the Pope squat was dismantled OCAP attempted to seize two more buildings but were thwarted by police.¹⁴⁶ In 2003 the "Gatekeepers Squat" came to symbolize government broken promises.¹⁴⁷ The Bridgepoint hospital property and former shelter was chosen as a squat location after a homeless man died near its entrance in June

¹⁴³ Initially in August city council voted 23-6 in favour of turning the building into social housing on the condition that OCAP move out. If not, said councilor Chris Korwin-Kuczynski, "we'll sell it. You have to make a stand . . . this can't become a trend; anarchy can't decide the future of anything." See, Kerry Gillespie, "Squatters clean, repair building," *Toronto Star*, 8 August 2002, D5.

¹⁴⁴ *Toronto Star*, 2 November 2002, B5.

¹⁴⁵ Sarah Lamble, "Peterborough Coalition Against Poverty: Guide for Squatters," OPIRG – Peterborough (June 2003), 59.

¹⁴⁶ In the "Give it or Guard it" campaign, city-owned 224 George St. and 213 Parliament St. were chosen after the city announced plans to sell the buildings. See, Jack Lakey, "Squat protestors back down; police in riot gear on scene," *Toronto Star*, 27 October 2002, A4; Paul Moloney, "Councilors to activists; get a job," *Toronto Star* 30 October 2002, B4.

¹⁴⁷ The 558 Gerrard St.E. building was owned by the Bridgepoint Hospital but Corrections Ontario leased and maintained the building.

2003. Five hundred OCAP activists stormed the Gatekeeper.¹⁴⁸ As mediator, Liberal MP Dennis Mills promised activists he would quit if he could not convert the building into social housing within a month. Cautiously optimistic, the squatters disbanded. One month later Mills claimed he had reached an agreement but Bridgepoint Hospital denied being contacted.¹⁴⁹ Instead, the hospital announced they planned to use the property for their own expansion. On 27 February 2004 OCAP protestors shouted down Dennis Mills at a news conference to develop the Toronto waterfront.¹⁵⁰ Mills' inaction gave evidence to support OCAP's claims of the honesty and class allegiance of Canada's political representation. On describing the OCAP hijacked news conference one OCAPer wrote,

Mills stands exposed for the faker he is. He thought to posture on the issue of social housing, deliver nothing yet come out of the whole affair smelling like a rose but he miscalculated. The look of fear and loathing on his face was a picture that we enjoyed on behalf of all those he has left to sleep on the streets.¹⁵¹

The most recent squat occurred on 13 November 2004 when 500 people marched from All Saints Church to the six-storey 590 Jarvis St. building, a former police headquarters, and homeless shelter. OCAP activists had hoped new, progressive-leaning mayor, David Miller, would take a softer line on homeless activism than his predecessor Mel Lastman. However, under Miller's authority, police used pepper spray, shields and horses and arrested sixteen activists.¹⁵² OCAP continues to research and pursue new locations for squats, empowering poor people to consider capitalism's discards as sites for homes and communities.

¹⁴⁸ PJ Lilley and partner Jeff Shantz had their two-year-old child taken by police. OCAP activists surrounded the police until their son was returned. Lilley, however, was one of four arrested. PJ Lilley, personal interview, 2 July 2005.

¹⁴⁹ James Cowan, "Mills chided for not keeping promise," *National Post*, 21 January 2004, A12.

¹⁵⁰ Steve Fairbairn, "Group claims MP ignoring homeless," *Windsor Star*, 28 February 2004, A11.

¹⁵¹ <http://www.ocap.ca/ocapnews/gatekeeper.html>

¹⁵² Bruce Demara, "16 protesters arrested after clash with police," *Toronto Star*, 14 November 2004, A11. The *Star* did not report on the pepper spray, claiming only that there were complaints of police shoving.

Just as OCAP seizes buildings for the homeless it also defends the global poor who desire to make Canada their home. The odds of poor immigrants touching Canadian soil are slim. Arriving in Canada immigrants seeking refugee status must face an officer of Citizen and Immigration Canada who decides whether the applicant meets the requirements to be reviewed by the Immigration and Refugee Board (IRG). Of those that are approved to the IRG, only five to 10 percent are granted refugee status; the rest are deported with no chance of appeal. Those lucky enough to remain, illegally or legally, face a poorly paid, often xenophobic workplace, or without work, the bureaucratic welfare office.¹⁵³

OCAP's immigration casework is motivated by the belief that legal status definitions are the justification for capital to exploit and divide the workforce. According to Jeff Shantz, "when the legal state creates and perpetuates phony divisions between workers through immigration laws and the construction of 'legals' and 'illegals' we must recognize this as part of the spatialized class war."¹⁵⁴ By using immigration status as a means to unequally distribute "rights," those who are "illegal" can be denied social benefits and create "a precarious workforce willing to take on undesirable or dangerous work."¹⁵⁵ Similarly, national borders have been made fluid for big business under NAFTA/FTAA, yet the flow of people has become more difficult; thus capital is able to move to cheaper, captive labour markets, intensifying poverty in both developed and

¹⁵³ After the September 11th terrorist attacks, the federal government passed Bill C-11 that made welfare recipients ineligible to sponsor the immigration of a spouse or children. The bill also expanded powers of detention and cut the number of judges who decide refugee eligibility. See, Stefanie Gude, "A 'smart border': The Canadian state rushes to keep up with its racist and regressive neighbour," *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 5 (Summer 2002), 4.

¹⁵⁴ Shantz, "Class Struggle," 4.

¹⁵⁵ Shantz, "Class Struggle," 1.

developing countries. For OCAP immigration is an issue of poverty in the shadow of capital.¹⁵⁶

Between 1998 and 2001 OCAP supported over 50 families in a bid to win landed immigrant status.¹⁵⁷ John Clarke estimated that their success rate on immigration appeals was 70 percent thanks to their combined collective action and legal work.¹⁵⁸ Immigration cases have only increased since 2001 while maintaining a healthy success rate. As Brian Dominick has stated, immigration officials found, like welfare personnel, that OCAP's direct action was best countered with concessions than defiance.¹⁵⁹

On 25 May 1998 OCAP took its first case to the immigration enforcement centre. Saber Ebrahimzadeh and his two sons were scheduled for deportation to Iran. The youngest child Ali, suffering from cystic fibrosis, pleaded his case. Ali's doctors gave him two years to live if he did not continue with his Canadian treatment. Immigration officials abandoned all plans to deport the family.¹⁶⁰ Critical to OCAP's immigration success has been involving ethnic communities. On 7 September 2000 100 people from the Toronto Somali community and OCAP supporters defended four families facing deportation, appealing their stay on humanitarian grounds. Immigration officials called the police but no one budged until the deportations were cancelled.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁶ Even John Clarke has encountered border officials. In February 2002 Clarke was stopped at the border as he traveled to a speaking engagement at Michigan State University. The questioning, conducted by Edward J. Seitz, a special agent for the State Department of US Diplomatic Security Service, ranged from the scary to the bizarre. Clarke was questioned about the 15 June 2002 Queen's Park riot. He was also asked if he knew the whereabouts of Osama Bin Laden! See John Clarke, "Interrogation at the US-Canada Border" *ZNet* (27 February 2002) <http://www.zmag.org/content/Repression/clarke_border.cfm> (26 June 2006).

¹⁵⁷ Shantz, "Class Struggle," 1.

¹⁵⁸ Podur, "When the Class Line is Drawn".

¹⁵⁹ Dominick, "Reinventing Antipoverty".

¹⁶⁰ "Antipoverty Direct Action in Ontario since 1990: 15th Anniversary Calendar", (2005).

¹⁶¹ Levant, "Flying Squads".

Thirty OCAP activists entered the Toronto Pearson Airport on 5 September 2001 to protest three families facing deportation. One couple, Farouk and Aziza, had left Kenya twelve years earlier and had lost their refugee claim despite the fact that all three of their children had medical disabilities. At the airport OCAP leafleted passengers informing them that Air Canada had a contract with Immigration Canada to profit from returning refugees to their native countries. When all three families received landed status Jeff Shantz called the win “a testament to the powers of direct action.”¹⁶²

Brendalyn, an immigrant domestic worker, won legal status after OCAP appealed her case. Michelle Landsberg of the *Toronto Star* followed Brendalyn’s story and praised OCAP for its “quiet” work. Landsberg says it is too simple to see domestic refugee workers as “illegals” because of their integral importance in the Canadian economy. “Canada became a magnet for so many women from the Caribbean precisely... to mind our children while Canadian women went out to work. It was one way the government could avoid providing a top-notch national child-care service.”¹⁶³ Not just governments benefited from this arrangement but also the families who were able to hire illegals at less than market rate.

Individual casework is often poor people’s introduction to OCAP. The same could not be said for the general public. OCAP’s mainstream reputation is based on two large-scale protests. The first, the Queen’s Park Riot in 2000, consolidated some of OCAP’s key demands around poverty and homelessness while the police, juridical and media response revealed the ideology and limits of the liberal hegemony. The second, the 2001

¹⁶² Jeff Shantz, “Class Struggle Against borders in Ontario,” *Northeastern Anarchist* 5 (December 2002): 3.

¹⁶³ Michel Lansberg, “Vulnerable women marked for deportation,” *Toronto Star*, 17 February 2002, 2.

Bay Street Shutdown, was a concrete and symbolic attempt to translate “anticapitalism” into practice.

On 15 June 2000 1,500 homeless people and OCAP activists marched to Queen’s Park to demand the repeal of the welfare cut, the Tenant Protection Act and the Safe Streets Act. “Moral appeals to the Tories are worse than useless and the time has come to create a mobilization that can stop them.”¹⁶⁴ OCAP requested that six people affected by homelessness speak to the legislative assembly. Addressing the legislature, however, is a privilege only granted to heads of state.¹⁶⁵ “I don’t give a rat’s ass about parliamentary tradition,” said Clarke.¹⁶⁶ Activists believed an unanswered protest would be a “strong and compelling form of activity from those being left to die on the streets [and] would have an important political impact.”¹⁶⁷ When Harris was asked why so many homeless would protest his government, he shrugged, “I don’t think any government has responded [to poverty] more than we have.”¹⁶⁸

After addressing the crowd, Clarke and other OCAP activists moved towards two metal barricades, behind which stood several hundred riot police. To the activists’ surprise the barricades were flimsy and unsecured; suddenly they were in direct confrontation with law enforcers.¹⁶⁹ Mass pandemonium ensued with \$16,000 in damages to Queen’s Park and 42 of 130 officers filing “injured on duty” forms while 25

¹⁶⁴ Shantz, “Fighting to Win!” 4.

¹⁶⁵ “Riot at Queen’s Park: Violence explodes at legislature protest,” *Globe and Mail*, 16 June 2000 A1.

¹⁶⁶ In court Clarke later clarified: “What I meant is that we are not concerned about the niceties of tradition.” See Harold Levy, “OCAP protest wasn’t a ‘stunt’ “ *Toronto Star*, 18 April 2003, F4.

¹⁶⁷ John Clarke, “What’s at Stake in the OCAP Trial?” *ZNet*

<<http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=3278>> (20 March 2003).

¹⁶⁸ Colin Freeze and Roma Luciw, “Chow faces probe over riot events,” *Globe and Mail* 17 June 2000, A22.

¹⁶⁹ Harold Levy, “Plan ‘disintegrated: Clarke’ *Toronto Star*, 17 April 2003, D5.

demonstrators required medical attention and 45 were arrested.¹⁷⁰ Police riot squad leader told reporters that the crowd behaved “as if they didn’t feel the blows.”¹⁷¹

Who initiated the violence depends on who is relating the story; protestors claimed that police executed a “punch out” where they bored into the crowd.¹⁷² Conversely, police and mainstream media reported that demonstrators lobbing bricks, paint and smoke bombs and even one Molotov cocktail provoked their response. Inspector Munroe claimed police merely diffused the violence: “Violence was deescalated even if the police advance seemed offensive.”¹⁷³ But authorities singled out Clarke as the riot’s mastermind. It was Clarke, they argued, that wanted a “political spectacle” and “direct confrontation with the police.”

From Clarke’s perspective, any violence that occurred was the result of poor people’s frustration and own initiative not the result of his counseling.¹⁷⁴ John Clarke claimed OCAP never advised violence but neither did they promote peace – most projectiles were gathered off the ground and were the result of spontaneous anger.¹⁷⁵ Heroux noted that stones are inefficient arsenal: “If your problem is with the bricks, then give us batons and shields and horses so we can deal with the police the way they dealt with us.”¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁰ OCAP ensured a team of nine registered nurses, one family physician and six first-aid specialists would be on hand to volunteer during the protest. One nurse, Kathryn Hardill was alarmed when she discovered that 9-11 would not answer the calls, considering the situation too dangerous. See Harold Levy, “Calls for ambulance aid ignored, nurse tells trial,” *Toronto Star*, 26 April 2003, B2.

¹⁷¹ Clarke, “Meek shall inherit diddley-squat,” 12.

¹⁷² Harold Levy, “Lawyer says riot charge baseless,” *Toronto Star*, 6 May 2003, B2.

¹⁷³ *Globe and Mail* 17 June 2000, A22.

¹⁷⁴ Richard Mackie, “Queen’s Park rioter says violence works,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 July 2000, A6.

¹⁷⁵ *Toronto Star*, 12 May 2003, A1.

¹⁷⁶ *Globe and Mail* 17 June 2000, A22. At the trial fellow OCAPer and York Political scientist David McNally testified that he witnessed Heroux being beaten by several police officers with truncheons. See, Harold Levy, “Professor saw police beat protestor” *Toronto Star*, 23 April 2003, B4. When Union and community groups called for a civilian investigation into the actions of the Toronto police, OCAP did not desire to participate. In a statement it said it is “not interested in diverting its efforts away from the struggle

Naomi Klein denounced the media's vilification of Clarke as "a Machiavellian puppeteer, pulling the strings of a limp, witless rent-a-mob"¹⁷⁷ She also questioned why the mainstream media insisted on spinning OCAP activists as "self-interested" and why protestors "putting [their] bod[ies] on the line for a set of beliefs" is so anathema to western culture.¹⁷⁸ OCAP activists, Klein wrote, are intelligent and talented people but instead of seeking wealth "they are using those highly marketable skills to work for power dispersal, to convince the least empowered members of Ontario society that they have powers – to organize collectively, to defend themselves against brutality and abuse – that are going unused."¹⁷⁹ Meanwhile, Judy Rebick emphasized that protestors "Were not... well-trained civil disobedience activists... these were poor and homeless people ... some people were angry enough to fight back."¹⁸⁰

For the next three years OCAP activists were dragged in and out of courts for their involvement with the 15 June protest. OCAP recognized the courts as apparati of capitalist rule but they have not shied away from defending themselves. As Clarke says, "if you are criminally charged then you may not like their laws but their laws recognize you so you might as well put up a good defence."¹⁸¹ Gaetan Heroux acknowledged that without Peter Rosenthal and OCAP's legal defense team, the gavel would have long

to defeat the Harris government by focusing on the predictable brutality of its police forces." See Egle Procuta, "Coalition wants civilian probe into Queen's Park riot" *Globe and Mail*, 11 July 2000, A16.

¹⁷⁷ Naomi Klein, "Would you invite John Clarke to your riot?" *Globe and Mail*, 21 June 2000, A11.

¹⁷⁸ *Globe and Mail*, 21 June 2000, A11.

¹⁷⁹ *Globe and Mail*, 21 June 2000, A11.

¹⁸⁰ Rebick, "Pitch battle is at doors of the legislature".

¹⁸¹ John Clarke, personal interview, 4 July 2005.

squashed OCAP. “We couldn’t have survived without the lawyers, we’d be hammered.”¹⁸²

After 15 June Clarke was charged “for counseling to participate in a riot” and Gaetan Heroux and Stefan Pilipa for “participating in a riot.”¹⁸³ For Clarke, and historian Bryan Palmer, the application of laws formerly used against communist unemployed organizers in the 1930s indicated a rupture from the peaceful concessions of a welfare state to a neoliberal agenda prepared to use criminal law to curtail the voices of poverty. According to Clarke, “the test the authorities are conducting is to find out whether they can impose serious prison terms on members of a movement they don’t like without paying too great a political price for it.”¹⁸⁴ Symbolic in its “democratic irony” the activists’ bail conditions were not to associate with each other or OCAP, participate in a demonstration or be near Allan Gardens or Queen’s Park.¹⁸⁵ Thus Clarke, Heroux, and Pilipa did not have the freedom to do their job.¹⁸⁶

On 11 May 2003 the four-month trial ended in a deadlocked jury and mistrial.¹⁸⁷ Heroux’s and Pilipa’s charges were dropped but Clarke faced a new jury. In response, 30 OCAP activists shut down Attorney-General Norm Sterling’s office for over an hour and

¹⁸² Gaetan Heroux, personal interview, 4 July 2005. Although Rosenthal, Bob Kellerman and Jeff House have worked pro bono, OCAP has still spent thousands of dollars to keep its members and poor people out of jail.

¹⁸³ Clarke faced up to five years while his comrades faced up to two years.

¹⁸⁴ Palmer, “Repression and Dissent,” 2.; John Clarke, “What’s at Stake in the OCAP Trial?”

¹⁸⁵ Palmer, “Riot Act,” 31. On 14 September 2000 Justice Peter Grossi ruled the bail conditions too restrictive and lifted the ban on engaging in peaceful protests and the right to visit Allan Gardens. However, Grossi upheld the decision that the activists could not go near legislature or associate with one another. See, Jane Gadd, “Judge shelves protestors’ bail conditions,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 September 2000, A21.

¹⁸⁶ Naomi Klein, “Crackdown: When police wage war against activists,” *Globe and Mail*, 15 November 2000, A15. Pilipa left OCAP and took a factory job: “We were fired – by legal means – from the job that we do.”

¹⁸⁷ John Clarke, “What’s at Stake in the OCAP Trial?” The final tab to Ontario taxpayers was over \$1 million. See, Kuhling and Levant, “OCAP trials and the Politics of Resistance.” On the “emotional stress” of the jurors, including one who was hospitalized during deliberation see, Harold Levy, “Jury flap marks OCAP mistrial,” *Toronto Star*, 12 May 2003, A1; “Mistrial declared in Clarke trial,” *Sudbury Star*, 12 May 2003, A10.

a half.¹⁸⁸ “We’ve always regarded this as politically motivated,” Clarke told the press, but “it’s now reached the point of political vendetta.”¹⁸⁹ Finally, in October 2003 Justice Harvey Spiegel stayed Clarke’s charges at the request of Rosenthal who argued that Clarke had not been brought to trial in a reasonable time as guaranteed in the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Clarke’s response was sanguine, “as I’ve come to have fairly modest expectations when it comes to the justice system.”¹⁹⁰

If Clarke had only modest expectations of the justice system, OCAP activists expected only further exploitation under a liberal capitalist hegemony. In the fall of 2001 OCAP created the Ontario Common Front (OCF), a collective of social organizations and unions from around the province to disrupt corporate institutions. OCF was based on the anti-capitalist assumption that political power is maintained and controlled not by governments but by business elite. OCF hoped “by pouring sand in the gas of Ontario economy [they] can rattle political and business leaders” and by “making things better for workers and the poor, [they] might actually interfere with the ability of corporations to make money.”¹⁹¹ The OCF mandate of economic disruption was radical in that it departed from the strategy of anti-globalization activists protesting government and summits towards a direct assault on its financial backers.¹⁹² While OCF acts were staged across the province it was the 16 October 2001 Bay Street Shutdown that most clearly expressed the OCF agenda.

¹⁸⁸ “Crown to Put John Clarke On Trial Again,” *NEFAC* <<http://nefac.net/node/463>> (18 June 2003).

¹⁸⁹ Siri Agrell, “Antipoverty activist faces new trial,” *National Post*, 19 June 2003, A17.

¹⁹⁰ Harold Levy, “Riot charges thrown out,” *Toronto Star*, 19 October 2003, A21.

¹⁹¹ Peter Gorrie, “In for the long haul: Activists prepare for battle,” *Toronto Star*, 17 February 2002, A7.

¹⁹² Mick, “An Anarchist Look at O16 and the Fall Campaign,” *NEFAC* <<http://nefac.net/node/63>> (8 November 2002).

“Capitalism? No thanks, we’ll shut down your fucking banks!” trumpeted an enthused participant.¹⁹³ At noon a multi-ethnic crowd of 600 marched out of Allan Gardens. Police on bicycle and horseback blocked their path - but after a few arrests, activists broke through the police lines. The snake march wove through the streets and their numbers grew to 2,000: union supporters, the I.W.W., anarchists and homeless outnumbered the police who watched anxiously from the sidelines. Traffic was snarled for over three hours. Protestors launched paintballs and scrawled graffiti on office buildings: “Eat the Rich”; “Smash the Banks!” and “Affordable Housing.” Protestors beckoned to suited employees: “Come join us... you’re in jail!”¹⁹⁴ Christopher Arsénault found his way onto the roof of the Royal York Hotel and spray-painted “stop murder” on the United States flag before lighting it on fire (rain prevented the flag’s combustion).¹⁹⁵ Just outside of Toronto OCF activists from Kingston blockaded the 401 and Don Valley Parkway causing massive traffic jams and “disrupting the ‘just-in-time’ economy that much of Ontario’s industry uses.”¹⁹⁶

Conservative estimates held that the economic disruption cost over \$200,000 while OCAP activists claim as much as \$1,000,000. Two officers and one protestor reported injuries.¹⁹⁷ Forty people were arrested on 70 charges. Chief Julian Fantino said police confiscated sticks, rocks, two-by-fours with “metal wing nuts in the ends,” concrete, Molotov ingredients, pepper spray, and numerous gas masks.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹³ Mick, “An Anarchist Look at O16”.

¹⁹⁴ Sonia Verma and Andrew Chung, “Poverty protest snarls traffic,” *Toronto Star*, 17 October 2001, A1.

¹⁹⁵ Tracy Huggman and Nick Pron, “Judge scolds OCAP protestors,” *Toronto Star*, 18 October 2001, B5.

¹⁹⁶ Mick, “An Anarchist Look at O16”.

¹⁹⁷ *Toronto Star*, 17 October 2001, A1.

¹⁹⁸ Paul Moloney and Bruce DeMara, “Mayor: We’ll sue ‘thugs’” *Toronto Star*, 17 October 2001, B1.

By crippling the economic heartland of Ontario the OCF not only hurt business, but also showed Canadians that a group of antipoverty activists, poor people, and their supporters blamed poverty on the unequal distribution of capitalist “material success”. As Tim Groves explained, “In the past protestors have brought moral arguments to the Harris government and the government has done nothing but ignore them. From now on we will not merely bring moral arguments, but instead use ‘economic disruption’ to hit them where they really hurt, in their piggy banks.”¹⁹⁹ To those complacent with the inevitability of capitalism, OCAP answered with the Bay Street Shutdown: poor people will fight their oppression under capitalist hegemony and will not stop until they win.

Behind every OCAP challenge or win against the liberal order lies the nuanced relationship of activists to the communities they serve. Through daily contact in the streets, shelters, an accessible office and open, consensual meetings OCAP activists endeavour to belong to the people they seek to mobilize. OCAP engages in forms of direct action because they are the communal tactics most accessible and empowering to the socially marginalized. Rather than demand order at demonstrations, poor people are encouraged to be themselves and not sanitize their emotional and physical response to their subjugation.

To complement their belief that decisions should be made by those most affected by them, OCAP activists have developed an ideology of action that reflects their practical potential within a postmodern environment. Sensitive to the interplay of social and economic forms of exploitation OCAP has moved beyond antipoverty activism as a white male pursuit by drawing women, First Nations and other ethnic peoples as equal partners, albeit with diverse concerns, into the fray of resistance. Experiencing the consensual and

¹⁹⁹ Tim Groves, ‘Disruptive Tactics,’ *They Call it Struggle for a Reason* 4 (June 2001), 26.

coercive aspects of the liberal order, activists are dubious of the possibility of state-based transformation. Equally unconvinced that poor people need meta-narratives or grand theories of social change to effectively resist neoliberalism, OCAP has adopted an anti-intellectual/theoretical stance. Instead, OCAP activists insist an evolving conception of the means of living otherwise can be crafted and expressed by poor people themselves through real life engagement and transformative reforms.

OCAP, despite its intentions, has been unable to redistribute socio-economic power – instead the antipoverty activists win concessions from the state and capital, prodding at the vulnerable attitudes, structures and personnel of the neoliberal order. While cognizant of this significant failing, for 16 years the OCAP community has not just resisted liberal capitalism but has explored and created ideological and ontological alternatives to the current social order. Fundamentally, they have insisted that a person's adherence to a liberal work ethic should not qualify one's right to equal access to the social and economic benefits of contemporary society. Through collective struggle, shared feasts and communal squats, OCAP's direct actions are committed to mutual aid in contrast to capitalist competition and liberal individualism. Finally, OCAP activists have linked their own localized struggle with the historical and contemporary counterhegemonic battles of other antipoverty activists, Canadian unions, indigenous peoples and the anti-globalization movement in order to explore collective possibilities for revolutionary change.

Conclusion

The great lesson of the unemployed struggles of the 1930s is that people fought to win. They went up against brutal political and bureaucratic structures and wore down their resistance. They exposed their callousness and poured shame on them but more than that, they disrupted the institutions that stood against them to the point where attacks were stopped and concessions forced through. That is what we must relearn today.¹

Learning the lessons of history is not a simple task for contemporary antipoverty activists. Despite shelves of analyses on social policy, Canadian social historians have not yet recorded the tradition of twentieth century antipoverty direct action nor have they interpreted poor people's acts as a serious contribution to the leftist project of living and thinking otherwise. This thesis attempts to rescue the political actions of a minority of Canada's indigent from historical obscurity through the analysis of three discrete moments of antipoverty activism. With many twentieth century poor people's movements yet to be mapped, this preliminary reconnaissance nonetheless suggests that poor people have contributed to the Canadian class struggle and continue, through their direct actions, practical-based demands and commitment to subsidiarity, to reveal means and possibilities of resistance within a liberal/neoliberal capitalist order.

Beyond acknowledging a tradition of antipoverty activism, I hope to tease out a few tactical and organizational similarities and differences between the Depression-era unemployed councils, antipoverty activism in the age of affluence, and the contemporary Ontario Coalition Against Poverty. Justifications for direct actions have varied according to time and place, serving such disparate aims as to exact concessions from the state or herald the revolution, to educate the indigent or gain broad public support, to ward off

¹ John Clarke, "Unemployed Movements of the 1930s: Lessons for Today," *Labour's Militant Voice*, <<http://labormilitantvoice.com/arcPamphUnemployed.htm>> 12 December 1998.

sectarianism or avoid co-optation. The success of direct action has been predicated on the evolving strength of liberal capitalism and antipoverty activists' relationships with larger left organizations. With the exception of the Depression, antipoverty activists have been unable to gain widespread acceptance for their methods, poor people's plight, or their insistence that the marginalized be involved in social policy decisions. The left, with a few notable omissions, has largely ignored or redirected poor people's angst into conventional channels, translating their "ignorance" with the help of a bureaucratic elite. Thus, the antipoverty movements' failure to affect the overall distribution of economic and political power cannot be understood only by inner tactical and organizational errors, but by the hegemony of liberalism and the left's unwillingness to acknowledge grassroots civil disobedience and wars of manoeuvre as the least co-optable and most effective way of undermining the charitable, regulatory and ideological apparatuses of liberal rule.

Antipoverty activists have operated on an assumption that conventional measures of lobbying are unavailable and ineffectual for the most marginalized in Canada: "The poor have nothing to bring to the table that the rest of the bunch want or need. It's away from the table they can get somewhere. In fact, it's by shutting down the table that they can start to get listened to."² Activists contend that social policy makers and the broader public will not provide aid without first being confronted by poor people's struggles: "Not only need, but expressed need has been a prerequisite of aid."³ With no valued seat at the decision making table, poor people have expressed themselves via relentless direct

² Clarke, "Unemployment Movements of the 1930s".

³ Franklin Folsom, *Impatient Armies of the Poor: The Story of Collective Action of the Unemployed, 1808-1942* (Colorado: University of Colorado Press, 1991), 2.

actions. As one Depression-era unemployed U.S. activist remarked, “ ‘Insistence is not born in a vacuum; it is the direct result of resistance.’ ”⁴

Neither is direct action born in a vacuum; it is the result of those committed to radical forms of mutual aid. In a liberal world all about “me,” antipoverty activists respond with a resounding “us.” Whether warding off bailiffs in Depression era Vancouver, chanting down Diefenbaker in 1962, or beautifying the Pope Squat, activists have been committed to expressions of solidarity. Antipoverty organizers and the community they serve have traditionally strived to combat greed and selfishness with declarations and acts of equality and unity.

Historians of the Depression era, blinded by the more romantic and tragic exploits of the On-to-Ottawa Trek, have spent little energy unearthing the day-to-day direct actions of the unemployed councils. Yet for John Clarke, “no one could dispute that the Unemployed Movements of the 1930s offer, as yet, the greatest example of how those who this society would throw on the scrap heap can organize to defend themselves and create crises in the political institutions that would abandon them to hunger and misery.”⁵ What are the historical reasons for the successes of Depression-era antipoverty activists?

Due to the sheer magnitude of unemployment and growing public sympathy for the inability of the indigent to express their needs or obtain adequate relief, acts of civil disobedience obtained a degree of social acceptance during the Dirty Thirties. To draw out greater public commiseration, CPC activists framed their demands not in revolutionary terms but perceived direct action as a reformative tool to challenge and expand the social responsibilities of the state. As a result, Bryan Palmer argues, “these

⁴ Folson, *Impatient Armies of the Poor*, 2.

⁵ Clarke, “Unemployment Movements of the 1930s”.

battles [at the relief office] struck to the core of law's confinements, because they constantly raised high the banner of universal laws of right and entitlement, which none could deny had taken a beating in the material downturn of the 1930s."⁶

The CPC was virtually alone on the left in its commitment to poor people's direct action and its espousal of universal rights. However their achievements have been obscured as historians wrestle with the legacy of sectarianism and bureaucracy in the Comintern Third Period. Piven and Cloward have taken this critique one step further and contend that CP unemployed activism was neutralized by Red commitments to large scale organization, electoral battles, and a bureaucratic vanguard: "Instead of exploiting the possibilities of the time by pushing turbulence to its outer limits, the leaders of the unemployed set about to build organization and to press for legislation, and in doing so, they virtually echoed the credo of officialdom itself."⁷ Despite Comintern intrusions and the distractions imposed by some CPC leaders, local CPC-UC members developed a strategy of direct action.

Although the Third Period had its shortcomings, as Eric Hobsbawm has argued, historians must distinguish between the Comintern and the nationally and regionally "unique," and "above all, make up their minds which policies were successful and sensible and which were neither, resisting the temptation to dismiss the Comintern en bloc as a failure or a Russian puppet-show."⁸ The Vancouver UCs occupied a "unique" space in the Comintern Third Period. Local activists did not move beyond CP rhetoric for strong organization; however, in their words and actions they were committed to

⁶ Bryan Palmer, "What's Law Got to Do With It? Historical Considerations on Class Struggles, Boundaries of Constraint, and Capitalist Authority," *Osgood Hall Law Journal* 41:23 (2003), 481.

⁷ Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Poor People's Movements: Why they Succeed, How they Fail* (New York: Random House, 1979), 91.

⁸ E.J. Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries: Contemporary Essays* (London: Orion Books, 1994), 7.

decentralized grassroots activism and were often baffled by top-down direction. While local activists espoused sectarianism, they did so in part because of their frustration with the city's well-established labour bureaucracy.⁹ Vancouver sectarianism also distinguished between grassroots direct action and conventional elite lobbying – a difference of considerable importance to CPC activists.

To some degree UC activists were able to avoid the opposing pitfalls of co-optation and revolutionary sectarianism by navigating under a radical pedagogy that assumed poor people would develop a socialist position through collective struggle.¹⁰ Any poor person could join the UCs, regardless of their ideology, so long as they were interested in exploring civil disobedience as a tool for social change and empowerment. In addition, a commitment to universal rights extended the UC resistance base to families, women, ethnic minorities and multi-age poor, although the UC concept of women was often an uncritical adoption of liberal gender norms which only reinforced male unemployment as the dominant site of resistance.

Antipoverty direct action during the Depression had both immediate and long-term results. The unemployed councils were occasionally able to intimidate relief officers and petty capitalists into capitulating to their immediate demands. Moreover, their direct actions were intolerable to liberal “peace, order and good government.” When state repression, deportations and relief camps only increased public sympathy for poor

⁹ The history of Vancouver's labour bureaucracy in the early twentieth century reveals several personalities who continue to dominant the labour leadership into the 1930s. See, Mark Leier, *Red Flags & Red Tape: The Making of a Labour Bureaucracy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

¹⁰ By invoking the term “radical pedagogy” I am indebted to Jacques Ranciere's literary resurrection of the nineteenth century schoolmaster French schoolmaster Joseph Jacotot. Jacotot alarmed the academia establishment when he insisted that all people have “a will served by an intelligence” and proved that an individual's knowledge does not require a pedagogue as much as an unconstrained will. In Jacotot's eyes poor people's will to learn was hampered by their economic status and an intellectual elite's insistence on their own privileged access to knowledge. See, *The Ignorant School Master: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, Translated by Kristin Ross (California: Stanford University Press, 1991).

people, all three levels of government were compelled to find consensual, co-optive measures to pacify dissent. As a result, an unimaginative lot of policy makers introduced a hybrid of British and U.S. welfare measures.

The knowledge and experiences of Depression era antipoverty activists did not disintegrate with economic recovery. Although Bryan Palmer and John Manley have argued that CPC antipoverty activists took their skills to strikes and lockouts in the labour unions of the early post-World War Two years, academics have overlooked their continued involvement in poor people's movements.¹¹ While the new welfare state mitigated some of the problems associated with poverty it also served to entrench in popular opinion conventional liberal lobbying as the only *civilized* avenue for reform. In the age of affluence, still divorced from the political decision making process, poor people were expected to graciously accept the enlightened proposals of government bureaucrats, despite their often contradictory aims. Yet, as the efforts of Fred Collins, William Gee and Eric Waugh attest, not all poor people were satisfied with the government's compromise, nor were they entirely duped into believing direct action was politically passé and ineffectual.

However, antipoverty activism in mid-century Vancouver was much tamer than its Depression-era predecessor. By working with the conventional trade unions, labour councils and sympathetic municipal leaders, in the hope that their credibility might win power and popularity for antipoverty protests, activists unwittingly failed to gain

¹¹ In fact Palmer has emphasized that "the rough protests of the unemployed, the evicted, and the relief dependent, ha[d] faded far from view" by the 1950s. See Palmer, "What's Law Got to do With It," 482. For John Manley's similar argument see, John Manley, "Communism and the Canadian Working Class During the Depression: The Workers Unity League 1930-1936" (Ph.d. Diss., Dalhousie University, 1985), 594.

widespread support and diluted the venom of civil disobedience. Instead their demands were used by municipalities to lobby for extra social funding and were obscured by liberal dreams of pump-priming the economy through state expenditures. Social democrats and union leaders consumed by McCarthyism were the main promoters of sectarianism and attacked antipoverty communists as foreign agitators. However, it was the tactical difference between grassroots direct action and rational, civilized discussion that separated CPC-inspired antipoverty activists from the newly ensconced left aristocracy.

Inspired by their Depression-era predecessors, antipoverty activists in the post-war period continued to use direct action to appeal to the state's responsibility, despite the fact that the state, through the creation of various welfare initiatives and attendant propaganda, had convinced the majority of Canadians that the state had assumed its social duties. Eric Waugh and other antipoverty activists believed by gaining media attention they could win the majority's support, but they underestimated the vigor of a revived liberal hegemony. Indeed Galbraith held a kernel of truth not fully digested by Vancouver activists – poverty had become an issue for the minority, with the majority lulled into an apathetic trance by the Keynesian liberal state and all its material trappings. Thus petitions and letters of appeal to city council, and even the symbolic protests at the legislature failed to impress on Canadians that, despite what they were told, poverty and social marginalization were not eradicated but obscured and dismissed through the state's regulatory social policy. Finally, mid-century antipoverty activists backpedaled on the 1930s UC acceptance of women and ethnic minorities, casting poverty as the individual problem of insufficient paid labour for white males.

Understanding how antipoverty activists responded to the social unrest of the late 1960s remains outside the scope of this thesis.¹² However, by the arrival of the Ontario Coalition Against Poverty in 1989, antipoverty activism had taken on a decidedly different shape, reflecting the struggles of the New Left and a particular postmodern environment. As John Clarke has said, relearning the unemployed struggles of the 1930s does not mean replication:

We can't fail to notice that unemployed organizing today takes place in a society that has seen the emergence of mass industrial trade unions and diverse and important social movements. The issue of mobilizing the unemployed and poor as part of a broader movement of resistance is much more complex now than during the 30s.¹³

OCAP's "complex" contemporary milieu makes it difficult to establish a historical perspective on the antipoverty organization. Nevertheless, history is made in the present and is preoccupied with where and why we are, just as much as where and who we were. Historians have a practical responsibility to find real ways of comprehending how traditions are shaped and contested by contemporary actors. By doing so, history can reflect more than the modern preoccupations of its authors.

In a complex, postmodern climate, OCAP activists have rejected poverty as a problem solely of white male unemployment. Women are disproportionately represented on welfare rolls and within poverty statistics. Inspired by feminist struggles, OCAP has

¹² For two general texts on the New Left and the Sixties generation in Canada see Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby-Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); for a more radical interpretation see Myrna Kostash, *Long Way From Home: The story of the Sixties generation in Canada* (Toronto: James Lorimer and Company, 1980). The 1960s spawned not just a wide array of social movements but also social theories. Lumped loosely under the acronym, New Social Movements (NSMs) theorists drawing on Gramsci to Jurgen Habermas have grappled with how and why NSMs have expanded resistance beyond political state-based change to issues of self-realization, environment, community, power and rationality while remaining sensitive to issues of class and the totalizing dangers behind counterhegemonic projects. See, William K. Carroll, "Social Movements and Counterhegemony: Canadian Contexts and Social Theories," in *Organizing Dissent: Contemporary Social Movements in Theory and Practice*, 2nd Edition, ed. by William K. Carroll (Toronto: Garamond Press, 1997), 3-38.

¹³ Clarke, "Unemployment Movements of the 1930s".

fought for the socio-economic rights of single mothers, low-paid and unemployed women in ways overlooked by their antipoverty predecessors. In addition, Toronto's visible minorities, often unemployed or poorly paid, have become the city's majority, comprising more than 50 percent of the city's population. Sensitive to Toronto's ethnic plurality, OCAP has fought racial exploitation especially when it has coincided and reinforced economic disparities. Similarly, by acknowledging indigenous struggles worldwide and in their own backyard, OCAP activists have departed from their antipoverty ancestors in their inclusion of First Nations as essential partners in the struggle to end poverty and other forms of exploitation.

Unlike the UCs, the UAC or the BCFU, OCAP has avoided direct control by labour unions, social democrats, communists and other left organizations. By insisting on independence, OCAP has avoided the destructive forces of left sectarianism and co-optation. While the UCs were never fully successful in wresting off their image as a Communist organization, and the BCFU activists were undermined by their labour council affiliations, OCAP has been able to involve activists with diverse ideologies and has successfully ignored labour leaders' attempts to sanitize the struggle by excluding poor people from taking their fight to the streets or the bargaining table.

Although trying to ensure the autonomy of the organization, OCAP activists are not apathetic isolationists. In fact, OCAP is committed to creating "affinities" with other leftists, so long as they are not compromised in their dedication to direct action and subsidiarity. Clarke, Jeff Shantz, P.J. Lilley and other OCAP activists believe a radicalized union workforce, engaged in direct action flying squads and militant strikes are fundamental for long-term social change. "We fully realize that the struggles of the

unemployed, poor and homeless, as vital as they are, are only a part of a bigger fight that must be spearheaded by organized workers,” says Clarke.¹⁴ OCAP activists contend they cannot lead revolutionary change although they hope to be part of any future, ongoing war of position.

OCAP, like its predecessors, has remained committed to direct action as the tactic most accessible and empowering for poor people. Reviving the 1930s collective occupation of the relief office, OCAP has mobilized poor people to take direct action to exact concessions from the state. However, “where the fight in the 30s lay in seeking to establish some kind of basic social provision, in the 90s we contest the destruction of a ‘safety net’ that was created in the post war era.”¹⁵ Unlike the antipoverty protests in post-war Vancouver, OCAP fights not just against the inadequacy of welfare provisions but the neoliberal reneging on the corporate-liberal compromise.¹⁶ Because of the liberal hegemony’s shift in orientation, only a minority of Canadians are overly concerned about rising poverty rates and even fewer are enthralled with OCAP’s direct actions. That the public has turned a blind eye to the increase in state coercive measures, draconian laws and riot police is proof to OCAP activists of their mainstream isolation. As such, OCAP has largely abandoned the beliefs held by Eric Waugh and past antipoverty activists that protests are about bending the ear of the capitalist media, gaining mass support, or “expressing indignation simply to make yourself feel better.”¹⁷ Instead, adopting the

¹⁴ Clarke, “Unemployment Movements of the 1930s”.

¹⁵ Clarke, “Unemployment Movements of the 1930s”.

¹⁶ Kees Vander Pijl has described corporate liberalism as “essentially a synthesis between internationalism and state intervention.” Pijl suggested in his 1984 treatise that by the early 1970s the hegemony of corporate liberalism was threatened by the rise of the “New Right” that rejected state intervention in favour of an unfettered free market. See, Kees Vander Pijl, *The Making of the Atlantic Ruling Class* (London: Verso, 1984), 21.

¹⁷ Clarke, “Unemployment Movements of the 1930s”.

slogan “fight to win” OCAP activists are determined that if they “can’t yet create a full blown political crisis for governments” they can “become a thorn in their flesh.”¹⁸

Over the years OCAP has used diverse direct actions to pierce the thick skin of liberal capitalism. OCAP has not only occupied welfare offices but has extended its casework to fight for immigrants and panhandlers. Beyond the state, OCAP has picketed and challenged landlords, charitable institutions, petty capitalists and community social cleansers. To draw attention to the housing crisis, OCAP has taken over abandoned buildings.¹⁹ Uninterested in symbolic and passive large-scale protests OCAP has attempted through the Bay Street Shutdown and the Queen’s Park Riot to return direct action to its 1930s heyday, by acknowledging poor people’s sabotage and retaliation against the police, state and capital as essential to exacting concessions.

OCAP is distinguished by being the longest standing antipoverty organization in Canadian history. While OCAP grew in size and militancy to attack Mike Harris’ “Common Sense Revolution, unlike its predecessors, OCAP has survived and attacked social democratic, conservative and liberal governments. Will OCAP outlast the neoliberal restructuring of the state? Clarke and other OCAP activists hold no illusions that their leadership and actions will cease to be vital to the survival, health and politicization of poor people. According to Clarke, “capital is ready and determined to

¹⁸ Clarke, “Unemployment Movements of the 1930s”.

¹⁹ OCAP began its housing squats as other antipoverty organizations around Canada attempted similar tactics. For a Vancouver comparison see, “Woodsquat,” *West Coast Line* 37:2-3 (2003/2004). Squatting reemerged as a political act in countries across Europe including Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, France and England in the late 1960s, early 1970s. It is unclear whether these various housing occupations contributed to the knowledge and the squatting practices of OCAP. For a brief survey of squatting strategies in Europe see Hans Pruijt, “Squatting in Europe,” (21 April 2004) <<http://www.eur.nl/fsw/english/staff/homepages/pruijt/publications/sq-eur>> (26 June 2006).

take everything from us. It's no good hoping for a humane turn after the next election. Either we find the means to really resist and not just talk about it or we're done for."²⁰

Moving beyond talk does not mean abandoning a war of position. Rather, OCAP activists insist that through action the nascent potential of overthrowing the Canadian liberal capitalist hegemony can be developed. Driven by a philosophy of action underpinned by a commitment to subsidiarity, OCAP asks: How can we begin to move beyond thinking differently to acting differently if we cannot first engage, mobilize and empower the most marginalized to join the fight? Only by winning concessions and local victories from those elements of capital and the state that are vulnerable can the marginalized even begin to pose the possibility of an "otherwise." As John Clarke says,

OCAP is looking for the best way available to engage the enemies of the unemployed, to cause them pain, to hurt their cash flow or disrupt their workings and, in this way, force concessions out of them. We actually demonstrate to people affected by poverty and social cutbacks that we can make a difference in their lives and that we can resist in a way that hurts those who attack them. In this way it is possible to inspire them and offer some hope that mobilization is not simply a waste of time.²¹

Nevertheless hope in the neoliberal era is physically and emotionally draining. More than one OCAP activist has suffered from despondency and depression.²² As a result, some activists fall back on Cloward and Piven's structuralist belief that only through a major economic crisis will the masses reconsider the current social order. To complement their structuralist argument the majority of OCAP activists also espouse the humanist conviction that the struggles of marginalized minorities are the means for survival now, and the best way to prepare, mobilize and agitate for the possibility of revolutionary change. OCAP's ability to move towards revolutionary ends, in concert with others on

²⁰ Clarke, "Unemployment Movements of the 1930s".

²¹ Clarke, "Unemployment Movements of the 1930s".

²² OCAP, personal interviews.

the left, lies outside the historical record and raises questions that only the future can reveal. But, as Ian McKay has stated, to be left is to find the “means [of] introducing into the world a vision of the future and producing a logical program for its realization.”²³ OCAP activists have explored direct action as a “logical program” for change by exploring its tradition, engaging in present-day battles and by envisioning and acting out a non-liberal alternative.

What does the tradition of antipoverty activism reveal to leftists committed to “freedom and solidarity”?²⁴ All those under the liberal project of rule called “Canada” who believe themselves as otherwise, ought to look beyond melancholic apathy, academic posturing, bureaucratic finagling and electoral minorities and find ways of supporting in a real subsidiary fashion the grassroots struggles of poor people. Fundamentally this means an acceptance of direct action and subsidiarity as twin guideposts in the counterhegemonic project. The Canadian left owes its acknowledgement and unmitigated support to left mavericks and activists such as Bob Leales, Eric Waugh, John Clarke and a pantheon of others, for their insistence that direct action is the best means to mobilize and empower poor people to exact concessions from the state. As Bryan Palmer has insisted “no struggle against capital and the state . . . can be successful with the working class inhibited by a leadership fearful to lead and antagonistic to the one force that has historically insured humanity’s advance: civil disobedience.”²⁵

²³ Ian McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals: Rethinking Canada’s Left History*, (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2005), 10.

²⁴ McKay, *Rebels, Reds, Radicals*, 31.

²⁵ Palmer, “What’s Law Got to do With It,” 488.

Beyond trumpeting direct action, antipoverty activists have been insistent that leaders perceive their project as profoundly, often revolutionarily pedagogical: by their own will and intelligence, poor people can explore the limited possibilities within, and imagine beyond, the morass of liberal capitalism. As poor people continue to organize and build a community based on direct action and mutual aid, how many on the left will dare to echo Gaetan Heroux's unequivocal pronouncement, "I'm with you"?

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